



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST— JULY 1, 2018

WISDOM OF SOLOMON 1:13-15, 2:23-24; PSALM 30:1, 3-6,12-13; 2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15; MARK 5:21-43

SACREDLY HUMAN

I wear my mother's miraculous medal. I've worn it every day since the day she died, more than two decades ago. I think it's very beautiful: heart-shaped, with a little mother of pearl inside and tiny marcasite stones around the edge. A miraculous medal is a "thing" in Roman Catholic lore, it is a very particular, special devotional medal of Mary, the mother of Jesus, revealed in a vision to Saint Catherine Labouré back in 1830. It says around the oval, "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." I always wore one growing up, and now I wear my mother's. When I take it off at night before bed, I kiss it, a long-ingrained piety from my upbringing for a blest object.

I know in hard-core Episcopalian circles, we don't go in for too much of that kind of thing. But all these long years, I have reached for my miraculous medal when I needed support, praying with my heart and rubbing my human fingers on it until the silver image of Mary is long worn smooth and shiny.

I don't think this little silver object has special power. But I do think Jesus' mother Mary loves us and watches over us, and I know my mother

Eileen Rose McVeigh loves me and watches over me, and I believe Jesus loves me. But Mary, and my own beloved mother, and Jesus are not here in the flesh holding my hand. And my hand needs holding, sometimes desperately, and I can reach for my miraculous medal with my hand, as I pray with my heart.

"If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Physical connection. It's powerful.

There's faith and there's flesh. Are they separate? When Jesus walked among us, they weren't separate. The woman today was drawn to Jesus, to get close enough to Jesus to be healed, to touch merely his clothes and be back among the living – because in her condition of constant bleeding, in her society she was considered among the dying, and that made her unclean, an outcast; the dying couldn't walk among the living. But to touch Jesus would bring her back in. Touch.

Jairus's daughter was dying, and this man, a highly placed leader of the synagogue, was desperate; he fell at Jesus' feet and begged.

There is so much BODY going on in today's Gospel. Jesus lived full body, fully human, even as his divinity flowed through him. The woman

with the hemorrhage touched his cloak and he felt her, felt his power flow to her body, to heal her. When she fell down before him, he said, “Go in peace.” Not, “Stay down on your knees.” And when Jesus went to Jairus’s little girl, he didn’t mutter incantations; he took her hand, flesh on flesh. When she awakened, she immediately began walking about, using her body. He told them to give her something to eat. Not to fall to their knees at his glory. To eat.

The body. Then and now, this is where we meet God. In our bodies. They’re not dualistically separate from our spiritual life. For the Christian, our daily human interactions ARE the venue for experiencing and for expressing the presence of Christ – the place where we strive to embody Christ for others.¹ That is sacred human work, and I say to you that “sacred human” is not an oxymoron!

We talk about being Christ’s hands and feet in the world, because our interactive world turns on hands and feet. We have this inherited intellectual theology of fallen flesh, but when Jesus lived among us in the flesh, his very coming honored the flesh, and in his life among us, he did not despise the flesh. He healed the flesh, he healed the hemorrhaging woman; he raised Jairus’s daughter from death, to life again IN THE FLESH.

Why do we have such a tough time accepting Jesus’ embrace of his humanity – and the sacredness of OUR shared humanity – and acting accordingly?

Jesus wanted to touch his friend Lazarus’s humanity so much, he raised him from the dead. He understood Jairus’s anguish so much, he raised his daughter. He loved his disciples, in

their flesh, so much, that after the Resurrection he came back to them in the flesh; he said, “Put your hand in my side.”

And he understood the hemorrhaging woman’s desperation, her need to be allowed to touch other people again so much, his healing flowed out, drawn by her faith, yes, but I think, also by the magnet of her human NEED to be touched, to be held in community.

Here and now is where we meet Jesus. In our bodies. Our human relationships are sacred, and the way we treat each other, in our humanity, is the way we live as followers of Jesus. All the “now” language you read in Scripture – last week in Paul: “NOW is the acceptable time” – well “now” means IN YOUR BODY.

Your body **is** the place where you meet God. And so, it is the place where *everyone* meets God. Jesus didn’t leave anyone to wither outside the circle of touch. The woman in today’s Gospel was an outsider in her culture, ritually impure, considered the taint of death. No one would touch her, so she touched Jesus. And Jesus touched her back!

What is happening in our physical world, in the world of relationships, not only matters, it is sacred. Sacred enough that Jesus’ very divine power flowed out of him in response to one person’s need. Sacred enough that Jesus took a dead girl’s hand in his – a shocking cultural impurity – and told her to get up and rejoin her family. If an esoteric notion of Spirit were all that mattered, if this life were so insignificant to the next, why Jesus at all?

Now, imagine how it was for Jesus. As word spread about him, everywhere he went, was faced with overwhelming need and misery, people

coming to him for relief, and though he was God, in his incarnation, he was but one human being, two hands, a body that got tired, that needed sustenance, needed sleep, needed comfort, and, I am sure, wanting to heal every misery and injustice he saw, but only able to reach as much as his two hands could do on any given day.

But we see time and again how the individual mattered to Jesus. There was a throng of curious, needy people gathered around Jesus in today's Gospel. So much so that his disciples were confused: "How the heck are we supposed to know who touched you, Jesus? Look at this crowd!" But Jesus *felt* **one** woman's touch, and then he went away with the **one** anguished father, in the midst of this big crowd. The individual mattered.

Jesus came with saving love for us all. But he reached out person by person.

That is a powerful charge – and a powerful comfort – to me, in this world of titanic, desperate need. We can be overwhelmed by it. Like the crowd of needs pressing in on Jesus – but his eye being connected to Jairus, one anguished father, and going with him. If you went to the massive mobilization at the SeaTac Detention Center yesterday, if you marched with the more than 1000 people who came to St. Mark's and St. James last Thursday to pray and voice a demand for human compassion and rights for immigrant families, if you wrote one letter or email to a legislator, made one phone call to the Attorney General, brought one pair of shoes or socks here today for an immigrant family, did your one voice or matter? The need is a tidal wave. Did it matter?

Well, touching one person, recognizing the humanity of one woman, and leading her back into the circle of society that had rejected her, mattered to Jesus. Our drop in the bucket to welcome those cast aside matters, becomes its own tidal wave. Do not feel hopeless, because we're doing what Jesus did when we step up in welcome and support for even one body.

A paraphrase based on the Talmud says: *Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. **You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.***²

Do not be daunted by the enormity of what we are called to as Christians in these times. Today we find Jesus flow through us when we touch our Muslim brothers and sisters and stand up for their inclusion by protesting the Muslim ban and working to change it. We find Jesus flow through us when we join Casa Latina on the Fourth of July to write letters of support and bring socks and underwear for separated families in El Paso. One body with new clean socks matters. Do not give up hope. You are not obligated to complete the work. But neither are you free to abandon it.

I am Christ's hands and feet in the world. And YOU are Christ's hands and feet in the world. Christ doesn't need us to be his **Spirit** in the world – the Holy Spirit is blowing where she wills throughout the world, and in US, always! We recognize and live that Spirit *in our bodies*, and in how we respect the holiness of the body of every single human being – especially those others want to cast aside and keep outside.

The poet Mary Oliver asked the poignant question, "What will you do with your one wild,

precious life?”³ It’s not just a poetic, existential question. It’s a boots-on-the-ground question. Our humanity is sacred, our relationships are sacred. Our need for each other is sacred in Jesus’ eyes. Sacred enough that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Your body is the place where you meet God and where you are called to recognize God in every other person’s personhood.

You don’t have to go out and get a miraculous medal. Your hand IS the miraculous medal. We touch Jesus’ cloak every time we touch one another, especially when we reach out to one who has been cast as outsider, because those are the very ones in the Gospel that Jesus touched back. Just do what a body can do; Jesus is there.

¹ Burke, Fr. Adrian, “Benedictine Values: Good Work,” *Echoes from the Bell Tower*, June 1, 2017, accessed June 29, 2018 at: <https://www.saintmeinrad.edu/seminary-blog/echoes-from-the-bell-tower/posts/2017/benedictine-values-good-work/?blogtype=s>

²Talmud ³⁰³, quoted in Jacobs, Natalie, “The World’s Enormous Grief,” *San Diego Jewish Journal*, August 1, 2016, accessed June 29, 2018 at <http://sdjewishjournal.com/sdjj/brie-stimson/the-worlds-enormous-grief/>

³Oliver, Mary, “The Summer Day,” *Mary Oliver: New and Selected Poems Vol. 1*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992, p. 94.

MARK 5:21-43 [*When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.” So he went with him.*

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.]

