

Trinity 24 (2023)

The human touch is powerful.

Studies show that being touched boosts your mental and physical wellbeing.

It can lower your heart rate and blood pressure, lessen depression and anxiety, boost your immune system, and even relieve pain.

It is likewise essential for infants. According to research, babies who are deprived of touch fail to thrive and can even die.

If human touch is this powerful, imagine *how much more* the divine touch, as witnessed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, who was and is both God and Man.

He reached out His hands, both physically and at times long distance, and power went out. Lepers were healed, mad men made sane, the

deaf left hearing, the blind seeing, and the dead and those as good as dead with new life.

I have quoted this before, but I think it bears repeating . . . Jesus would have made the world's worst funeral director, for the very reason He broke up every funeral he ever attended.

And this is what we see Him doing in today's Gospel as He arrives at the house of the ruler of the synagogue. (According to Mark's Gospel, the ruler's name was Jairus).

When Jesus arrives, the professional mourners, who were already plying their mournful trade, are sent away.

After which, He goes to where the little girl is, touches her, raises her up and returns her to her parents.

What a joyful day that must have been for them and indeed for the whole community!

If we had read further in Matthew 9, we would have found another ‘touching’ story. Here, Jesus reaches out his hand to two blind men giving them sight.

But I am getting ahead of myself. What about the woman with the hemorrhage of blood who shows up as Jesus is on His way to Jairus’ house?

Interestingly enough, here there was touch, but Jesus was not the doer of the action. It was woman herself who reached out her hand.

Moreover, it was not Jesus Himself she touched, but the hem of His garment, probably one of four blue tassels worn by Jewish men on the corners of their outer garment.

Nevertheless, power went forth, and she was healed.

All three of these ‘touchings’ . . . that of the synagogue official’s daughter, the two blind men and the women with the hemorrhage . . . brought, healing, wholeness, new life.

And FAITH was central to all three.

The official believed Jesus could do what humanly speaking was impossible. In Mark’s account, when he came to Jesus, his daughter was at this point of dead but not yet dead. It was only as Jesus was made his way to his house that word came that she had died. It is at this point Jesus says, “Only believe.” “You’re with me, everything will be alright.”

I think there is something very precious in this part of the story. Whatever is going on in our life, whatever the trouble or situation, we are with Jesus. Our part is “only believe.”

Let's move now to the woman. Though a bit superstitious in her approach, she believed Jesus could do for her what no doctor had been able to do over the past 12 years. So, she came. She came in faith.

The two blind men dreamed they could see and dare to follow that dream to Jesus. They likewise came in faith.

So, as we reflect on this Gospel, at least one application would be the imperative of faith. Faith is the key that opens the casket to all of God's blessings.

“Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him,” says Hebrews 11:6.

Let me hasten so say that Christian faith is not blind in the sense we psych ourselves up to believe “something we know ain't so,” as the

Junior-age Sunday School boy once defined faith to his teacher.

Christian faith does involve taking a leap, but it is not a blind, unreasoned one.

This leap is focused on the God who has already proved Himself reliable . . . in His dealings with His ancient people, the Israelites, as well as with people today.

The way this conviction is confirmed and matures is by exercising whatever amount we have of it at the moment. **“Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief.”**

And, as we move in this direction, we shall experience signs and even proofs that we are on the right track.

Let me give you an example. It was the week before Christmas, and the telephone rang in the church office. Picking up the receiver, a

woman's voice came on the line and began telling me that she had several small children and no money for Christmas toys. Her husband had left her, and she had no one to turn to.

More than that, the deadline for applying for aid from the agency which typically provides toys for children at Christmas had passed.

As I listened, my eyes fell on an envelope lying on my desk. It had arrived in the post that morning. It contained a \$100 check for a family in need at Christmas time. A former member had sent it.

I stopped the woman mid-sentence and said: **“Mam, before you asked, God provided. I’m looking at an envelope containing a cheque for \$100 designated for a family at Christmas.”**

I heard her begin to cry on the other end of the line. I found myself wanting to do the same. God is good. He is good all the time.

No, Christian faith is not blind. It is focused on the God who has acted history and who continues to act today.

Sometimes we think ‘miracles’ – if you want to call them that -- happened only in olden times but cannot happen now. Not so.

What is your faith level? Whatever it is. Take a baby step and go forward. You are with Jesus. Only believe.

This is my first application. All things are possible to those who believe.

A second involves Christ’s concern for all sorts.

Jarius, the ruler of the synagogue, was – most likely well-off financially. He was a leader in his community.

The woman was a poor invalid. Because her malady involved ritual uncleanness and because it had been with her for 12 years, she had been separated from the social and worship life of her community for a long, long time.

More than that, all her financial resources had been exhausted. She had spent all she had on doctors and was none better. Her Medicaid benefits had run out.

The child of the ruler of the synagogue was just that, a child.

And finally, we come to the two blind men. Their situation, their handicap, had no doubt rendered them unemployable.

In this passage, we are reminded that Jesus is the Saviour and Friend of **all** – men and women, young and old, rich and poor, those with jobs and those without.

We all fit into one or more of these categories.

More than that, the grim realities with which the people detailed in this passage are dealing are those common to man.

For the ruler of the synagogue, it was sorrow and anxiety over what appeared to be the loss of his daughter.

For the woman, it was sickness and fear.

For the blind men, it was a state of darkness, physical and perhaps to some extent spiritual.

For the child, it was being held captive by the greatest enemy of all, death.

People are still held captive by all of these, and Jesus' concern for human need continues.

So put yourself and your concern on the table and say, in the words of an old Gospel song: "Jesus included me too."

The door has been open to all.

Whosoever may come and draw out of the well of salvation . . . well connected or unknown, rich or poor, young and old, sick and well, people in prison and people on the street . . . all may come. There are no outcasts. ///

This is the season of thanksgiving. As we make our list of things for which to be grateful, let's include: "Jesus included me."

As I close, I am reminded of something that happened to me as a boy.

We pulled into one of those old country stores. Out front under the overhang were two or three older black men sitting on feed sacks sorting out the problems of the world.

I jumped out of the car and went over to one of those drink chests so common at country stores in those days. As I did, one of the three men looked up at me, and I said: “How are you, uncle? (That was a courteous way to address older black men in those days.)

I shall never forget his response. Two words which we all should be saying this week and every week, **“Giving thanks.”**

--Giving thanks for the touch of the Great Physician on our lives and on the lives of those we love.

--Giving thanks for faith, God’s faithfulness and our, at times, timid response to it. Timid or not, faith brings victory.

--Giving thanks, Jesus included me.