

The Touch of the Cloak



"Who touched my clothes?" (Mark 5:30)

Jesus is looking around, in a large crowd, people pressing in on all sides. He knows something happened. And soon after, in the house of Jairus, Jesus says, "Why do you weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And then, "Little girl, get up!" (Matt 5:35-41)

Two moments of miraculous healing, each one distinct and yet complementary, mysteriously woven together. Two stories revealing both privilege and the utter lack of privilege, power and disempowerment, public grief and hidden illness, the leader of a synagogue with a prominent name and a social outcast with no name at all. And both the unnamed woman and the daughter of Jairus are healed by *touch*.

There is something about the touch of Jesus' clothes that draws us into the mystery of the body and into the realm of what is happening within and among us.

Woman with an Issue of Blood, by James Tissot¹

I'm curious, what would it be like to touch the garment of Jesus? I mean, what would it be like to feel the actual fibers of the cloth against your fingers? And what would it be like to sense a sudden flow of energy and even power, as took place between the woman and Jesus?

I wonder if any of you have been able to offer or receive a hug lately, or perhaps you are looking forward to one; I mean, a hug after a long, long wait, when it was safe and right to do so. An embrace with an old friend, with a distant family member, with a neighbor, or another member of St Mary's? This touch of embrace, was it not powerful? Wasn't it just as powerful as the flow of energy between Jesus and the woman who reached out to touch his cloak? Was it not also a source of relief, a release of a little suffering, and just a bit of healing? And isn't it now so precious in your memory that it nourishes you, as if the embrace is never ending?

What would it be like to touch the garment of Jesus? Maybe we know.

And are we not being touched in other ways? Is not sound a form of touch, the musicality in our world soothing our bodies as we speak or sing or listen? Has there been a moment in a conversation when the sound of someone's voice touched you and made you feel better, relieved, less burdened? Was there a moment of kindness that touched your heart, overwhelming your sorrow with just a little bit of hope? Maybe it was the touch of a prayer shawl, and the knowledge beneath your fingertips that every stitch was made just for you in prayer.

Isn't this the same thing as touching the garment of Jesus? Is it really any less? Isn't it a kind of healing, when we sense we are connected in these ways?

Are we not the body of Christ already? Touching this world, and being touched by it, our hearts so deeply moved by the energy around us. Can we feel a little like Jesus when he turned around and said, "Who touched my garment?"

Life abundant in the little moments.

And Jesus doesn't know at first who touches him. He's looking. I would think that Jesus, being Jesus, would know who it was. He would just turn and identify them. Instead, he is seeking in the crowd the one who touched his clothes; seeking the one seeking him. He does not know who it is until the woman comes forward, revealing herself in utter vulnerability, throwing herself at his feet in "fear and trembling," and tells him the truth. (Mark 5:33)

This woman, suffering from a long illness, immediately felt a change in her body with this touch; and at the same instant, Jesus felt a power leaving him. It was a mutual exchange, perhaps a bit like taking a part of ourselves and giving it away or receiving it in a hug, a word, a moment. We pass on the gift, "paying it forward," as we say, offering it freely because it has been freely given. And we just let it go; as if "the power has gone forth" (Mark 5:30)

And in reaching to touch the garment, we discover we are sharing our burden. God carries our burden and us. There is relief in this expansion of our soul. Relief in knowing that we can offer all the shadows of our lives and receive, in return, a forgiveness, a total acceptance, an embrace.

Jesus, in recognizing the woman, points to her faith as “the very source of the power by which she has been healed...”² “Daughter, your faith has made you well,” (Mark 5:34)

Yet, hearing these stories leads us to yearn for the healing moments that haven’t come for ourselves and for those we love, for those we’ve lost, for this terrible loss in this pandemic. We can feel bereft of all healing despite our faithfulness. In the psalm, we can hear our own voice crying, “Out of the depths have I called to you ... I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him...” (Psalm 130:1,4-5)

As Howard Thurman writes, “We are buffeted about by so rich a variety of circumstances that it is often very difficult for us to find our own ways. We are creatures of pain and hurt, joy and ecstasy, of despair and hope. All around us we see great stretches of unrelieved human misery: hunger of body...”³

Jesus was “the perfect instrument.” He embodied something so potent that he channeled human thought and introduced a new rhythm, a new movement of the heart.⁴ It is as if we have all been tuned to become instruments, in turn, if we would let ourselves be.

If we would let ourselves touch and be touched.

And this new pulse, this shard heartbeat, is what we feel when we gather. Even now, wherever we are, together in new ways. According to one commentary, “... we have barely begun to recognize the depth and hidden potential in what our bodies will teach us - if we can only learn how to listen to them.”⁵

In this season of healing, may we reach faithfully for a little touch of God together. Inspired by the words of Frances Havergal, may we take our lives and let them be consecrated, Lord, to thee. Take our moments and our days, and let them flow in ceaseless praise. Take our hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love. Take our hearts, our voices, our minds and let them sing, always, only, for our king. Take ourselves and we will be ever, only, all for thee.⁶

Amen.

READINGS

Psalm 130

1 Out of the depths have I called to you, O LORD;
 LORD, hear my voice; *
 let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.
 2 If you, LORD, were to note what is done amiss, *
 O Lord, who could stand?
 3 For there is forgiveness with you; *
 therefore you shall be feared.
 4 I wait for the LORD; my soul waits for him; *
 in his word is my hope.
 5 My soul waits for the LORD,
 more than watchmen for the morning, *
 more than watchmen for the morning.
 6 O Israel, wait for the LORD, *
 for with the LORD there is mercy;
 7 With him there is plenteous redemption, *
 and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

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.

Hymn #707 1982 Hymnal

Words: Frances Ridley Havergal

Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of thy love;
take my heart, it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King;
take my intellect, and use
every power as thou shalt choose.
Take my will, and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for the thee

¹ Tissot, James, 1836-1902. Woman with an Issue of Blood, from *Art in the Christian Tradition*, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57960> [retrieved June 26, 2021]. Original source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brooklyn_Museum_-_The_Woman_with_an_Issue_of_Blood_\(L%27h%C3%A9moro%C3%AFsse\)_-_James_Tissot.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brooklyn_Museum_-_The_Woman_with_an_Issue_of_Blood_(L%27h%C3%A9moro%C3%AFsse)_-_James_Tissot.jpg).

² “In speaking to her, Jesus affirms her faith by pointing to it as the very source of the power by which she has been healed...” Mark D. W. Edington, in *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season after Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16)*, Kindle edition, Location 6383.

³ Howard Thurman, *The Centering Moment*, 1st edition (Richmond, Ind: Friends United Press, 2007); p. 59.

⁴ “Here is one who was so conditioned and organized within himself that he became a perfect instrument for the embodiment of a set of ideals — ideals of such dramatic potency that they were capable of changing the calendar, rechanneling the thought of the world, and placing a new sense of the rhythm of life in a weary, nerve-snapped civilization.” Howard Thurman. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (p. 16). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Edwin M. McMahon Ph.D and Peter A. Campbell Ph.D, *Rediscovering the Lost Body-Connection Within Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: Tasora Books, 2011); p. 4.

⁶ Hymn #707 (1982 Hymnal). Words by Frances Ridley Havergal.