



Praise, Prayer & Preaching sermon

The healing touch of Christ

By Rev Dr Keith Garner

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I continue my exploration into this important section in Mark's Gospel, which could be defined as 'Miracles around Lake Galilee' and continues until Mark 6:6.

These miracles emphasise the extraordinary character of Jesus' powers as:-

- He subdues the raging sea (4:35-41)
- Casts out a legion of demons (5:1-20)
- Heals a woman who has been ill for 12 yrs (5:24b-34)
- Raises a young girl to life (5:21-24a and 35-43)

In his account, Mark combines the story of a woman who had been ill for twelve years and, interestingly, the healing of a girl who was twelve years of age.

It is clear that Jesus had returned from the other side of Galilee, after spending time away from the crowds. A large number of people greeted Jesus on his return and in that crowd there were two people in deep need:-

- We have an anxious father, concerned about his daughter
- We have a desperate woman, who has become used to living with sickness over a long period of time

One is inclined to compare the two situations: Firstly, Jairus is a person of standing in the community. Mark describes him as "one of the synagogue leaders". On the other hand, in direct contrast, the woman is unknown and unnamed. Her condition would reinforce this and she was an unwanted outcast.

So we remind ourselves that Jesus and his fellow disciples have travelled back across Lake Galilee and were greeted by Jairus, a synagogue official, who literally begs Jesus to lay his hands on his little daughter and heal her (v.23). Jesus agrees to go to Jairus' home and we are told that a large crowd followed.

En route Jesus meets a woman who has suffered from a haemorrhage for many years. Her approach is very different from that of Jairus. She touches the fringe of his garment and is healed. Jesus stops, for in a mysterious way, he perceives that healing energy has flowed from him into another person. He asks who has touched him.

The words "He turned around in the crowd..." (v.30) paint a picture of Jesus looking for the person concerned and, when the woman comes forward, not surprisingly she "fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth." (v.33)



She may have expected a scolding, but instead she received a blessing. The words of Jesus speak powerfully to her situation: “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.” (v.34)

There is an interesting biblical point that we should not miss: When people from Jairus’ house approach and report, “Your daughter is dead. Why bother the teacher anymore?” (v.35) it is significant that Jesus continues to the house of Jairus. He takes with him only Peter, James and John, this inner-circle of disciples that was developing from the earliest days of his ministry.

I have previously drawn attention to the fact that we have before us ‘a miracle within a miracle’. This pattern is often part of Jesus’ teaching method, but here it is used in terms of important miracles. It is a particularly interesting approach of this gospel writer and is often described as “the Markan sandwich”.

We are told that as Jesus continues on his journey to the home of Jairus and approaches the house, he becomes conscious of the commotion and the loud wailing that often attended mourning. Jesus dismisses the mourners and calls the child to life.

I thought it would be helpful to look at these two passages and to draw some conclusions that might be helpful in relation to our understanding of the healing touch of Christ today. I offer to you four aspects that I believe are consistently true, as we seek the healing presence of Jesus Christ.

THERE IS SOMETHING HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT IN THE POWER OF PERSISTENCE

There is evidence of persistence in both accounts. We may wonder why Jesus asked the woman to make herself known to everyone. This was certainly not to cause her embarrassment, but to draw attention to the nature of healing faith.

Her persistence is expressed in the words, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” (v.28) This is not a superstitious action, but suggests that she had tried all kinds of methods prior to this moment. The gospel writer reminds us, “She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse.” (v.26)

The problem for the woman was catching the attention of Jesus and this is where persistence comes in. Her problem was of a very personal nature and she didn’t want to discuss the issue publicly.

According to Levitical law, a woman who was bleeding was considered unclean and under law no-one could touch her. There were many ancient taboos and she certainly didn’t want to go through the disciples in order to meet Jesus. She wanted to see the doctor and didn’t want to have to book an appointment.

Jairus came to Jesus and repeatedly begged him to heal his daughter. (v.v.22-23) The word ‘earnestly’ gives us an indication of his persistence.



We may well have joined with many in the crowd, especially those from Jairus' household, who thought, "Come on, Jesus, she's been waiting twelve years, another hour won't make much difference!" But, for Jesus, persistence is an important quality.

When dealing with this passage previously, I have drawn attention to different aspects of the passage, one of which is that life is full of interruptions – and Jesus' life was no different; this was an important component of his public ministry.

In the Markan text, Jesus Christ is going about a normal day and we see how he dealt with invasions into his life. The interruptions are helpful. As one writer put it, "They tell us that Jesus is never so busy or scheduled that he does not have time for people from every walk of life."

The persistence of people who searched for healing is met by the willingness of Jesus to reach out.

The quality of persistence has strong biblical support, for example when Paul was writing to the church at Galatia about "doing good to all" he concluded, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."
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The great Baptist missionary, William Carey, was in conversation with his nephew who had asked him if he could write his biography. Carey responded, "If the biographer gives me credit for being a plodder, he will describe me justly. Anything beyond this will be too much. I can plod. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything."

Louis Pasteur, the great French chemist and microbiologist, concluded about his life, "Let me tell you the secret that has led me to my goal. My strength lies solely in my tenacity."

Like most of us, I have thought deeply about the implications of the church massacre at the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston. It caused me to return to the poignant words of Abraham Lincoln, "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right – let us strive on to finish the work we are in."

HIS HEALING TOUCH

In each account, there is the importance of touch: As the woman reaches out to touch his garment; and as Jairus specifically requested Jesus to come and lay his hands on his little daughter, in the confidence she would be healed and live. (v.23)

What we don't know is just how many times the woman and Jairus had witnessed Jesus offering his touch to those in need.

The Menninger Institute in Topeka, Kansas, once conducted a fascinating experiment. They identified a group of babies who did not cry. This requires some further explanation. Like all babies, they instinctively knew that crying is the way to get attention. It is their way of calling out. However, the particular babies in the study had been in abusive situations. Their parents let them cry for hours on end and never responded. The babies ceased crying, almost as if they had learned that it was not worth trying.



So the Menninger Institute came into the experiment by asking that people from retirement and nursing homes come in every day to hold the babies and to rock them. The object was to enable the babies to start crying again. Physical touch made all the difference.

As powerful as physical touch is, there is another deeper and more profound kind of touch, which I would want to define as spiritual touch. This is the touch that influences and impacts the life of people.

In both stories there is the notion of fear and faith – and the power of Jesus to take people on a journey from one to the other.

It is likely that Jairus stands at the opposite end of the socioeconomic scale from the unnamed woman, but in both instances the power of touch is important.

Despite the ‘Do not touch’ signs, a museum had very little success in keeping patrons from touching, and on occasions soiling, priceless pieces of furniture and art. The problem evaporated overnight when an intuitive museum employee replaced the signs with ones which read ‘Caution: Wash your hands after touching’.

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The power of touch is important in any modern aspect of healing and, drawing on biblical evidence, I would suggest that there are three things that need to be acknowledged in the use of touch:-

- It must be a touch that is welcomed
- It must be a touch that is wholesome
- It must be a touch offered in the context of prayer

Selwyn Hughes, the Welsh Pentecostal writer of the twentieth century, developed the Daily Study Notes Everyday with Jesus which were read around the world. He often wrote about healing and once suggested, "No wonder you are sick. You are not linking yourself enough to the resources that bring healing."

Something that emerges from both cameos within the story is that:-

- The healing of Jesus Christ is never anonymous
- The priority for Jesus Christ is the person in need



- He is never too busy to help

PRAISE IS OFFERED TO THE ONE WHO IS ALWAYS THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

The woman healed of her haemorrhages frequented many doctors, but they were unable to help. As a last resort, she turned to Jesus Christ. Her reasoning was that if she could just touch his garment she would be healed. Perhaps she hoped that Jesus wouldn't even notice that she had touched him.

For Jairus, this is very much an instance of him coming out of the shadows to be recognised as one in need. We cannot ignore the fact that this would be costly for Jairus.

In his devotional writings, Henri Nouwen suggested we all have a part to play in the work of healing: "We are all healers who can reach out and offer health, and we are all patients in constant need of help."

N T Wright, in his studies in Mark's Gospel, poses an important question, "Was it Jesus' power that rescued the woman, or her own faith?" He goes on to say that "Clearly it was Jesus' power"; but Jesus says, "Your faith has rescued you."

The recognition of Jesus Christ as the healer in each and every situation is important. It was the Country Parson, George Herbert, who with tongue in cheek says, "God heals, and the doctor takes the fee."

I cannot look at this passage without making a brief reference to the delightful use of the Aramaic, when Jesus speaks to the girl who is sick, "Talitha koum!" How did this small Aramaic phrase enter the Greek New Testament? It was Barclay long ago who offered a solution, "There can be only one reason. Mark got his information from Peter. For the most part, outside of Israel at least, Peter, too, would have to speak in Greek."

But, remembering that Peter is one of the inner-circle of three, how could he ever forget the voice of Jesus. The words are full of gentleness and they must have lingered with Peter to such an extent that his memory of the occasion meant he referred to the original language.

THE CLIMATE OF FAITH

In both contexts, the importance of faith cannot be ignored.

In this gospel, we see remarkable examples of what one writer called "unstoppable faith". First there is Jairus. He pushes his way to Jesus in the midst of a large throng, falls to his knees and repeatedly implored Jesus to respond.

Secondly there is the woman who had tried all the cures and had become destitute in the process, yet she would not give up the quest for a cure. She heard about Jesus, believed he could cure her and reached out in faith.

We also perceive throughout this passage the sense of faith that Jesus demonstrated in his response to those in need.



Let me return to N T Wright. “He is not a magician, doing conjuring tricks by some secret power for an amazed but uninvolved audience. He is (though the onlookers don’t yet realise this) God’s Son, the One through whom the living God is remaking Israel, humans, the world. And faith, however much fear and trembling may accompany it, is the first sign of that remaking, that renewal, that new life.”

In the account we have examined, there are a number of contrasts, of which two are worthy of note as we draw to a close:-

- There is the contrast between the spirit of despair that the mourners demonstrate and the hope that Jesus clearly exhibits in this situation. This reminds us that often these two voices are heard – one is the voice of despair and the other, the voice of hope. It questions our grasp on the good news of the gospel in each and every situation.
- There is the contrast between the unrestrained distress which the mourners display and the calm serenity that Jesus once again demonstrates. Whilst there would be those tearing their hair and their garments, we find One who is calm and quiet, utterly serene and strangely in control of the situation.

The secret is clearly that of faith. I have talked about this in terms of a climate of faith – for faith is the capacity to receive whatever it is that God wants to give. This indeed is the channel of God’s blessing. David Hewitt saw this as the context in which we can understand the healing touch of Christ:-

“Jairus had great faith. The woman’s faith was smaller and slightly suspect. Jairus had faith on behalf of another. The woman had faith for herself. In both cases, however, it is faith that forms the bridge between human need and God’s resources.”