

CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SPARTA, NC
PENTECOST 4 (8B), JUNE 28, 2009
The Rev. J. Barry Kramer
“The Healing Touch”

“Who touched me?” (Mark 5:31 NRSV)

Today there is a crisis in health care cost and often in the delivery of healing ministries to some people. What is the role of Christian faith in bringing healing and hope to millions of people who are caught in the middle of this situation? Perhaps a look at today’s Gospel reading will help?

A woman ill for twelve years, having consulted many doctors, until her money was all gone, had heard of Jesus’ healing ministry. In desperation, or in faith, we know not which, she was determined to touch Jesus’ clothing, thinking that somehow his touch might make her well. She pushed through the crowd and managed to touch the hem of his garment. All of this was in spite of the taboos against an unclean person being in public, and against the shame of a strange woman touching a man she did not know. You of course know the rest of the story. As a result of her boldness, Mark says: “Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.” (vs.29)

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could get rid of cancer, heart disease, AIDS, and other life threatening illnesses so easily today! Often it takes more than just a touch to heal someone, yet we never want to underestimate the power of the human touch. Think for a moment of the pleasure of human touch: the softness of a new baby’s skin against yours, the firmness of a formal handshake, the warm embrace of family members after a long separation, the joy of wife and husband making intimate contact! There really is no substitute for the joy of human touch. Why here at Christ Church we have even worked through a controversy about how to pass the kiss of Peace! The importance of human touch is all around us now, and we do well to heed that good counsel, for the loving concern that touching can convey may go a long way in reducing stress, an irritant that brings suffering to our bodies, minds, or spirits.

When the woman touched Jesus and experienced bodily healing, Jesus stopped abruptly in his tracks, and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” His disciples wanted him to ignore the matter, but the now healed woman, with some degree of timidity and fear, came forward and told Jesus the whole truth. Instead of a rebuke for defying social custom, Jesus commended her on her courage, and added a double blessing; “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” (v.34) Her twelve-year illness of uncontrollable bleeding had stopped, and in addition she had a spiritual security that God loved her and that knowledge would give her contentment and wholeness all her life!

Today’s lesson pinpoints how Jesus can be the Lord and Master in a variety of situations where we are willing to come to him in faith and expectation, or just plain desperation! Whatever brings us to Jesus initially is not as important as the fact of our coming. *When we give God a chance “to touch” our lives in the*

body of Christ, healing miracles do happen! Jesus' power to transform our lives is still there today, but we have to have the courage to reach out and touch him. That's what the church needs to be: a place where we can bring our illnesses and hurts to experience God's touch.

So the question is obvious? Is Christ Church a place where people can come to reach out and touch Jesus? Is Christ Church a place where people can feel the "touch" of God's healing power?

When I was in seminary at the Philadelphia Divinity School there was a Pentecostal Church just up the street at 43rd and Walnut and one Sunday evening some of us seminarians went up to visit and attend a service. It was, of course, quite different from the Episcopal tradition! At one point the preacher got quite wound up as he talked about "touching God." He told everyone that if they reached up high enough they would be able to "feel God's furry belly!" Seriously!

Of course we young seminarians made quite a joke out of that image as we spread it around the campus. But you know what? The image may have an element of truth. Far from advocating a God with a furry belly, I do often wish that people would come to church and sit still long enough to "feel" the touch of God's power!

Today would be a good day to start. At the end of the sermon, let's just be quiet for a spell, and see if we can "feel" the presence of God. Whatever your problem or illness, surely we all have one, be still and offer it to God. Then imagine yourself reaching out to touch the spiritual hem of Jesus' garment. Whether or not you feel God's power in your life at that moment, be sure to thank God for being present, because while you may not feel the result immediately, it will surely be there!

Oh, and by the way, I have lots of extra Band Aids!