

“The Touch of Jesus”

Luke 8:40-56

August 28, 2016

INTRODUCTION:

We conclude our study of the miracles of Jesus with a two for one story—one story with two miracles. In this chapter, Luke has selected four miracles that show the power of Jesus over the forces that are against us. Jesus has power over the destructive forces of nature and that of the demons. In this story, we see that Jesus has power over sickness and even over death. But how do we participate in this? These miracles emphasize the role of faith as the means by which we benefit from the power of Jesus over these destructive forces. These two miracles reveal to us something of the nature of that faith.

The title of today’s sermon is intentionally vague. “The Touch of Jesus” could mean either our touching of Jesus or his touching of us. These two stories feature both touches. In the story of the hemorrhaging woman, it is her touch of Jesus that leads to her healing. In the raising of Jairus’ daughter, it is the touch of Jesus that raises her up. Let’s look now at each of these touches.

I. Touching Jesus

While Jesus was on his way to Jairus’ house, to minister to his dying daughter, a large crowd accompanied him. Jairus was an important and influential man, and many wanted to support him in his time of need. Others probably just went out of curiosity to see what Jesus would do. But there was someone else in the large crowd whose agenda had nothing to do with Jairus or his daughter. She had lived with a quiet desperation for twelve years, due to a chronic hemorrhage. Such a condition was more than inconvenient, because Old Testament law declared that such bleeding made one ceremonially unclean (Lev. 15:25-31). What’s more, all who touched her, or who were touched by her, or who merely touched anything she had touched, would also become unclean. In such a case, the person rendered unclean by any contact with her would have to wash both his body and his clothes, and would still remain unclean until evening. It’s not hard to see how her condition would make her something of an outcast.

She had somehow heard of Jesus, and perhaps she had also witnessed his miracle-working ability. Maybe she had listened as well to his teaching. Luke doesn’t tell us how it happened that she came to have hope that Jesus could help her, but she did. Her plan was to mix with the crowd and remain undetected by either Jesus or others. Then she would touch the fringe of his garment from behind and receive his healing power for herself. She did so, with

immediate results. For the first time in twelve years, the flow of blood stopped. She was healed, and Jesus said that it was her faith that was instrumental in the healing. **“Daughter, your faith has made you well”** (v. 48).

There are at least two things we learn about her faith from this passage. The first one is that the object of our faith is more important than the size of our faith. Her faith could not be described as great. She just lightly touched Jesus, hoping to do so without being noticed. She didn't speak or do anything else that would call attention to herself. It wasn't the strength with which she laid hold of Jesus that counted, but the fact that it was Jesus. The object of our faith is far more important than the size of our faith. Jesus doesn't require large amounts of faith, but he does require that our faith be placed in him. One of the great errors of our day is to have faith in faith. That error teaches that as long as we have enough faith, anything is possible. D. A. Carson gave an illustration once that can help us with this. Referring to the Old Testament Passover, he imagines two men he calls Smith and Jones talking about the angel of death coming through Egypt that night to slay the firstborn of every family. Smith says to Jones, “Aren't you afraid for your oldest son tonight? That angel of death is going to come through and kill the firstborn of every household that doesn't have the blood of the lamb on the doorpost. I'm terrified for my son.” Jones replies, “I'm not afraid at all. God said that the blood of the lamb would cause the angel to pass over our house and we will be safe under the protection of the blood. God said it, and I believe it, and that's that. Aren't you going to put the blood of the lamb on your doorpost?” “Of course I am,” replies Smith, “but I'm still frightened.” The question is, which of these two homes did the angel of death pass over because of the blood of the lamb? The answer is that in both homes the lives of the firstborn were saved, because it's not the size of our faith, but the object of our faith that counts.

The latest *Christianity Today* features the testimony of novelist Andrew Klavan, raised as a secular Jew but who then came to faith in Christ in his forties. He said it happened one night when he was reading one of Patrick O'Brian's great seafaring novels. One of the characters in that novel said a prayer before going to sleep, and Klavan thought, “Well, if he can pray, I can pray too.” So he voiced a three-word prayer to God for some simple things he had become aware of that were gifts to him. He prayed, “Thank you, God.” He writes, “It was a small and even prideful prayer: a self-impressed intellectual's hesitant experiment with faith. God's response was an act of extravagant grace. I woke the next morning and everything had changed.” Just a mere touch of the true God, even one mixed with sin, led to the most significant results.

Second, we learn from her that faith is strengthened when we come out of hiding. Much of this story is focused on Jesus' attempts to call her out from her hiddenness. According to verse 47, she wanted to remain hidden. Hiding has been an effect of sin ever since the first sin of Adam and Eve, when they hid from God in the Garden. This woman's hiding strategy was to make sure

she wasn't noticed. It's easy to understand why that would be the case. When she was noticed, people would get upset at her because she had made them unclean. So she is terrified when Jesus calls her out. She is probably afraid that he is going to be angry at her for making him unclean. But Jesus is unlike anyone else in that instead of making him unclean by touch, he made her clean by contact with him. We can leave behind all of our hiding, coping strategies and simply bring our honest, authentic selves to Jesus. Coming out of hiding leads to peace. That's why Jesus told her to "Go in peace."

Jesus is calling you out of hiding too. In order to do so, you must first recognize what you are hiding behind. We usually hide behind something we regard as a strength. I try to hide behind always having an answer. Even if I am clueless, I will be tempted to make something up just to appear competent. Jesus says to us, in effect, "Leave that behind. You don't need it. Come out from your hiding place and receive the gifts I have for you." When we do so, our faith is strengthened and Jesus fills us with his peace.

II. Touched by Jesus

Jesus encourages Jairus to exercise his faith when he tells him, "**Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well**" (v. 50). This encouragement came when one of Jairus' servants came with the unwelcome message that his daughter had died. Jesus was too late to be of any help. But Jesus didn't see things that way and invited Jairus into an even deeper faith than what he already possessed. Here's what we learn about faith from this: faith holds on to Jesus even when all seems lost. There are two different challenges to faith in this case.

The first challenge to Jairus' faith is the fact that Jesus' actions seemed unwise at best, and perhaps even unjust. It's not hard to imagine the sense of urgency Jairus must have felt. His daughter was on the verge of dying, and Jesus was his only hope. But Jesus seemed unwisely to have no sense of urgency. If I was Jairus and it was my daughter in need, here's what I would have wanted to say to Jesus. "Jesus, this hemorrhaging woman's need is not urgent. She's been living with this condition for twelve years. A few more hours is not going to be the biggest tragedy in the world. But my daughter will likely lose her life if you delay." But delay is exactly what Jesus did. Even after healing the woman, he paused to have a discussion with her. And during that delay, the worst happened and his daughter died. It was at that moment that Jesus said to Jairus, "**Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.**"

Jairus had a choice to make at that point. He could have said, "It was within your power to have saved my daughter's life, but you foolishly delayed here so that she died. I don't think I want anything more to do with you." In my decades as a pastor, I have come across dozens, if not hundreds, of people who

have basically said about as much. Some tragedy occurs and God doesn't deliver in either the time or manner they thought necessary, and they angrily walk away from God. What they don't account for is the fact that God knows things they don't know and has power far beyond what they imagine. Jesus was inviting Jairus to trust him even when it seemed that all was lost. So the second choice before Jairus was to trust Jesus even when he didn't understand. Such trust resulted in accompanying Jesus and allowing him into his house even when he had no idea what Jesus was going to do.

A second challenge to Jairus' faith was when Jesus became a laughingstock to Jairus' friends and relatives who were gathered at his daughter's deathbed. They all laughed at Jesus when he said, **"She is not dead but sleeping"** (v. 52). What does it mean when someone is laughed at like this? People become the object of laughter when they put forth an idea that is beyond ridiculous. It is so outlandish that it doesn't even deserve a reasoned argument. For example, if you ask me if I can come and help you load your moving truck and I say, "I can't do it on Saturday because I have to wash my hair that day," you would be right to laugh. For one thing, I have almost no hair to require washing. For a second thing, how long could it take? What you wouldn't do is to sit down with me to give me a list of reasons why washing my hair is not a legitimate reason for declining a request to help you load your truck, for the simple reason that my reason in the first place is so ridiculous. When Jesus said that his little girl was asleep and not dead, those who heard him didn't bother to reason with him about the technical differences between being asleep and being dead. He was being ridiculous in their view. Yet Jairus was asked to believe something widely regarded as ridiculous, that death is reversible.

As Christians, we are in the same position as Jairus, being asked to believe things that are commonly regarded as ridiculous by our culture. We believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, that a Jewish carpenter given the death penalty by Roman authorities walked out of his tomb after three days. We believe that death is not the end and that this same Jesus will return one day and will raise from the dead every person who has ever died. Following that, he will judge both those who are alive at his return and those who have died throughout the history of the world. We believe that the best life now is the one that follows Jesus into death. We believe in the upside-down kingdom, that the happy ones are the servants, not the masters, that joy comes not from living for self but from dying to self and living for God and others. These things are seen as pure lunacy by our culture and they laugh at us. And as they laugh at us, they marginalize us and pay no attention to us.

How should we respond to the world's laughter? We should respond like Jesus did. He didn't argue with them or get angry. With a quiet confidence, he simply proceeded to do what he was going to do, raising her from the dead, and then gave a very practical command to give her something to eat. Jesus was aware not only of her big need of life but also her little need of hunger. I think

that tells us something significant about our response. We are the Church of the risen Lord Jesus, and we have the powerful Spirit of God within. We don't need to resort to gimmicks and trickery. We don't need to try to be smarter or more entertaining or more hip and cool. We don't need to look for the quick fix. We just need to be the Church, living transformed lives as we learn to love others. And we need to do the little things that constitute faithfulness. We need to be content just to remind people that little girls get hungry and need something to eat. If we are secure in our faith, we can let them laugh and continue to love them.

Jesus ended the laughter by taking this little girl by the hand and speaking words of power to her. **“Child, arise.”** And she did. **“She got up at once.”** Every single one of us will one day be where this little girl was, on a deathbed. The announcement will come for you one day like it did for her when the servant told her father, **“Your daughter is dead”** (v. 49). Words will one day be spoken about you to a spouse, child or friend, “Your wife, your father, your friend, is dead.” You will be all alone on that day, except for one thing. If you have heard Jesus say, **“Do not fear; only believe,”** then Jesus will be there too. He will take you by the hand and care for your every need. Eventually, he will even raise you up with a new body and live with you forever in a new heaven and a new earth. So do not fear, only believe. Let them laugh all they want. I'm with Jesus.

CONCLUSION:

Jesus says a curious thing after this miracle. He charges her parents not to tell anyone what had happened. Won't they be able to infer what happened when they see Jairus' daughter walk out of that room? Why did Jesus give this command? It's the exact opposite of what he had told the demoniac in the previous passage, and even what he made the hemorrhaging woman do. Why did Jesus now want these parents to be quiet? I think we have an answer to that when we remember what happened after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. John tells us that many believed, but that many also determined that Jesus had to die. Jesus knew that such a display of power would force a choice, leading to his death. He would do that willingly in the case of Lazarus because he knew that was his time. But not yet. The significant point is that in order to bring life to this little girl and to you and me, Jesus would have to die. It was the only way. He would do so not surrounded by loving parents like this little girl. Even his heavenly Father abandoned him on the cross. The reason is that he became sin in our place. He literally gave his life for us. And now I say to you what Jesus said to Jairus. **“Do not fear; only believe.”**