

“Social Healing”
3/25/07
5th Sunday in Lent
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Luke 8:43-48
Brentwood First Presbyterian Church

Scene 1 Hemorrhaging woman touches Jesus

The hemorrhaging woman touches Jesus anonymously for she feels unworthy. Some of you feel unworthy to touch Jesus. Either you feel that way now, or you felt that way in the past. Or you will feel that way in the future. You feel unworthy because of shame for something you have done or not done or are doing now. Or because you have internalized the opinions of your well meaning but less than perfect parents, teachers, boss, or spouse or significant other. We don't admit it, but we do internalize the opinions others have of us. Even if they are not accurate reflections of how God sees us. Of how God in Jesus sees us. The hemorrhaging woman is presumably suffering from either from a hemorrhagic disorder like Von Willebrand's disease or factor XI deficiency, or she could have a uterine fibroid tumor that interferes with normal physiology. The Leviticus law promoted by the Pharisees declares that once a month, all women are unclean. Jewish men never touched women except their wives, because except for their wives, they never knew whether it was their time of month or not. And rather than accidentally touch an unclean woman, they touched no woman except their wives, and then only when they were not unclean. The point is, this hemorrhaging woman is literally an untouchable. And anyone she touches she makes untouchable as well. And so it has been for 12 years. She is like a leper in her social isolation. She is like a modern day AIDS victim. Everyone says, here she comes! Get out of her way because she might accidentally touch you. And yet, some where deep within her she knows Jesus is not like this. She trusts God in Jesus, and reaches out and touches him. She reaches out and touches God in Jesus. Though rejected by her culture, she knows she is a child of God. God will not reject her. God never rejects a human being, a child of God.

Jesus wants us to do the same. Jesus wants us to treat all the children of God like they are our children. Like they are our brothers and sisters. For Jesus there are no untouchables. Jesus breaks down the walls which divide us. Jesus wants to be touched. Jesus want us to want to be touched also.

I had a friend in high school whose name was Phil. We played a game for 6 years. It was called “You're it.” Whenever one of us saw the other, and the other was not looking, we touched the other on the shoulder. Just hard enough to know a touch had occurred, and then we ran away or put a crowd of people between us and the one who we touched so we could not be touched back. And the toucher looked at the touched person and said the first few years “you're it.” By the time we were seniors in high school, the toucher got the attention of the touched, and just winked. It was fun doing this, but you know, I do not even remember Phil's last name. And I remember nothing else about him. We were so busy touching and playing you're it, running for cover after a touch, that I do not

remember any conversations with him. How sad. What a lost opportunity. This is a good name for that game, “You’re it.” Because the word “it” objectifies the other person. It implies no relationship whatsoever. Touching does not require relationship. It is almost as if the hemorrhaging woman was playing you’re it. She touches Jesus and takes off. It is like going to church on Sunday morning and mouthing the words of the hymns without meaning them. It is like coming to church and not saying hello to anyone. It is like church without relationship. It is like playing “you’re it” with church.

Scene 2 She is healed anonymously.

Her hemorrhaging stops when she trusts in Jesus’ unconditional acceptance. Jesus’ unconditional mercy. Jesus unconditional love. Jesus’ unconditional forgiveness that erases all shame. Her healing occurs anonymously because Jesus’ love is not just for us as individuals, but is also for all of humanity as one body. Jesus loves us as individuals, and encourages our individual walks with God. But Jesus loves us all, every one of us, and the anonymity of her hemorrhaging tells us individual relationship is not required for physical healing to occur. Don’t misunderstand me. I think God wants an individual relationship with you, I am just saying individual healing is not predicated upon individual relationship. But this individual physical healing is not complete without individual relationship. Without an individual relationship with God in Jesus. So Jesus calls her out to have this relationship. Jesus calls her to relationship. She does not call Jesus. Jesus calls to her.

There is a big debate among denominations, and among people within denominations. Some folks think Jesus added us all to the church universal 2000 years ago. And some think none of us are added to the church until we make a profession of faith.

What if it is both? What if God plants a seed in our hearts, in our DNA if you wish to think medically. This seed is a piece of the Holy Spirit, and a sign of God’s invitation. A sign that we are a child of God. All of us. But this seed, though of God, does not flourish, flower, or bear fruit, until we make a decision to come to the great banquet God has prepared for us. Until we make a decision to commit our hearts and actions to continue and fulfill the ministries begun by Jesus 2000 years ago. To usher in the commonwealth of God. Only then does the seed planted by God flourish. I think it requires both our action and God’s action. But God acted first. God sent the invitation, and we have the opportunity to RSVP “no” or to RSVP “yes.” Just remember, we are not party crashers. God issues invitations to all of humanity. And God loves you regardless how you respond. God will never turn God’s back on you, anymore than a mother would turn away a nursing baby. Any more than the prodigal father would turn away a prodigal son. When we make a decision to commit our lives to Jesus, we water that seed and only then does it bear fruit. Only in a relationship with Jesus do we become whole. Not anonymously, but in relationship.

Scene 3 Your trust in God has made you whole, rejoice.

Jesus knew she needed social healing, which cannot occur anonymously. So he calls her forward and tells her, “Your faith has made you well, go in peace.” But the Greek words translated in the NRSV as “faith, well and peace” can also be translated “trust, whole, and joy.” So another translation meaning the same thing in Greek is, “Your trust in God has made you whole, rejoice.” But in whom or what is the trust placed? Many years ago, I thought this was trust that she would be healed of hemorrhage. The last time I read this scripture, I thought it was trust that she would be healed of social isolation. But last week when I read it again, I wondered if what Jesus is talking about here is trust that she would not be penalized for reaching out and touching Jesus. Trust that after reaching out, she will be affirmed unconditionally. The table is set, and her empty place at the table beckons. Jesus issues the invitation. All she has to do is come forward and commit to a relationship. Jesus has set the table and called us. He calls us by name. You, and you, and you, and you. He calls us to come forward and commit.

Next week, Stella is joining our particular church. She was joined to the church universal 2000 years ago. She joined a particular church several years ago. Next Sunday, Palm Sunday, she will join the particular time and place of Brentwood First Presbyterian, in its particular embodiment of the ministry and mission of our Lord Jesus. And we will celebrate our church and its newest member next week with a potluck brunch, to which all are invited. I do not know who will bear more fruit as a result. Our church or Stella. Probably both.

Conclusion

The game, “You’re it,” seeds flourishing, and wholeness through commitment to particular embodiments of Jesus in the form of particular churches.

We may have physical healing, but we can never have anonymous wholeness.

Only when we come forward to see Jesus face to face, do we have any chance of being whole. Only when we see Jesus in the other, and then change roles and become Jesus to the other, do we have any chance of becoming whole.

Glory be to God. Amen.