

First Presbyterian Church of Kissimmee, Florida  
Dr. Frank Allen, Pastor  
6/28/09

“The Easter Touch”

Mark 5:21-43 (NRSV)

21 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea.

22 Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet

23 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."

24 So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.

25 Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years.

26 She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.

27 She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak,

28 for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."

29 Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

30 Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?"

31 And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'"

32 He looked all around to see who had done it.

33 But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.

34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

35 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?"

36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe."

37 He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.

38 When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.

39 When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping."

40 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.

41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!"

42 And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement.

43 He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

## **LAUGHING AT JESUS**

When Jesus comes to our house, the sick are healed and even the dead don't stay dead. Do you believe that?

We say that we believe that but sometimes our actions say something else. We have become accustomed to death. We accept it as inevitable. We too might laugh at those who would be naive enough to suggest that there is somehow an escape from this death dealing world.

And I guess that's why they laughed at Jesus long ago. The people of Jesus' day were realistic when it came to death. The best you could hope to do was to have a decent funeral and move on. When Jarius arrived at his home long ago, his friends and neighbors had already done just that. The funeral for his little girl had already started without him!

And, according to the Bible this funeral was a raucous affair. There was much wailing and gnashing of teeth. The people were crying out loudly and beating their breasts. I am reminded of something that the Apostle Paul said in his letter to the church at Thessalonica. He referred to people who grieved as if they had no hope. That certainly seems to be the way they were grieving about this little girl.

But Jesus didn't believe in a world without hope. In fact Jesus had come to the world to remind us that in life and in death all of us are in the compassionate and gracious hands of a loving God. In Jesus' mind death would not be the victor in the end. We might pronounce hope dead and gone, but Jesus said, "Your daughter is not dead. She's just sleeping."

And the crowds laughed at Jesus.

Now we shouldn't be too hard on the crowds. Suppose you heard something like that today. Suppose someone went to Conrad and Thompson Funeral Home for the viewing of a dead friend and said,

"They've got it all wrong. He's not dead. He's sleeping."

You might laugh as well. It would certainly be a nervous laugh.

**And you would be upset that someone could be so naive. You would think that it was cruel that someone could say something so stupid at a time like that.**

**But, that's what Jesus said. No wonder people laughed.**

### **THE FIRST FUNERAL**

**The claims of Christ are often unbelievable. They don't fit in with our experience and our expectations. We believe that once you're dead you're dead ... dead and gone.**

**I remember a wise old pastor telling me, "The first funeral you do will be you own."**

**I wasn't quite sure what he meant by that, but shortly after arriving at my first church I learned. The clerk of session died quickly and unexpectedly at work from heart failure.**

**He was a cheerful man whom I had learned to rely upon for much needed help during those difficult days of adjustment.**

**But, now he was gone. His family was in shock from such a sudden death. I remember walking down to his home and meeting one of his sons grieving in the back yard.**

**I said, "I was very sorry to hear about your father." And the son turned toward me with tears and anger in his eyes and said, "Not half as sorry as I am."**

**That was the beginning of my first funeral. The wise old pastor was right. It was my funeral. I felt so helpless, so alone and so inadequate.**

**Oh, I read all the familiar passages. I read Paul's triumphant rhetorical questions, "O death where is your victory? O death where is your sting?"**

**But, in the faces of the family I could see that the questions were not rhetorical but real and painful. They seemed to be saying with their eyes, "Well, now that you ask preacher ... death is victorious, and the sting of death is well nigh everywhere."**

**I learned through this experience that I'm not Jesus. When I work with a grieving person, I can't talk like Jesus talked.**

**I know better than most the power of grief and loss. I know that any attempt to minimize the pain that someone feels when the funeral has already started is doomed to failure. It will provoke despair and even hostility.**

**We say that where there's life there's hope. But, we also say that once life is gone there are no second chances. The best we can do is go to the cemetery with the mourners.**

### **THE MAN WITH THE EASTER TOUCH**

**But, Jesus is not like us. Jesus comes to proclaim life that is everlasting. Jesus has the Easter touch.**

**Jesus could tell a grieving father with integrity, "Don't be afraid. Just believe."**

**Jesus did what only God could do and said what only God could say. He brought life out of death and hope out of despair.**

**And the power of Jesus' touch was foreshadowed by what happened on the way to this ultimate healing.**

### **A MIRACLE INTERRUPTED**

**Jarius, a ruler in the synagogue came to Jesus and begged him on his knees to come and heal his daughter who was on the verge of death. Jarius was desperate for help. When your child is in danger of dying you are willing to do anything to see them healed.**

**And Jesus was willing to oblige. Jesus interrupted his travel and his preaching to go to Jarius' home.**

**But, on the way there was another interruption. A woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years decided to touch Jesus. Now the Bible doesn't say that this woman was on the verge of death, but I think we can safely assume that it was true. The Bible tells us that she had spent all her money on many doctors, but none of them could help her. Her case was hopeless.**

**More than that according to the ancient law she was also unclean. Her issue of blood made her an untouchable. She was as good as dead both physically and socially.**

**But, somehow she had heard about Jesus. This man had had healed many and had shown a willingness to touch people that others had rejected. So she thought, "If I can just touch the hem of his garment, I will be healed."**

**So, she did. She was healed instantly. And Jesus noticed that something had happened, that the "power" had gone out of him.**

**Imagine the scene. Jesus, Jarius and the crowd are rushing posthaste to reach the ruler's daughter. She's at the point of death. Time is of the essence.**

**And then Jesus comes to a dead stop and asks, “Who touched my clothes?”**

**According to Jesus’ disciples that was a really silly question. There were people all around him, and they were all rushing to Jarius’ house before it was too late. No doubt they were jostling each other as they hurried along the way. How could Jesus ask, “Who touched my clothes?”**

**But, Jesus saw more than the others. He knew that something significant had happened. And so he sought out this woman who had been secretly healed. In fact Jesus refused to move until the person in question came forward.**

**Well, the woman came. Quite naturally she was afraid. It was against the law for her to touch anyone, especially a famous rabbi. In fact she shouldn’t have even been in the crowd. But she admitted what she had done, and surprisingly Jesus told her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”**

### **DON’T BE AFRAID**

**I think this powerful healing sets the stage for what comes next. Some guys from the house of Jarius came with bad news. “Your daughter is dead. Jesus can’t do anything. Come on home and join the funeral.”**

**But, Jarius had seen the power of Jesus. Even touching the hem of his garment could bring healing to a woman who had been ill for twelve years. Maybe, just maybe something could be done for his little girl. Maybe the reports of her death were premature.**

**Jesus ignored the message of those who said that the little girl was dead and gone. Instead, Jesus told this desperate father, “Don’t be afraid. Just believe.”**

**This is one of the big messages of the Bible. Don’t be afraid. Don’t be anxious.**

**It was the message that the angels brought at Jesus’ birth. It was the message that Jesus proclaimed during his earthly ministry. And it was the message that came from the angels and the risen Christ after the resurrection.**

**Don’t be afraid. In a world where death seems to reign supreme, Jesus tells us the same thing.**

**Don’t be afraid. Replace your fear with faith. Think about what God in Christ has done in the past and use that as a guide to your future.**

**Jarius did that. Jarius and his wife left the laughing mourners outside, and went inside with Jesus.**

**They went inside the house where the little dead girl laid.**

**GET UP!**

**And Jesus took the little girl by the hand. Perhaps there was a gasp from the inner circle of disciples who had also followed Jesus into the house. Touching a corpse was strictly forbidden by the law. It would render a person unclean for days.**

**But, Jesus was not afraid to touch anyone or anything. He even reached out and touched the cold hand of death. And in the hands of Jesus death met its match. Instead of death making Jesus unclean, Jesus took the sting out of death.**

**Jesus said, "Little girl, get up!" And she got up.**

**I'm intrigued by the fact that the church saw fit to preserve a transliteration of the Aramaic words that Jesus used on this occasion. Apparently the sound of those words, "Talitha kum" was a kind of touchstone of hope.**

**In a world where death and destruction are all around, Jesus reaches out his hand and says "Talitha kum," and everything changes. The old rules no longer apply. The sick are healed and the dead don't stay dead.**

**I would like for you to imagine that you are there on the inside of that house with death and Jesus. It shouldn't be hard ... at least when it comes to the death part. We've all been there before. We've all been to that place where the setting sun is going down and hope is in short supply.**

**Perhaps you're there today.**

**Beside an open casket or at the moment of our own death we are invited to hear with the thrill of anticipation the words of Jesus, "Talitha kum."**

**Little girl get up. Young man get up. Old man arise and walk. Old woman have hope. Tragedy will not have the final word in your life. Jesus will have the final word.**

**Like Jarius we have seen enough of Jesus to know that he has the Easter touch. When Jesus walks into our life the very power of God comes with him. Just a touch or a word from Jesus, and everything changes forever.**

**And mark this well ... the Easter touch is not just about the day we face death. The Easter touch should also inform how we live here and now.**

**Jesus interrupts the cycle of despair and cynicism.**

**Jesus' divine authority still changes the lives of people in desperate situations.**

## **A HISTORY OF FAITH**

**I was given a good example of how that happens this past week.**

**Carrollyn and I were on vacation in Savannah, Georgia, and we took a tour of the First African Baptist Church. We managed to join an organized tour and heard a wonderful talk by one of the members of that church. She filled us in on their long and eventful history with a very lively and entertaining forty minute presentation.**

**This church was founded before the Revolutionary War by free blacks. In fact most blacks at that time came to this country as free people or indentured servants.**

**Unfortunately that didn't last. Slavery became more and more entrenched, and the white establishment sought to control what was preached from the African American pulpits. There would be spies who would sit in on the service to monitor what was said.**

**But, one of the first pastors of this church was not afraid. He said that the word of God was more important than the threats of men and women. And he said quite a few things that the establishment didn't want to hear.**

**For his efforts this pastor was taken to the public square to be beaten. But he told them that they may as well cut off his head because he wasn't going to compromise his preaching of the gospel to please the world.**

**And that courage in the face of death continued down throughout the history of this church. At one time they were struggling to build a new church building. They were able to scrape together enough money to buy the land with some members contributing what they were saving to buy their way out of slavery.**

**But, they didn't have building materials. So they made their own bricks, had the women carry the bricks in their apron up the steep climb from the river during the day and constructed their church brick by brick during the evening. That was the only time they had available to build their church after working all day in the fields. Four years later in 1859 the church was completed and it still stands today.**

**This church became a significant stop on the Underground Railroad that shuttled slaves to freedom in the North during the Civil War. In order to hide fleeing slaves, they put them in a crawl space under the floorboards in their basement.**

**(We saw some of those floorboards with air holes drilled in them so that the slaves who hid in that four foot space would not suffocate.)**

**As I listened to the story of this historic church I wondered, “How could these people stand up to so much death and persecution over the years? How could they continue to build when all around others sought to tear them down?”**

**It was because of their faith, a faith that still burns brightly.**

**They placed their belief in the Savior who still says, “Talitha koum.” Get up. Don’t lie down in the face of death. Get up. Share a meal. Share your lives. Believe in the power of life instead of lying down to die.**

**God’s power to save is greater than the enslaving, death dealing powers of the world. The Bible tells us that they may kill your body, but they will not kill your soul. That belongs to God alone.**

### **A NEW APPOINTMENT**

**A Methodist bishop sent one of his ministers to a church that was having significant problems. But, the minister protested the appointment to the district superintendent. He said, “It’s not fair. That church is dead. It has too many problems. If I go there it will end my career!”**

**And the DS replied, “Well, I’ll tell the bishop what you said. But, I need to warn you. This bishop truly believes that the resurrection is true. He actually believes that Jesus bodily, really, truthfully rose from the dead on Easter, and he thinks that Jesus still raises the dead.**

**So you need to know that when you say something like ‘the church is dead’ it really doesn’t impress this bishop at all. He really believes in Easter.”**

**What about us? Do we really believe in Easter? Do we still tell stories of faith and hope?**

**A church growth consultant was asked, “What do you think we could do for renewal in the mainline church?” And he responded,**

**“Tell stories. Tell good stories of churches that were born again and raised from the dead.**

**The declining church can’t stand stories of success and resurrection. The declining church loves stories of death and defeat because it helps it feel better about itself. Nothing defeats death better than a good story of resurrection.”**

**I wonder. Do we really believe in Easter? Do we tell stories of resurrection or do we tell stories of defeat and despair?**

### **FAITH PLAYS A ROLE**

**In our lesson for today the faith of the people who come to Jesus plays a pivotal role in their salvation. Jarius, the ruler in the synagogue had to humble himself before Jesus and the sick woman had to risk the condemnation of the crowd.**

**But, they would not be denied. They came to Jesus, and Jesus had the Easter touch.**

**I wonder.**

**Are we like the pessimistic crowd who says, "Send Jesus away because death has already come."?**

**Or are we like Jarius and the sick woman? Do we have the faith to come to Jesus when times are desperate and hear his words of hope? He calls us still.**

**"Don't be afraid. Have faith. Get up and walk toward me. Even death will not have the final say in your life"**

**Amen.**