

A Touch-and-Go Situation

[Text -Mark 5:21-43]

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In this morning's New Testament reading, Jesus is heading toward the home of Jairus - a leader of the local synagogue - in order to tend to Jairus' critically ill daughter. A large crowd is following him, pressing-in around him. In that crowd, there's a woman who reaches-out to touch Jesus' robe. This woman has "endured much under many physicians", and for the past twelve years has gotten worse instead of better. Her menstrual bleeding would make her an "unclean, untouchable" individual, according to Jewish Levitical Law; and she's run out of money, run out of doctors, and run out of options. Unlike Jairus, a male leader of the local synagogue, who can openly ask for help, this shunned woman must quietly blend into the crowd, and hope to get close enough to touch Jesus. So she comes-up behind him, touches his robe, and immediately her bleeding stops.

She can feel within herself that she's been healed; and Jesus feels within himself a release of healing energy. When he asks, "Who touched me?" she humbly admits that it was she. She *had* touched Jesus' robe; but she also touches his heart, with her remarkable courage and faith. So Jesus gives her a beautiful, Life-affirming compliment: "Daughter, *your* faith has made you well! Now, go in peace and be made whole!" What a wonderful affirmation, for someone who has been disregarded and dismissed for so many years! And what a wonderful example, for those of us who seek to be instruments of Divine compassion and healing in the world today.

Now obviously, you and I have no control over whether people's health or lives will be restored when we reach-out to help them. Nevertheless, we can still be an important part of their healing process, simply by our willingness to stand beside them, or to stand-up for them. Jesus' call - to heal the sick and free the oppressed - remains extremely critical for you and me today, because all around us there are people who are [metaphorically] bleeding and scarred, from being battered and beaten by legalistic interpretations from our own Bible!

I'm not talking about the laws against eating pork or shellfish; because while those laws are spelled-out in the Book of Leviticus, even the most adamant fundamentalist will admit that *they* are completely archaic and

irrelevant teachings. However...that *one* reference in Leviticus to same-gender relationships, is the brutal battering-ram that's still being used to beat-down LGBTQ people today. The Supreme Court may have spoken [for now] on the issue of our right to marry; but the Religious Right continues to speak words of judgement, intolerance, and condemnation against us - to an increasingly anti-gay, anti-women, anti-worker, anti-immigrant judicial branch.

Now I realize, that as a liberal-leaning "snowflake" I should probably just whine and wilt-away - wringing my hands with dismay. But I'm not going to do that. Instead, as a *truly* "evangelical" Christian - one who actually believes in the *euaggelion*, the *Good News* of Christ's liberating love, gracious compassion and extravagant welcome - I'm going to continue to work within the Church to make a positive difference in people's lives. Regardless of what's happening in the world of politics, together you and I will still feed the hungry, welcome the outcast, embrace those precious immigrant students at the Thomas Jefferson Newcomers Academy, comfort the afflicted, and [at times] afflict the comfortable!

In 1991, a majority of states in the U.S. were amending their constitutions to define “marriage” as being exclusively “between one man and one woman”. It wasn’t because same-gender people were allowed to marry; it was simply a crass political ploy to raise money and to denigrate LGBTQ people. On June 29th 1991, at the height of this anti-gay fervor, this congregation made the decision to declare itself “Open and Affirming”. On that day twenty-seven years ago, Brecksville United Church of Christ officially proclaimed that this is a community of faith which “Invites, welcomes, and affirms all people, including those of every race, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital circumstance, physical or psychological ability, economic condition, ethnic origin and theological tradition.” [I think it’s safe to say that we pretty well covered all the bases!] This declaration clearly proclaims that this Family of Faith openly gladly embraces and supports all those who religion and society often consider deficient or defective human beings. And with this declaration, we not only offer *hope* to people; we can even help save and renew people’s *lives!*

Before Jesus arrives at Jairus’ house, he receives word that he is too late - that Jairus’ daughter is already dead. But Jesus doesn’t heed that word. Instead he proclaims a Divine Word of hope and faith: “Do not fear, only believe!” Then he enters the house and takes the hand of the presumably dead child [which *also* violates Levitical Law!] And Jesus raises that child to new life and renewed health. That’s an extraordinary demonstration of what Divine compassion and power can do; yet, as we know, that’s not how the story always goes. Sometimes we pray for our children, and they don’t get better. Sometimes we beg God to save our loved ones, yet they still struggle, suffer, and die. And like those mourners outside Jairus’ house, we may scoff at the idea of any kind of Sacred Intervention; or question whether our faith is really good for anything. That’s when you and I need to once again hear the words of Jesus, “Do not fear, only believe!”

At times, Life can be extremely painful and confusing, depressing and devastating. Even when you’re doing your absolute best for others, you can still end-up being blocked or betrayed, rejected or condemned, or even nailed to a cross! But that doesn’t mean that your effort is wrong, or your faith is weak, or that your Divine Source has abandoned you. And it certainly doesn’t mean that Life’s Story ends with crucifixion and death. The ultimate Good News - our ultimate healing - arises from that Unbreakable Connection between our frail and fleeting lives, and that wondrous Eternal Life revealed in Jesus Christ:

The One who willingly reaches-out to touch *all* people with compassion, healing, and grace;

The One who is with us right now, inspiring us to continue his mission of restoration, wholeness, and peace;

The One who replaces religious legalism, with Divine compassion, openness and welcome;

The One who raises-up that One Law in the book of Leviticus that supercedes all others: "You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself."

When we get that one right, then everything else will fall into its proper place.