

Sermon for Proper 8, Year B

The Text: Mark 5:21-43

Human beings seem fascinated with touch. Perhaps it's because we know that our eyes can play tricks on us. Sometimes we don't hear things perfectly well either. Our sense of smell can be pretty accurate but also easily disrupted with a few different stimuli. Our sense of taste may be quite strong but you can't go around tasting everything.

We can see things in dreams but we know they aren't real. We can be chewing on a chocolate bar in our sleep and find out when we wake up that we were chewing on the pillow. Touch seems to make things real.

Touch is a wonderful gift from God.

We love to be touched in the right way by the right people. A hug from mum or dad, or from your kids or grandkids. That's good. A pat on the back from your mates, even the ruffling of your hair from your footy coach or someone you respect – it means that they like you. It means you are accepted. A handshake, a gentle touch or even a kiss. If it's done in the right way with the right people touch can make us feel incredibly strong, safe and secure.

It's an awful tragedy of life that touch has been so misused. The infection of sin in the world that every person has inherited means that sometimes, some people use touch – a gift given to us from God – in abusive ways.

God's gift of touch was to make us feel safe and secure. Yet people who have been touched by the wrong people in the wrong way feel anything but safe. Here is a person standing vulnerable, needing to feel appreciated, secure, loved and accepted. And instead, the abusive touch they receive makes them ugly, horrible, insecure, unsafe, unable to trust others and sometimes even unable to truly appreciate good touch ever again.

It's maddeningly shameful when this happens, when people misuse their power, and touch others in an abusive way. And the worst part is that the person who ends up feeling shame is often not the abuser. It's the abused. The vulnerable person who should never have been touched in

that terrible way often feels ashamed. They might even rationalise that the act of abuse is, somehow, their own fault, even though it absolutely isn't. They might feel that they are no good. When a good touch could have made them feel strong, or safe, or loved or accepted, instead an abusive touch made them feel dirty, no good and ashamed.

Today's Gospel reading features people desperate for *good* touch. Jairus, the synagogue ruler, possibly had his doubts about Jesus. Synagogue rulers were probably in an awkward position trying to make something of Jesus, this travelling preacher and teacher. He didn't really fit the mould of the Messiah they were expecting. But now that his daughter is dying and he has nothing left to lose, he comes to Jesus in completed desperation seeking his touch: "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."

Jesus' touch is good touch. It saves people who are desperate.

But on their way to see the girl, Jesus is held up by a woman who has been bleeding for 12 years. She is not allowed to touch anyone anymore because her bleeding makes her ritually unclean. She has seen every doctor she can and spent all of her money doing so. How much cash have you got in your bank? If you wiped it clean on medical bills you'd hope that you would be better. But instead this woman had not gotten better. In fact, she had only become worse.

She is desperate for good touch and she claws her way through this crowd and with great faith reaches out to Jesus, just hoping to touch his cloak. And she does touch him. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

"You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth.

He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?"

Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe." He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James.

When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep."

But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!").

Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

The woman who had been suffering for 12 years is healed. 12 years of misery, gone, and restored to the community in peace. The little girl, having died, is raised up and again has life.

How many people in this world need the good touch of Jesus? How many desperate people are there who have had their life messed up and ruined by bad touch? How many people need to be set free from their suffering which, like for this woman, has lasted 12 years or 20 years or more?

We all need it. We all need the good touch of Jesus because this infected, sinful world will touch us all in a bad way eventually. We won't all be abused but we will all be hurt and we will all hurt others too. We need to know what good touch is, what God's holy and loving touch is so that we can feel secure and safe as his children.

And some people will need the good touch of Jesus just that little bit more. For the times that others have hurt you, abused you, made you feel ashamed, made you feel unworthy of touch or made you feel that you are unable to enjoy touch again – Jesus wants to give you his good touch and take those things away.

In Holy Communion, Jesus touches us in a profound way, he places his body and blood in our hands. We are connected with God. Jesus' touch is good touch. When Jesus touches us, he brings healing, salvation and the power to live. In baptism we have all received the touch of Jesus when he baptised us in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. That is where, like the little girl in the gospel, we who were once dead-spiritually dead-were raised again with new hearts and new life. Amen.