



The Many Sides of Jesus – TouchPoint for June 23, 2021

Mark 5:21-43 (MSG) ²¹⁻²⁴ After Jesus crossed over by boat again to the other side, a large crowd met him at the seaside. One of the synagogue leaders named Jairus came. When he saw Jesus, he fell to his knees, beside himself as he begged, “My dear daughter is at death’s door. Come and lay hands on her so she will get well and live.” Jesus went with him, the whole crowd tagging along, pushing and jostling him.

²⁵⁻²⁹ A woman who had suffered a condition of hemorrhaging for twelve years—a long succession of physicians had treated her, and treated her badly, taking all her money and leaving her worse off than before—had heard about Jesus. She slipped in from behind and touched his robe. She was thinking to herself, “If I can put a finger on his robe, I can get well.” The moment she did it, the flow of blood dried up. She could feel the change and knew her plague was over and done with.

³⁰ At the same moment, Jesus felt energy discharging from him. He turned around to the crowd and asked, “Who touched my robe?” ³¹ His disciples said, “What are you talking about? With this crowd pushing and jostling you, you’re asking, ‘Who touched me?’ Dozens have touched you!” ³²⁻³³ But he went on asking, looking around to see who had done it. The woman, knowing what had happened, knowing she was the one, stepped up in fear and trembling, knelt before him, and gave him the whole story. ³⁴ Jesus said to her, “Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you’re healed and whole. Live well, live blessed! Be healed of your plague.”

³⁵ While he was still talking, some people came from the leader’s house and told him, “Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher anymore?” ³⁶ Jesus overheard what they were talking about and said to the leader, “Don’t listen to them; just trust me.”

³⁷⁻⁴⁰ He permitted no one to go in with him except Peter, James, and John. They entered the leader’s house and pushed their way through the gossips looking for a story and neighbors bringing in casseroles. Jesus was abrupt: “Why all this busybody grief and gossip? This child isn’t dead; she’s sleeping.” Provoked to sarcasm, they told him he didn’t know what he was talking about.

⁴⁰⁻⁴³ But when he had sent them all out, he took the child’s father and mother, along with his companions, and entered the child’s room. He clasped the girl’s hand and said, “Talitha koum,” which means, “Little girl, get up.” At that, she was up and walking around! This girl was twelve years of age. They, of course, were all beside themselves with joy. He gave them strict orders that no one was to know what had taken place in that room. Then he said, “Give her something to eat.”

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

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

Last week, we talked about Jesus going to the 'other side.' This week he goes back to the other side...which was the original side...but it had become the 'other side' when Jesus went to the first 'other side'...which then became the 'present side,' and made the original side, the 'other side'. Now that Jesus has gone back over to the 'other side'...it now returns to being the 'original side' and the original 'other side' returns to being the 'other side'...after having been the 'present side'.

Got it! Me neither!

Do you see how hard it is to figure out which side Jesus is on?

He keeps moving from one side AND to the other. He keeps healing on one side AND the other. He keeps restoring life on one side AND the other.

One day it's a demon filled, Gentile man, living amongst dead people surrounded by pigs. The next day it's the daughter of a leader of the synagogue and a woman with bleeding issues. Those are about as opposite sides as you can get.

"Whose side are you on Jesus?" It would seem, on whosever side is in need of healing and restoration...so that would pretty much include all sides.

It would appear, Jesus actually meant it in chapter 2 of Mark when he said, "Those who are well don't need a physician, but those who are sick do; I have come to call not the righteous, but the sinners."

Uh oh! I always thought I wanted to be on the side of Jesus. I thought that would make me righteous, but apparently, being on the side of Jesus puts me on the side of sinners – in the midst of sinners – and more than implies that I am a sinner. Doesn't Jesus know that righteousness needs to avoid sinners? Righteousness needs to stay away from sin! Righteousness needs to keep from contacting, touching, rubbing shoulders with sin!

But here is Jesus in our lesson for today. Touching a 12-year old dead girl and being touched by a woman with a blood issue for 12 years. Now in the bible, the number 12 is used to signify completion and perfection. There are 12 tribes of Israel...the 12 disciples and 12 apostles...in the book of Revelation, the New Jerusalem has 12 gates guarded by 12 angels...and of course there are the 12 commandments.

OK, just checking to see if you were still awake.

In the Bible, the number 12 signifies completeness and perfection. So the 12-year old girl is completely and perfectly dead, and the woman with a 12 year blood flow is completely and perfectly unclean in her blood issues.

And yet here is Jesus, touching and being touched by perfectly unclean people. And females at that. Mark is doubling down on the uncleanness issue from his culture's perspective. It seems that Jesus is unaware of the truth that when something clean and pure touches something unclean and impure...the clean becomes unclean...the pure becomes impure.

Isn't that one thing we are sure of? That when purity touches impurity...purity becomes impure. And when clean touches unclean...clean becomes unclean. Isn't that why we are taught to stay away from impurity and uncleanness? Avoid it at all costs! Because when impurity touches purity...impurity wins and when uncleanness touches clean, uncleanness defeats cleanliness.

"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." The accusation against Jesus is one we can all understand. How can one stay clean and pure when mingling with the unclean and pure? Guilt by association is still guilt.

But it seems that something is different about the kingdom of the Divine. For according to these stories we have today, the deep Mystery is that when purity touches impurity, purity wins and when uncleanness touches cleanliness, cleanliness wins.

When impurity touches purity, it becomes pure. And when uncleanness is touched by cleanliness, it becomes clean.

Maybe being perfect doesn't mean achieving and maintaining perfection, but rather, being perfect means embracing imperfection... in others and ourselves.

The first miracle Jesus performs in John's gospel is the changing of purification water into celebratory wine. Think about that...the days of purifying oneself...the days of trying to stay pure are over. It is time to simply celebrate the Mystery's presence: in us and with us and around us; in our imperfection, in our impurity. Purity issues are old wineskins that cannot contain the new wine of Christ.

What a radical departure that is from the way we think. We think our purity is dependent on staying away from...avoiding...building a wall between us and impurity.

We think our purity is dependent on keeping impurity on the 'other side'.

But according to these stories today, if we have been touched with the purity of Christ, if we are clothed in the robes of righteousness, and cleansed with the blood of the Lamb, as so many religious folks like to claim...

then there is only one place for us to go...

Into the world of the impure and unclean, into the brokenness, into the dis-ease of the world.

The Christian life then is not spent avoiding the pain and brokenness – the sin of the world. It is spent touching it and being touched by it. It is spent going from one side to the other and immersing itself in it. If the brokenness of the world can overcome Divine healing, then the Divine is weak indeed. If the only way our faith can survive is by avoiding contact with the world, then our faith is weak indeed.

Building walls, taking sides, creating exclusive communities of purity has nothing to do with the way of Jesus, the way of the Divine, the way of Mystery. It's the difference between seeing yourself as the 'salt of the earth' or part of a 'salt lick'.

If we are, as some claim, a Christian nation based on Christian values, then what are we afraid of from the 'other'? Why are we afraid of touching and being touched by those who are different from us, those who are hurting and those we might consider unclean? If our American Christian God is such an awesome and mighty God, what are we afraid of in the encounter with other people and cultures? What a weak American Christianity we must be witnessing to if we simply act in fear and avoidance of the 'other'. If the values of our American Christianity can be lost in the encounter with other cultures, then our American Christian values were weak to begin with and not worth keeping. And we should pray for a death and resurrection of them.

Think of how much of American Christianity has focused on staying pure, maintaining righteousness, showing oneself as blameless? HAH! What a joke. The only way I can stay pure, maintain righteousness and appear blameless is by the constant touching and being touched by the Mystery who came to call the sinners, the unrighteous.

These are not things I possess. They are not things I own. They are not things I control. They are gifts,

given to me by the one who continually reaches out and touches me and to whom I reach out my hands. Because in the Divine kingdom, when purity and impurity touch, purity prevails. The Divine prevails.

And so, if we want to talk about purity at all, even though the miracle at the wedding of Cana would imply those days are over, but if we want to talk about purity at all...

we can only talk about it as a gift, not an achievement.

Just like in this meal.

In the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus reached out to the unclean Judas, the impure Peter, and to those who were soon to be stopped dead in their tracks this coming night, like the 12-year old girl in our passage.

He reached out and touched them, in bread and wine, with his body and blood. And now 'blood,' that which was seen in our bible passage as a sign of uncleanness, now becomes our source of life, forgiveness, and hope. Let that soak in! Maybe Jesus doesn't have it backwards after all. Maybe it's we who are mistaken.

When life and death touch, life wins!

When unclean blood touches the body and blood of Christ, or even his garment, healing wins.

Here at this table we hold out our hands, to touch and be touched, by the one who comes to our side and brings healing and wholeness to us all.

Because when the Mystery touches our lives, the Mystery wins.

And that's pure grace, which is the one and only purity still worth talking about.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Hearken to My Voice

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Hearken to my voice, O Lord when I call. Have mercy on me and answer me. You speak in my heart, and say, "Seek my face". Your face, Lord will I seek.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

You are the Center, Lord

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd.)

You are the center, you are my life. You are the center, O Lord of my life.
Come, Lord and guide me, Lord of my life. Send me your spirit, Lord of my life.
You are the center, you are my life. You are the center, O Lord of my life.

Come, Lord and heal me, Lord of my life.

Come, Lord, and teach me, Lord of my life.

You are the center, O Lord of my life.

Give me your spirit and teach me your ways.

Give me your peace, Lord, and set me free.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer.

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

Benediction

The Lord Bless You and Keep You

(National Lutheran Choir, Peter C. Lukin)

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you. To shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you. And give you peace....