

Psalm 30:2-5, 11-12; Luke 8:42b-48

“Touch: your faith has made you well”

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We continue our Lenten midweek series, titled: “The Incarnate Senses: Christ dwells in you.”

Tonight, as we meditate on the sense of touch, we remember that Jesus touched and healed many in the gospels. For example, Jesus healed the blind (Jn. 9; Mk.10:46-52; Mt. 9:27-31) and those with leprosy (Mt. 8:1-4; Lk. 17:11-19). He healed specific people such as Jairus’ daughter (Mk. 5:21ff) and Peter’s mother-in-law (Mt. 8:14-15). The gospels contain many stories of touch, healing, and the hope of new life. In touching those considered ritually unclean, Jesus crossed social and religious boundaries, showing that no one is outside of God’s healing touch and peace.

Many of these stories include a confession of faith by the person who was healed, with Jesus saying, “*Your faith has made you well; go in peace.*” There’s a connection between healing and peace. The word for peace in Hebrew, *shalom*, implies not simply inner calm, but a restoration of health and wholeness to body and spirit. *Shalom* implies the restoration to community with others and with God. The touch of Jesus heals not only a physical ailment, but it also restores wholeness to body, spirit, and community. Jesus’ touch is not limited to healing only infirmity and sickness but also extends to healing the holistic dimensions of body, spirit, and community.

This is significant because Jesus announces the good news as the kingdom of heaven drawn near *in him*. In touching and healing, Jesus restores God’s *shalom* as peace and health of body, spirit, and community.

Luke describes a crowded scene as Peter says, “*Master, the crowds are hemming you in and pressing against you.*” Though only a face in crowd, the unnamed woman’s faith took hold of Jesus’ garment and his power. The word for “touch” in tonight’s gospel, *haptomai*, means not only “to touch,” but also “to take hold of,” and “to cling to.” Touch in this story suggests that the woman’s healing began when she took hold of hope, and by faith, clung to Jesus. In order to help us think about these aspects of touch, I would like to share three vignettes: to touch; to take hold of; to cling to by faith.

“*She touched his garment.*” I remember being seated on a crowded urban train in Tokyo and there was an older woman, perhaps in her late 80s in a kimono, trying to stand against the overwhelming weight of the crowd jostling her about. I wanted to give to her my seat, but was afraid that if I stood, someone would swoop in and take the empty seat. So I reached out and touched the sleeve of her kimono and motioned for her to sit down. As first she refused, but I again touched her sleeve and motioned. As she bowed and stepped toward me, I stood up blocking the

seat so that only she could sit down. It was small gesture, but one that gave someone a bit of peace and safety on a crowded urban train.

*“To take hold of.”* For many years, Mari and I were members of the *Ippo no kai*, the “One Step at a Time Group” that met in the church we served in southern Japan. This was a group of blind people who met for Bible study and fellowship. Every year when the fall colors were stunning, they went on a hiking trip to Chomonkyo Gorge in the mountains of Yamaguchi Prefecture. You may wonder, “Hiking with the blind?” I did, too. It was a marvelous experience as someone without sight “took hold of” my arm and we walked together. As I touched upon what I saw, my words stirred their imagination about the world through which we were walking together. Like Paul’s words about walking by faith and not by sight, our faith in Jesus touches and *clings to* the faith of another at moments when we may not be able to see the way forward. Walking together is a bit like the journey of faith with Jesus who gives us insight into the world we are passing through.

*“To cling to by faith.”* A ninety-six-year-old man named Takeo lay dying in the hospital. I had visited Takeo many times both at home and in the hospital. Takeo had been a Christian for nearly all his life and was a retired high school English teacher who had taught generations of young people. He had been president of his church and decades earlier had helped found the church that I now served. His daughter-in-law and grandson greeted me when I came into the room, saying, “He’s been unresponsive, and we’re not sure he hears us.” I knelt close to his bed and said, “Takeo-san, this is Pastor Tim. Your daughter-in-law and grandson are here; would you like to pray?” Slowly, Takeo’s hands moved out from below the covers, and I placed my hand upon his folded hands. After praying together, I sat with him in the community of his family in that room. Takeo died later that afternoon. Like the woman who touched Jesus, Takeo had a faith that clung to Jesus knowing that Jesus was with him leading him from death to life.

Touch is a sense we use every moment, almost without thinking. Yet the faith of the woman in the story was very intentional. Jostled by the crowd, she reached out to touch Jesus’ garment, taking hold of Jesus’ power for her. She took hold of Jesus, and her faith clung to him, trusting that she would be healed in body and spirit.

When have you reached out to touch someone with the hands of Jesus? When has someone held on to you with the power of God’s love for you?

Touch can protect and guide, heal and reassure; touch can lead us from the fear death to the certainty of eternal life.

Jesus’ words, *“Your faith has made you well; go in peace”* reveal his power alive in you. May your faith cling to him. He is God’s *shalom* of healing and wholeness for you. Amen.