

That Healing Touch ~ September 6, 2009

Mark 7:24-37, Psalm 125

Have you ever, in the midst of turmoil and confusion in your life, had someone reach out and touch you? Sometimes this person says nothing but just touches your arm or taps you on the shoulder and, somehow, you know you will survive another day and, that, eventually, all will be well. Or, have you ever turned to another person dwelling in distress and despair, and simply touched him or her? Sometimes it's best if we don't say anything, if we just show that we are present and that we are offering our support.

Since I am lately into babies, I know that, as soon as possible after a child is born, he or she has some skin-to-skin touch time with the new mother. Bonding is started for both. Reassurance is given that even though the newborn has suddenly emerged from a warm safe environment, he or she will be taken care of in a strange, cold, new world.

Years ago, there was a study done to try to discover if there was a difference for patients who had physicians who touched and even prayed for them and those who preferred to keep a distance. The results of this study seemed to indicate that there was. Those doctors who viewed and treated their patients as people, with human needs, had a far more positive rating by their patients and a better recovery rate.

When I participated in a Clinical Pastoral Education program while in seminary, I was assigned a floor in a hospital that dealt with cancer patients. I learned first hand how important it was to be present for those going through difficult therapies. Those who had oncologists who understood their needs and concerns were far better off than those who had doctors who stood in the doorway never approaching them. In our day and age of broadening medical knowledge we are beginning to recognize the value of alternative medicine that is meant to treat the whole person. Some of it involves touch, some does not, but new pathways to healing are being discovered every day.

Jesus knew human need and human fear. He always reached out to those who were suffering spiritually or physically. Many times during his ministry, he would heal others with a touch. Years ago, a man, who was known to be a tad grumpy and very set in his ways, asked me if I thought anyone, other than Jesus, could heal with a touch. I said, "Yes, I did." He didn't agree with this and I remember telling him that if someone was as completely in touch with God, as Jesus had been, that I believed that person could heal others. After all Jesus had told us, that "Greater things than I have done, ye, too, shall do." This dear old fellow remained unconvinced.

In our readings for today there are two specific instances of healing described. One was a bit long distance and it took some convincing for the young girl's mother to get Jesus to cooperate, but, we are told, her daughter was healed. While we might think Jesus was a trifle difficult in this instance, we need to recall that he believed he had been called by God to serve and save the nation Israel, only. This particular woman, requesting a healing, was not Jewish. This story helps us understand that Jesus' power was not limited, it reached across all lines to touch and mend others.

Following these physical healings Jesus always asked the people involved to refrain from spreading news of their cures around. The concern with being overwhelmed by those who needed healing for a physical ailment was major for him. He saw himself as

one who had come to help people get their spiritual lives back in balance, to discover a new way to viewing and serving God. He was new wine in those old wineskins threatening the status quo with his teachings about the new way to “do religion.” Instead of simply preaching the scriptures, he practiced them.

That’s what we are called to do. I know you all know this. We are asked in our human ways to extend the healing touch of Jesus. Sometimes we do this through physically touching another person to offer support. Other times we offer kind words, a smile, a special look. We help others feel whole through treating them as fully human and as equals and accepting them just as they are. We extend his loving, healing touch through measuring our thoughts and our words to make certain we are not rude or insensitive when dealing with those around us. We walk more fully in his footsteps when we manage to set aside the rush of our days and just become aware of those among us who may need support.

We are the present disciples of Christ. We need to learn to carry on this part of his mission in memory of him. Amen

A Simple Prayer (I used this favorite from St. Francis as my Pastoral prayer.)

Lord. Make me an instrument of your peace!
Where there is hatred let me sow love.
Where there is injury...pardon.
Where there is doubt...faith.
Where there is despair...hope.
Where there is darkness...light.
Where there is sadness...joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled...as to console
To be understood...as to understand
To be loved...as to love
For It is in giving...that we receive.
It is in pardoning, that we are pardoned.
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

-- Amen