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June 30, 2018

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Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

[July 1, 2018](#)

Wisdom 1:13-15, 2:23-24

Psalms 30

2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15

Mark 5:21-43

In January, David Brooks of The New York Times wrote a column titled "Now Is the Time to Talk About the Power of Touch." In a wonderfully expressive phrase, he spoke of the power of "disenchanted emotional touch," a touch not grounded in love or commitment that, when abusive, has the power to cripple, if not destroy, the immeasurably positive potential of loving touch.

Brooks wrote: "Emotional touch alters the heart and soul in ways that are mostly unconscious. It can take a lifetime of analysis to get even a glimpse of understanding." There could hardly be a better introduction to today's Gospel.

So many times when we hear this Gospel, we focus on the woman's healing and the little girl's resuscitation, but as Mark tells the story, those are only the backdrop to the real action. In this account, Mark mentions touching seven times. The crowd "pressed" around Jesus. The woman believed that his touch would heal, and she touched Jesus. Jesus asked twice who had touched him and finally, after the father had asked him to lay hands on her, Jesus took the little girl by the hand and raised her.

Both the woman and the girl's father believed in the power of Jesus' touch, and both received its life-giving results. Certainly, many people touched Jesus with little effect — that's exactly what the disciples were trying to tell him when he asked who had touched him. But like a child who instinctively comprehends the emotional message of a touch, when that woman touched him, Jesus knew that someone had sought and found something desperately needed.

Jesus was never content to distribute miracles as if by magic wand or vending machine. The woman had started something when she touched him, but she had only just begun. She had used her initiative and obtained the result she sought without being aware of how small her expectations in the light of what Jesus had to offer.

The next step was for Jesus to seek her out. This may be the only time in the Gospels that Jesus sought someone he didn't know, whom he could not call by name. When she approached him face-to-face, like so many who encountered his power, she did so in fear and trembling.

Mark says that "she told him the whole truth," implying that she explained her situation, her hope, her audacious, unlawful decision and the wondrous result it brought. For the moment, that was her whole truth: She was suffering; she had hoped for a cure and received it.

Jesus' reply opened up a new horizon for her. As he had told others, he said that her faith had saved her and she was free to go in peace, cured of her illness.



(Mark Bartholomew)

But Jesus said more — something utterly extraordinary. Jesus called her "daughter." This is the only time in Mark's Gospel that Jesus called someone "daughter." He had called others his mother, sisters and brothers (3:34), he addressed a paralytic as "child" (2:5) and he once called his followers "disciples" (14:14), but never before or after did he address a person as his daughter or son.

We are left to wonder what it was about her that led Jesus to call her his own in that unique way. It could have been her hope or her faith, perhaps her audacity. Each of those qualities opened her to receive life from him in what he recognized as an unprecedented way. She had started it by touching his garment in a way that touched him profoundly. He returned the gesture not by laying on hands, but by calling her "daughter," indicating that she was receiving life from him as he did from his Father.

We hear no more about her and are never told her name. She may have been one of the women who continued to follow Jesus, who remained to witness the Crucifixion and who, Luke tells us, supported Jesus from their own means. Whatever she did, she knew that she had received life from Jesus and became as closely bound to him as a child to her parents.

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We find reflections of this Gospel woman in people like Pakistani Malala Yousafzai, an activist at the age of 11 who was one of two 2014 Nobel Peace laureates when she was 17. The Gospel woman is also well-represented by the former slave and U.S. citizen Sojourner Truth, who proclaimed, "I will not allow my life's light to be determined by the darkness around me."

The woman Jesus called his daughter is a representative of all people who reach out for Christ's help, trusting that their plea will touch God and open to how the touch of God can transform them.

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Editor's note: This Sunday scripture commentary appears in full in NCR's sister publication Celebration, a worship and homiletic resource. Request a sample issue at CelebrationPublications.org. Sign up to receive [email newsletters](#) every time Spiritual Reflections is posted.

A version of this story appeared in the **June 15-28, 2018** print issue under the headline: The power of touch.