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February 3, 2020

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“Who touched me?” (Mark 5:32).

2 Sam 18:9-10, 14b, 24-25a, 30-19:3; Mark 5:21-43

Again, today’s two readings are both powerful narratives about life and death. The death of Absalom and his father David’s grief offer a universal tale of blood loyalty and blood revenge. Mark’s account of the healing of the woman with the blood issue and the raising of the daughter of Jairus are also about divine kinship between a dying woman and a grieving father who find life in the touch of Jesus.

Robert Alter, renowned translator of the Hebrew Bible, has noted similarities between the story of David and Francis Ford Coppola’s epic film “The Godfather.” Michael Corleone’s rise within the family from innocence to power parallels the rise of David from shepherd boy to king, and both figures are ensnared in violence to protect their power. When Absalom challenges his father, he is at first spared only because he part of the royal family, and to spill his blood would violate blood kinship. In the end, David’s lieutenant, Joab, kills Absalom when his hair is caught in the branches of a tree as he flees on the mule. When word reaches him, David is inconsolable. The violence he has sown has come full circle and invaded the inner circle of his own family. Likewise, Michael’s descent into murder, including the execution of his own brother, leads to the death of his beloved daughter during an assassination attempt against him.

The biblical lesson is that sin and death are inseparable, while grace always brings life. The presence of Jesus exhibits this grace because he is God incarnate. His physical touch communicates life. The woman who pushes her way through the crowds, unlike others who seek to touch Jesus, connects to him with faith, and Jesus immediately realizes that power has gone from him to her. His life, his physical energy, the beating of his heart, the feelings surging through him as he moves through the crowd, engage this woman in a unique and intimate way. She taps into his incarnate mystery, and her blood hemorrhages stop. She is made whole again.

The raising of the daughter of Jairus bookends this first miracle, because the blood flow that was ending the woman’s life had been about to signal the girl’s entry into adulthood, the beginning of her capacity to conceive and give birth. But she was now dead, and a greater tragedy for her parents could not be imagined. But the father would not let go, even when word reached him on the way that his daughter was dead, or when the professional mourners scoffed at Jesus.

Both the woman and the girl are restored by their contact with Jesus. They touch the new Creation in him, the life-giving power that would come to fulfillment in Jesus by his death and resurrection, and be made accessible to us, his body, the church, in the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup at every Eucharist.

There are other kinships and loyalties, and some of them bring death. The story of David and even contemporary crime dramas are fair warning that sin always ends in death. Jesus offers abundant life, and to remain in him, to be in touch with him, is the path to life.

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