Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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“Who touched me?” (Mark 5: 31).

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24; Ps 30; 2 Cor 8:7-9, 13-15; Mark 5:21-43

It is hard to miss the theme of touch in today’s masterful Gospel. Mark nests one story about a woman with a blood issue inside another about Jesus raising a young girl from her deathbed. In both instances, legal and social taboos were broken. The woman with the blood flow would be faulted for contaminating the crowd by pushing her way through to touch Jesus’ cloak. The little girl was presumed dead and, therefore, touching her would have rendered Jesus unclean.

Jesus’ freedom to touch the dead and lepers, dine with public sinners, allow women to anoint and kiss his feet, speak with a Samaritan woman in public and accept water from her at the well, were part of his mission as the Incarnate Word. Every healing he performed proclaimed the power of divine love to perfect nature. Every time he stretched the rules and chose compassion over legalism, he was expanding the reign of God and the good news of salvation. Jesus’ earthly body was already a sign of the new Creation to be revealed at his resurrection, but even before that, his human touch was contact with divine life, an experience of promised wholeness for a fallen world.

This promise is the theological basis for sacraments -- encounters with the Jesus. More than rituals, the sacraments are affairs of touch. As physical experiences, they celebrate the holiness of human life and need in all its stages, from birth to death,

healing and forgiveness, meal and vocation. This is the liturgical heart of the church. Pastoral ministry is also essentially a hands-on immersion in the real lives of people by experienced ministers. So, inevitably, any reflection about Jesus' power of touch faces questions about the impact of the sexual abuse crisis on today's church.

Rightly or wrongly, the question has been raised repeatedly whether the church can survive and function with an all-male priesthood and with a clerical culture seemingly unable to form ministers mature enough and free enough to function effectively in today's world. In the larger context of women as witnesses in the Gospels, it begs the question of whether women should be called to full equality in ministry for the good of the church.

Today's scriptures do not solve these challenges, but Mark must have had a reason for joining the two healing stories. Jesus, despite obstacles and even ridicule, restores two women to health and full potential so they can take their places in the community. One reaches out to touch him, trembling with fear but still risking everything to find wholeness. The other, a young girl dying on the threshold of adulthood, is raised up to realize the hopes and dreams that still lie before her. The beloved community Jesus proclaimed would be diminished without them. He knew the power of a woman's touch, and he wanted every little girl to grow up to answer her call.

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