

## **QUESTIONS JESUS ASKED: WHO TOUCHED ME?**

**Numbers 15:37-41; Mark 5:25-34**

**July 9, 2006 – Pentecost 5 [B]**

In those uncertain days immediately after Hurricane Katrina, one of the more DISTURBING images that filled our TV screens was that of people in New Orleans on the rooftops of houses or on the balconies of apartment buildings – people STRANDED, desperately pleading for someone to COME and RESCUE them. As it soon became apparent there were THOUSANDS of trapped people – our hearts went out to them. But at the same time, some of us couldn't help but wonder: **WHY did these people IGNORE the evacuation warnings? WHY didn't they flee when they had the chance? WHY did they choose to RIDE OUT the storm?** Well – **NOW we know.**

A survey of New Orleans residents has revealed that **thousands stayed in the city because they had NOWHERE ELSE to go or NO ONE ELSE to turn to.** Many of those who stayed behind DID SO because they simply had NO family or friends who could shelter them.

While this may be difficult for some of us to believe – consider THIS: there's growing evidence that **MORE Americans feel MORE ALONE – MORE ISOLATED – than ever before.** Recently, pollsters asked the American public: *How many CLOSE friends do you have?* And they were SHOCKED when the majority of people answered *"I only have 2 close friends."*

What's so TROUBLING about this is that 20 years ago pollsters asked the same question and people answered *I only have 3 close friends.* So – **more and more Americans report having fewer and fewer friends** – and worst of all – **1 in 4 Americans now say they have NO ONE to discuss important matters with.**

Some social critics cite these statistics as "evidence" of the decline of the "traditional family" – and they're probably RIGHT to some degree. But the poll ALSO revealed that **even WITHIN families – people are TALKING LESS.** According to one family therapist, TV, video game, and computer use is UP in part because more and more **people feel LIKE STRANGERS within their own families.**

Please don't raise your hand – but I wonder this morning – HOW MANY [not IF, but HOW MANY] here today feel ALL BY YOURSELF? ISOLATED?

The Scripture for today delves into this issue of ISOLATION.

Jesus has just returned from a successful "mission trip" across the lake [the "Sea" of Galilee]. He's been over on the "other side" where GENTILES live – and now he's returning "home" to the fishing village of Capernaum.

As Jesus draws near to shore, he notices a crowd of people waiting for him. Among them is a man named Jairus. He's a leader in the community, the ruler of the local synagogue, a respected man. But **his 12-year-old daughter is DYING and Jairus is DESPERATE**. So he comes and waits frantically for Jesus to come ashore – then **he falls at the feet of Jesus** [a sign of great RESPECT] and he BEGS Jesus to come TOUCH his daughter [lay hands on her] so she will be healed. And Jesus agrees to go with him.

But on the way – SOMETHING HAPPENS. As Jesus makes his way to Jairus' house, the crowd presses around him – and **in the crowd there's an unnamed woman** [a symbol that she's NOT "important"; she's a NOBODY]. This unimportant, nobody-of-a-woman is there because she's been ill for 12 years with a bleeding disorder [think "menopause gone mad" and you get the picture].

Mark [MK] tells us this woman has spent ALL her resources – her entire life's savings – on professional healers and quack cures. But instead of HELPING, they've only made things WORSE. So now this woman is STILL SICK; she's BROKE [all her credit cards are "maxed" out because of medical bills]; her existence is a LIVING HELL. And to make matters WORSE STILL – the nature of her illness is such that BY LAW she is forbidden to come into contact with others. **Imagine having an illness that "quarantined" you so that you couldn't go to school, to work, shopping, to a restaurant, to church** – and you begin to get a picture of what her life has become. Not only is she been PHYSICALLY and FINANCIALLY "broken" by this experience – she's been SOCIALLY marked as an OUTCAST.

But this woman has heard of what Jesus of Nazareth has been doing – and in her heart, she feels a glimmer of hope that **if she can just TOUCH Jesus – even his CLOTHING – she will be healed**. So this woman BREAKS THE LAW – she risks getting into the crowd, even though if she is recognized she can be STONED TO DEATH.

In spite of the "RULES" – she pushes through the crowd and touches the "HEM" of Jesus' robe. In reality, the word MK uses is "tassels" – the woman actually touches the tassels of Jesus' clothing. Jewish law [Numbers 15] commanded that people wear tassels on the corners of their clothing as a reminder [like tying a string to your finger to remember something] to always serve the LORD and obey God's commandments. This woman PUSHES through the crowd – touches Jesus' tassels [*tzit-tzit*] – and **INSTANTLY the woman KNOWS she is healed!**

However – Jesus ALSO senses that something has happened. He stops “dead in his tracks” and asks: **WHO TOUCHED ME [my clothing]?** The disciples answer: *DUH, Lord, you’re surrounded by people; EVERYONE’S touching you!* But Jesus says: *Someone PURPOSELY touched me – because I felt healing power go out from me to them. So – WHO TOUCHED ME?*

And slowly – RELUCTANTLY – this woman comes forward. She doesn’t know what Jesus will SAY or DO. But she comes forward and she too falls at Jesus’ feet – and at the RISK of being rejected and perhaps being put to death – she tells Jesus EVERYTHING.

**It’s HERE that Jesus does an AMAZING thing.** He gives this unnamed “nobody” a NAME – he calls her “daughter”. In effect, Jesus is saying: *You’re NOT a NOBODY; you’re FAMILY. Your faith has healed you; go in peace.* And having done THIS – Jesus then proceeds to the home of Jairus where he heals HIS daughter as well.

Now, folks – I’ve been reading and re-reading this story for the past week now. I keep coming back to the CORE, the HEART of this incident – Jesus’ question: *WHO TOUCHED ME?* Does anyone wonder WHY Jesus asks this question in the first place? **WHY did he pause here when he was already on an URGENT mission to go help a sick little girl?** Wasn’t the woman HEALED the moment she touched Jesus? Wasn’t STOPPING a waste of time?

I want to suggest to you that **he did it because this woman wasn’t FULLY healed.** She was PHYSICALLY healed – but **she wasn’t FULLY healed until Jesus stopped and gave her a place back in the community that had shunned her for 12 long years.**

You see – no one can LIVE without OTHERS. Research has shown that babies who are deprived of intimate, caring TOUCH don’t grow physically or mentally as do babies that are touched in loving, caring ways. And this woman is only “healed” when Jesus ends her isolation and helps her get back into the community.

This incident reveals a very important component of Jesus’ mission for us. Jesus comes announcing/proclaiming GOOD NEWS – God’s reign is breaking in on the world.

The signs of this are evident in Jesus’ ministry:

- EVIL is overcome
- ILLNESS is healed
- SIN is forgiven
- even DEATH is defeated

But often LOST in all this is that **Jesus comes to give people LIFE** – and **in the Bible, “life” means having right relations with GOD and right relations with OTHERS**. And whenever Jesus heals or frees or forgives – it’s to **RESTORE people to “LIFE”** [to right relations with God; right relations with others].

Years ago – when I had TIME – I used to enjoy restoring old furniture. I discovered here’s something really NEAT about stripping away old layers of PAINT and GUNK from a FINE piece of furniture, sanding away NICKS and SCRATCHES, applying a layer of FINE NEW STAIN – and seeing a previously USELESS piece of furniture “come to life” again.

Well – THAT’S what Jesus does for us. **“Restoring” lives that have become stained, scratched, and useless – that’s Jesus’ mission. It’s the mission of the Church, too.** In Galatians 6:1, the Apostle Paul writes: *If someone is caught in a sin, you who experienced the grace of God should RESTORE them gently.* He goes on to say in v. 2: *Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

But unfortunately – all too often when someone falls out of “community” – what happens? We keep them at arms’ length so they won’t “contaminate” the rest of us! But here Jesus has an unexpected encounter with a woman who is SICK – ISOLATED – CUT OFF from everyone. **Jesus HEALS her and RESTORES her and rewards her faith with a place in his family.**

Brothers and Sisters – there are 2 things I hope you take home with you today. The FIRST is that somewhere among us this morning is someone who feels alone. That’s BAD news. But the GOOD news is: *Jesus is passing by. Reach out and touch him.*

The SECOND thing is that once someone reaches out to Jesus – those persons need someone to help them into the “community”.

Will YOU help them?

Let us pray....