

**Sunday, September 8, 2013**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon - "Just one Touch"**

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When my sisters and I were little girls we would spend hours outside in our yard, sitting in the grass, picking buttercups.

We had been told, perhaps by a wise neighbor, or an older cousin, that if you held a buttercup under your chin and saw a yellow reflection, it meant that you liked butter.

We would ceremoniously hold the small flower under one another's chin, check for a reflection and declare, "Yup, you love butter."

I do believe that the bright flowers always cast at least a faint reflection.

We only did this during the day, when the sun was shining and I don't recall anyone being deemed a butter-hater.

What I love about our buttercup activities is that they were conducted completely out of faith.

Someone whom we believed had told us that buttercups had this revelatory power.

Our family didn't even eat butter – we were a 1960's margarine household.

Our only taste of butter was at my grandmother's house where we did indeed find that we loved butter assuring us that our buttercup experiments were legitimate.

We believed in the magic of buttercups because we had no reason not to.

In today's gospel story we come upon two individuals who put all of their faith in Jesus – desperately hoping that what they have heard will be true for them as well.

Jairus, a leader of the local synogue is devastated by the illness and immanent death of his young daughter.

He has heard that this Jesus of Nazareth has the power to heal.

He seeks him out in the public square. In front of a crowd of people this religious leader humbles himself and begs for Jesus to save his daughter.

Jesus is moved by his faith and agrees to go to the daughter.

While he is moving through the town, with Jairus and the disciples in tow, one daring woman reaches out, unnoticed, to touch the hem of his robe.

Her desperate hope is that the stories she has heard about this man will be true and that she will be healed from a condition that has plagued her for twelve long years.

As she reaches out and touches his cloak, she feels the healing power go through her body.

Jesus, too, feels the power and questions the bystanders.

The woman, surely fearful knowing that she is considered unclean, comes before him and confesses that it was she who dared to draw on the power of Christ.

Jesus' words to her are a message that resound within our faith to this day, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed."

Now the word comes from Jairus' house that it is too late, his daughter has died.

Jesus gently says to Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe."

Let's go.

They continue on and Jesus restores Jairus' daughter to life.

Both the woman with the bleeding condition and the synagogue ruler take huge risks in their search for healing.

The woman defies the requirement that a person with her condition not be out in public or touch a rabbi.

She dares both.

The synagogue ruler, by throwing himself at Jesus' feet, risks his social and religious status.

Sometimes desperation can make us do terrible things.

But sometimes desperation can also lead us to stop worrying about what others think and just risk it all.

"Do not fear, only believe."

The risk in these stories is to tie healing to piety – the greater the faith the more likely you will be made well.

It is important that we remember that the focus of Mark's miracle stories is not on the faith of the petitioners but on the power of Jesus.

His miracles are the sign of the inauguration of the kingdom of God and the sign that Jesus is the Messiah.

Mark uses these stories in his gospel to answer the question, "Who is this Jesus?"

We, in turn, reading these stories must ask ourselves, "Who is this Jesus in our lives?"

How willing are we to humble ourselves before this healer and ask for help?

How willing are we to believe that when things seem helpless, Jesus Christ can transform lives?

You see my friends, this Jesus who heals with a touch, this Jesus who heals with a word, this Jesus to whom people flock, is the Jesus whom we have committed to follow as Christians.

Belief in Jesus Christ, both human and divine, is the only requirement for Christianity.

But it is a big requirement for when we say we follow Jesus – we must be willing to try and live our lives in a Christ-like manner.

We must be willing to reach out – to touch the unclean, to heal the sick, to offer forgiveness, mercy and grace.

In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship* Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes how he and his Christian brothers and sisters tried to survive under the Nazi regime in Germany. It is instructive for us today. He said, “The followers of Christ (*we*) have been called to peace. And they (*we*) must not only have peace but also make it. To that end they (*we*) renounce all violence and tumult. ... His disciples (*we*) keep the peace by choosing to endure suffering rather than inflict it on others. They (*we*) maintain fellowship where others would break it off. They (*we*) renounce hatred and wrong. In so doing they (*we*) overcome evil with good, and establish the peace of God in the midst of a world of war and hate.”

This is hard work that we have committed to.

In today’s reading Jesus calls both women ‘daughter’.

Regardless of their social status – one high and one low, Jesus rejects the assumption that if there is a “winner” there must also be a loser.

In God’s kingdom, we are all adopted children.

God does not cure the poor at the expense of the rich, or vice versa.

In God’s kingdom, we are all loved, we all get a second chance at life, and no one has to lose.

The only thing standing in the way of our ability to enter this new reign is our choice, and our ability to answer Jesus’ challenge:

“Do not fear, only believe”

A few years ago I was meeting with a family before a funeral service. They were talking about the pain of losing a loved one and the overwhelming feelings of grief and sadness they were experiencing.

I was talking about the healing power of God’s presence in our lives and the promise that Jesus made to his followers that he would prepare a place for them.

The daughter was listening carefully and then she said to me, “You know, it sounds like you really believe that.”

I took her hand in mine and looked into her eyes and I said, “I do believe it.

With my whole heart and soul, I believe it.”

I felt the healing power go from my hand to hers.

I have felt this healing power numerous times in my ministry – at the bedside of someone who is dying, in my office with a person who is in crisis, on the street, with a person who has been absent.

Touch is a remarkable gift – one that conveys caring, acknowledgement, concern, love.

I want you to take the prayer square that you were given earlier.

I want you to hold it in your fingers and think of it as a piece of Jesus’ cloak.

I want you to hold it while we pray and think about those areas in your own life where you might be in need of healing.

I want you to believe that this small piece of cloth has the power to restore your soul.

I want you to believe that the power of Jesus Christ is available to you, just as it was to Jairus’ daughter and the bleeding woman.

You, child of God, are blessed and beloved.

Augustine wrote, "A person can do other things against his will; but belief is possible only in one who is willing"

From those words, the following prayer was written,

Dear God,

I am willing and open to the movement of Your Spirit within me.

I am willing to believe that I am capable of being more loving and joyful.

I am willing to forgive myself and any other person I think has wronged me.

I am willing to be transformed at the core of my being.

I am willing to believe that I am healed, healthy and whole.

I am willing to be a peacemaker.

I am willing to walk the path of Love.

I am willing to be the person You would have me be.

I am willing to be of service to the people around me.

I am willing to see every situation as an opportunity.

I am willing to grow spiritually.

I am willing for Your will to be my will.

I am willing and available for the Holy Spirit to show me how to be; truly me.

Amen