

PENTECOST 5

June 28, 2015

Mark 5:21-34

"Breathing in and Breathing Out"

Pastor Saul Stensvaag

Human beings need physical contact with other people. We need touch. Experiments with infants and young children have shown that physical touch from a parent or caregiver is very important.

Mariana Caplan, in her book, Untouched, says that,

"Many people actually become sick because they are touch-starved." Lack of touch is as detrimental to health as lack of Vitamin C."

She goes on to say, *"contrary to the old warning that holding babies too much will spoil them, the opposite is true.*

The more holding, carrying, rocking, and hugging we do, the more we provide the necessary sensory stimulation for brain growth.

My mom and dad used to tell of their experience with their first child, my oldest sister.

Like many of their friends, they had a copy of a book by Dr. Spock – no, not **that Dr. Spock** – Dr. Benjamin Spock. The book was entitled: *Baby Care*, and my parents tried to follow all of his advice. Spock wrote:

"the way to cure chronic resistance to sleep in infancy is straightforward. The way to ensure that the infant doesn't get away with such tyranny is to say good night affectionately but firmly, walk out of the room, and don't go back."

Well, one night, after baby Rebecca had cried nonstop for about an hour and a half, my dad told my mom to go pick her up and comfort her.

She said, *"Well, Dr. Spock says we should just let her cry."*

To which my dad replied, *"Dr. Spock doesn't have to live here!"*

The hunger for touch – the desire for a handshake or an embrace – is still with us as adults, isn't it?

Those of you who know I'm a hugger can understand why I love this statement by Melba Colgrove in her book, *How to Survive the Loss of Love*:

"The healing power of touch cannot be overestimated. Get three hugs a day for survival, five for maintenance, and eight or more for growth!"

Jesus must have known the value of touch. Time and again, as he interacts with people, especially in the healing miracles, **tactile touch** is part of the healing process.

In Jesus' touch, there is power for healing. The two separate healing stories in today's gospel illustrate this.

Jairus, whose daughter is near death, asks Jesus to *"come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live."*

And the woman in the crowd who has been suffering from bleeding for 12 years, thinks, *"if I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."*

Both Jairus and the woman are correct. When she touches Jesus, her bleeding stops immediately and she feels healed. And when Jesus enters the room of Jairus' daughter, he takes her by the hand, and she too is healed.

It's important to note that Jesus isn't afraid to touch even those people the religious establishment labels unclean. The woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years was a social outcast. She was considered unclean and wouldn't be allowed to set foot in the synagogue.

But Jesus is not afraid of her touch.

And back then, a dead body was considered unclean, but Jesus wasn't afraid to reach out and take the dead girl by the hand in order to revive and heal her. **Jesus is always willing to extend his healing touch to those in need.** We need his healing touch.

Of course, we no longer are able to encounter the flesh and blood Jesus who walked the roads of Palestine in the first century. But Jesus continues to extend his healing touch through those who serve him, knowingly or unknowingly, in the world today.

Whenever a doctor, nurse, family member, or visitor touches a sick person, Jesus is there, extending his healing touch.

Whenever a parent or other caring adult embraces a hurting child, the healing power of Christ is at work.

One of the prayers we pastors may use in the hospital recognizes how Jesus reaches out through the hands of others:

"Lord, look upon your servant, Joan. Give compassionate hearts and healing hands to those who attend her, and let your life-giving power flow into every cell of her body and into the depths of her soul, restoring her to wholeness."

Of course, the healing that God in Christ gives us may not always mean a physical cure. It may be much deeper than that.

Sometimes, God chooses to grant a different sort of healing, namely the healing of the soul, and the removal of all fear of death and suffering.

That's why, sometimes I use the following from our pastor's prayer book,

"Almighty and merciful God, our only source of health and healing, who alone can bring calmness and peace; Grant to us, your children, a consciousness of your presence and a strong confidence in you. In our pain, our weariness, and our anxiety, surround us with your care and protect us by your loving might." Amen

Of course, it's not only when we are sick in the hospital that we need to know the loving presence of Jesus. We need it every day, don't we? There are many kinds of sickness, many ways that we are less than whole.

And sometimes we long for some **physical sign** that Christ cares – that **He is truly with us, ready to heal.**

Today we receive that sign.

In the bread and wine of communion, Jesus comes to us in a physical way.

He comes to us in **bread we can chew** and **wine we can swallow**, because he knows our **need for a physical experience of his healing love.**

Friends, I don't know what it is that you need healing for today. But Jesus knows. He knows and he reaches out to you.

When we feel the bread in our hands, we experience the healing touch of our savior. Martin Luther calls this sacrament, *"medicine for the soul."*

The glorious gifts of the Lord's Supper draw us forward to gather together so we can wallow in his loving presence. And, as we receive him **in-with-and-under** the bread and wine, our hearts and souls are healed once again.

But that's not the end of the story. The healing isn't over yet. The power of Christ to heal, given to us in this meal, is always more than we need; **more than we can possibly use just for ourselves.** There are always leftovers. And so, the healing power left over is now ours to share with others.

My **confirmation students** learn about **the figure eight of the Christian life**, which shows how we are always to be gathering around the word and sacraments to be fed, and then sent out into the world to serve.

Sam Torvend, in his book Daily Bread, Holy Meal has a similar, powerful illustration, namely, *"Breathing in and breathing out."*

And he uses two laws of physics – centripetal or inward force and centrifugal or outward force – to explain it. He writes:

" Christian worship often looks deeply centripetal: that is, people seek a 'peaceful' center; they are drawn inward, away from a world that may appear threatening. It's no surprise that the assembly, which is a body, must breathe in air, drink water, and ingest food in order to survive.

The centripetal movement of the liturgy draws people into the center of Christian worship and its supper.

Yet one of the core insights of Luther is the insistence that in the Lord's supper Jesus Christ is given **FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD...**'

Luther says, 'As love and support are given you, you in turn must render love and support to Christ in his needy ones.'

Torvend concludes, "Luther clearly announces the centrifugal movement of the liturgy and the Christian assembly. **Along with breathing in, the body must also breathe out in order to survive.** Set next to the centripetal movement of gathering inward is the centrifugal movement of sending outward into a beautiful yet threatening world.

You see, you and I receive the healing touch of Christ in order that we might share that healing with the world.

When we receive Christ today in the bread and wine, **we are, in a sense, BREATHING IN.**

But, at the close of the service, when we are told to "go in peace, serve the Lord," we are being **reminded of the need to BREATHE OUT.**

Jesus Christ promises to always be present with his healing power. His presence **frees us from self-preoccupation, from anxiety and helplessness.**

It FREES US UP TO SERVE OTHERS.

Because **Christ is not a REFUGE FROM THE WORLD but our REFUGE IN THE WORLD, and that little preposition, "in", makes all the difference.**

Breathing in, and breathing out.

So come, my friends. Come to the Lord's table.

Let the **centripetal force of his love** for you draw you into the holy meal.

But then, let the **CENTRIFUGAL FORCE OF HIS LOVE FOR ALL THE WORLD DRIVE you from this place ready and willing to share his love, his compassion, and his healing with a world longing for them.**

So BREATHE IN....

And BREATHE OUT,

UNTIL THE LORD COMES AGAIN. Amen