

### **Mark 5:21-43 “Reach Out In Love”**

It's a wonder that anyone came near him, let alone a “great crowd”. You couldn't have blamed people if they had stayed away in droves, or at the very least if they had kept their distance, a safe distance, from Jesus. The stories of his recent adventures on the other side of the Sea of Galilee were by now known far and wide, especially the fantastic incident over on that shore where the Gentile pig farmers lived. Some even claimed that's why they had come, to see and hear this strange man who had driven out demons there and destroyed a whole herd of pigs in the process!. But surely they knew how ritually unclean that made him, and how if they came near him or had anything to do with him they too would be unclean by association. Oh, there were the purification rites, but those cost time, money, and effort. Anyone could have understood if they had stayed well clear of this strange Jesus of Nazareth, the one they said could not only cast out demons, but heal people as well.

But they didn't stay away. They came in droves to see him. They gathered around him on the seashore in noisy, pushy, shoving, chaotic crowds. Everyone was trying to get closer, to hear, to see this man of god, but none had the courage to touch him. It's likely that at least some of them got shoved into him; how could they help it as people further back in the pack tried to get closer, but few dared actually reach out to touch him, possibly in respect but more likely in fear. Fear both of his unclean / untouchable status and perhaps more so of the obvious power in him.

That's why Jairus' approach to Jesus was all the more astounding. As a leader in the synagogue, Jairus knew all too clearly the consequences for him of even talking to this man. The rules were clear, the lines that could not be crossed were drawn boldly by the laws of Moses, and he knew the penalties by heart.

The same was true for the woman with the hemorrhaging problem. For her the risks seemed in some ways less, because she was already banned from worship, and had been for twelve years. But on the other hand, her status had dropped about as far as it could go, and she knew the crowd wouldn't hesitate to condemn and even kill her with impunity if they discovered her in their midst. With the mood of the crowd being so favourable toward this Jesus they would kill her for sure if they caught her doing what she so desperately wanted to do – touch even the hem of his cloak that she might be healed. Nothing else had worked: all of the medical experts she had seen, all of the mainline and alternative routes she had tried, and now she was destitute, broken and still not healed. He was her last hope. He needn't even know that she had crossed the uncrossable line if she could only sneak up from behind.

These two, Jairus and the unnamed woman, people from the extreme opposite ends of the spectrum of acceptability, were forced in seeking help to cross legal and religious lines that were clearly drawn, and rigidly enforced. Lines handed down in the Law and the Prophets, lines that were vigorously and rigidly defended as being scriptural, as being the inflexible and unchanging law of God.

Sadly that same vigour in defending lines demarking what is deemed acceptable to God is still evident today. Many individuals, many groups, many churches can be found today making self-righteous declarations of being able to understand with divine clarity the mind of God, or at least who they believe is acceptable to God. They spew forth misappropriated bits and pieces from scripture to the constant accompaniment of a staccato thumping of a bible. Today's Scribes and Pharisees draw the same kind of lines that have been drawn and defended for centuries: lines like defensive moats to exclude women from leadership and to keep at bay those who are otherwise deemed ‘untouchable’ for one reason or another. Lines meant to define who is on the inside, and thus acceptable to God, and who is on the outside, and thus unable forever to receive any favour from God. Lines that prevent the reaching out in love to touch and heal those who need it most.

Thank God for his Son, Jesus Christ, who as we see in this gospel story not only respected and acknowledged but also accepted those who crossed the lines. Thank God that Jesus listened to Jairus'

plea for help, and instead of banning him for crossing the line responded to his plea, and healed his daughter. Thanks be to God that Jesus himself crossed the line by going not only into the house where the girl had apparently died, for not only did he enter the room where the corpse lay but he reached out in love and touched the body. He took the girl's hand, and spoke to her, saying "get up", and she did. Who could deny that his power to heal her was from God? Nobody! Who would dare deny that Jesus, in responding to Jairus' crossing the line himself crossed the ultimate line, and yet still found favour from God to heal her? Nobody!

Jesus had undeniably crossed legal and religious lines simply by being in Gentile territory among pig farmers, yet his power to heal the man possessed by demons was undiminished. Jairus crossed the same line by approaching Jesus to heal his daughter, and instead of being shunned by Jesus, Jesus turned and reached out to heal the daughter.

And what about the woman who touched the hem of his cloak? Instead of simply writing her contact off as one more shove, push or jostle in the crowd, Jesus recognized what had happened, and sought the woman out, not to condemn her, not to incite the crowd to drive her back into lonely, sick isolation, but to comfort her. Even though she had by all legal accounting violated him through touching his clothing, even though she had crossed just about every religious line drawn, Jesus softly called her to him, affirmed her faith, confirmed her healing, and sent her on her way with his blessing of peace. It was clear that Gentiles, foreigners, women, children, tax collectors, prostitutes, sinners, lepers, the unclean, yes and even the righteous could now be touched by the loving power of God.

Thank God that much of the church today hears the message of grace in Jesus' reaching out in love, and hears the call that as the body of Christ the church is still called to reach out in love. Reach out to help those who need the help most, in healing, in food, in dignity. Last year people within The Presbyterian Church in Canada reached out in love with almost four million dollars in donations to Presbyterian World Service and Development. We see in the gospel story a few people who were touched by the grace of God in Christ ... let us now see some of the people who were touched by your contributions ...

... the PWS&D video ...

Now isn't that truly a record of God's grace in Christ? But there's more. Through some \$8.3 Million in donations to Presbyterians Sharing, Presbyterians have reached out in love to First Nations to help with healing and reconciliation; have reached out in love to struggling rural and remote congregations; have reached out in love to help enthusiastic new congregations get started; and have reached out in love providing missionary workers continue to demonstrate the grace of God in Christ.

But there's still more. Through contributions in Presbytery dues local Presbyterians have reached out in love to help children encounter Christ's love in a camp setting at Camp Douglas; have reached out in love to Hummingbird Circles; and have helped congregations to thrive, proclaiming God's redeeming love in Christ.

But there's still more. Through your generous contributions of money, time, and talents this congregation called Central has regularly reached out in love in Christ's name to feed the hungry, comfort the distressed, and touch the community around us. From around the world to around the corner, the body of Christ still reaches out in love, by the grace of God.