

Sermon Notes – January 24, 2021

(Mark 5:21-29, 33-36)

I want you to see several things in our story today. One of those is that God's love is for all people – whether you're rich or poor, young or old, no matter what your situation in life, God loves all people. St. Augustine, one of the early Church Fathers, once said, "God loves every person as if they were the only person on earth. Yet, God loves all as God loves each." God loves and cares about all of us. The second thing I want you to hear is that Jesus was interrupted in the story. How do you deal with interruptions? And do you know that sometimes a disruption in your day, in your schedule, may be the most important thing you do that day? Third thing: Touch is more than physical. When we think of touch, we think of tactical and physical. Jesus touched people in so many different ways – physically, embracing the kids; he touched the blind and put spittle in their eyes to make them see; he touched the deaf and made them to hear; but he also always touched people with his words, his parables, his stories, and his healing power. Touch is more than physical – remember that.

In our Gospel reading today, Jairus is a synagogue ruler. Now I need you to know that a temple in Jerusalem was a big building where all the Jews came for worship. It's also the place where they had all their big feasts every year – the annual feast, the Passover, the Pentecost – all those things. But in each little town or village, they had a synagogue. It was for worship, but it was also a school for Jewish boys to learn the Old Testament and the scriptures. This man, Jairus was a ruler in the synagogue. He was an administrator -- he oversaw the cleaning of the building and getting visiting rabbis to speak since they didn't have a permanent rabbi or preacher or teacher. He was wealthy and a prominent member of the Jewish community. He comes to Jesus, begging on his knees, "Please heal my daughter. Please lay your hands on her and heal her." Now, aren't you surprised that he didn't come to Jesus as a prominent member of society, and come in and say, "Hey, Jesus. I met your man, Andrew and he told me that you are an honorable man. He told me you could heal people and I've got a daughter who is very

sick. I would like you to take her on as a patient. I would be glad to pay you.” But, he didn’t do that. You see, synagogue rulers and Pharisees and Sadducees didn’t think highly of Jesus. In fact, they often looked down on him. This guy had probably been to every doctor and tried every herb that he knew, and nothing worked to heal his daughter. *In desperation and humility, he comes and falls at Jesus’ feet, begging for Jesus to heal her.* Have you ever noticed that when your child is sick that you would do anything for that child – that grandchild – to get them the help they need? This man was willing to beg Jesus to heal his daughter.

Then, on the other side of the social-economic spectrum, I want you to see a woman who was poor and sick. She had been sick for twelve years. She was ritually unclean because she had a bleeding disorder every day, which in Jewish law meant that she couldn’t worship in the temple or the synagogue; she couldn’t commune with other women in the marketplace; supposedly, she wasn’t even supposed to be out of her home. But, she snuck in the crowd and in desperation and with courage, she thought, “If I could just touch the hem of his garment... I’ve heard he could heal people. I’ve heard he’s not afraid to be around sinners, lepers, or prostitutes. Maybe, if I can just touch his garment, I will be healed.” She’s poor, sick, and unclean; she’s an outcast in society. From two different spectrums, two different economic levels, they have come to Jesus for healing. Jesus loves all people – every single one of us, as though we were the only person on earth. He loves us all. He loves us each. God loved and cared for both of them and he cares for you. No matter what your concern, no matter how big or small your problems are, he wants us to come to him. He loves us all.

Jesus was willing to be interrupted. Now think about it – he’s on the way to Jairus’ house, his daughter is dying, and he says, “Come, Master.” Wouldn’t you be a little upset if the doctor had turned around and went to help someone else when he was supposed to be coming to your house to heal your child? But Jesus was willing to stop and be interrupted – because Jesus is Jesus and God’s ways are higher than our ways. Jesus already knew what he was going to do with the little girl at Jarius’ house, but he stops and takes the time to be interrupted by this woman with the

issue of blood. Here was a woman who had been isolated and alienated from society and worship, and Jesus wants her to know that she is a child of God and she is valued. Women and children in that day had no value. They were like slaves, a piece of property with no value. They were at the bottom of the totem pole, and Jesus heals her. She touched him and she was healed. He said, “**Daughter...**” did you notice that? Jesus called her “daughter.” Don’t you reckon that all those Jewish men were pondering why Jesus called her daughter? They thought she was a piece of property, but Jesus thought she was a daughter of God – she’s part of the family of God. He turned “a nobody” into “a somebody” of value. God always placed value on every human being, no matter who they were. But he also wanted this woman to be welcomed back into the community and the temple and she could only be welcomed if she was well, and Jesus made sure she was.

When everybody was laughing at Jesus for asking the crowd, “How can you ask who touched you in this crowd?” Have you ever been to the Panthers Stadium or Carowinds or Disney World and it looks like you can barely get around without touching somebody or hitting somebody? That’s the way it was that day with Jesus. He had won so much popularity with his healing parables and his preaching that the people were crowding around him, wanting something from him. When he said, “Who touched me?”, they started laughing. The woman who touched him finally admitted what she did and Jesus said, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace.” (That meant, “Go in wholeness. You are free from your suffering and free to commune with others.”) Jesus needed the crowd that day to know this woman was well, and that she was okay to go back to worship and to the marketplace. Jesus was willing to be interrupted.

Father Henri Nouwen was a Catholic priest, a book author, and a professor. At the prime of his career, he worked at the University of Notre Dame as a professor where he had a heavy work schedule. He said that the hardest part of his work was all the interruptions to his work, but then one day it dawned on him that those interruptions were his work. A friend went on to tell him that “Life is what happens to you

when you are planning other things. And sometimes the interruption is more significant than what you were already doing that day.” Did you hear that? ***“Sometimes the interruption is more significant than what you were already doing,”*** because you may be making a difference in somebody else’s life. God has called us to be interrupted. Sometimes it is difficult for us to let our schedule and our time to be interrupted.

I have close friends who live in Henderson, North Carolina. I always get tickled by some things because I guess it’s just something that we do as we get older. I would try to call Mrs. Foster between 7-9:00pm at night on a Friday or Saturday night. Guess what? She’s always watching Westerns and when I call, she doesn’t have time to talk. “Will you call me back?” The only thing wrong with that is that I may have forgotten what I called for earlier. Sometimes we don’t like to be interrupted, do we? Sometimes I get frustrated with interruptions. I thought I have this-this-and this to do today, but I get a call about visiting so-and-so or “Would you please call so-and-so?” ***I’ve come to realize that those interruptions are important and that person needs me right then.*** Sometimes the interruption that you have may be more significant than what you were already doing.

Then, I want you to hear in this story that Jesus touched people. He touched this little girl and took her by the hand. He often touched people - whether it was the blind, the deaf, or whoever. He touched and healed them. He embraced little children. Women would bring their little children to Jesus for blessings. He got upset with his disciples when they tried to push the children aside. But, Jesus also touched people with his words and his stories. ***I want you to think about the different ways that we touch people.***

Geoffrey Bull, who is a professor at the University of Massachusetts wrote a book, “Caring, Feeling, and Touching.” In his book, he said that skin hunger is one of the biggest things that we all need to have. We have the need for human contact from the time we are born until the time that we die. We need touch. Right now, we are living in a pandemic where it is hard to touch people like we want. We can’t kiss, hug, or embrace people

unless they are in our immediate family or live in our household because we're afraid of this virus. *But there are ways that we can touch the lives of people.*

There is a man, who was an English missionary in China, years ago – after World War II. He went to Communist China to start a new church. While he was there, he was arrested and put in prison because he was thought to be a spy for England. He was kept in prison for three years and two months. He said that he often wondered what day they were going to come in and kill him, because he just knew they were going to shoot him, strangle him, or whatever. One week it was so difficult and he was so depressed that he just kept asking the Lord for a sign. “Please give me a sign, Lord, to know that you are still with me and it is not over yet; there is still hope of freedom.” All of a sudden he heard outside the prison wall a song playing on the radio of one of the prison guards. It was a Concerto by Beethoven and it lifted his spirits and kept him from despair – it kept him going that week. He believed it was a sign from God. Most of us know that we can be touched by music and it can immediately lift our spirits. One of the things that Marty Light did for me for Christmas was to make me a CD of music. When I listen to it, it touches my heart and my soul and it lifts my spirits. We know that music can lift us.

You and I have other gifts that we can use to touch people's lives. One of those is the touch of the Ministry of Cards. I think I have told you before there was a lady in my church in Forest City years ago whose husband had a stroke. They didn't have any kids and her husband was paralyzed on one side. The stroke affected his speech, but one word that he could always say was, “Card.” She noticed that whenever she went to the mailbox and got a card from one of their fellow church members, his eyes would light up and he would get a smile on his face. One day, she went to get the mail, but she did not go directly back to his room. When she finally came back in, he said, “Card! Card! Card!” He always brightened up and got a smile on his face when there were cards in the mailbox. Because of his reaction, she set-out to have a “Card Ministry” at our church. Every week, she would send cards to the people that were sick or homebound or inactive in the church. When I had my kidney surgery

years ago, I was in the hospital for two weeks and out of work for almost six weeks full time. She sent me a card every week – sometimes twice a week. She always had a sweet note inside the cards that would touch you. “I just wanted you to know that you are thought about, missed, and prayed for.” ***Cards have a ministry and they touch our lives.***

Letters can also mean a lot to us, can't they? When I was graduating from high school, my favorite teacher came to my graduation. She brought me a gift and she also wrote me a long letter. I still have that letter in my cedar chest at home. When I was graduating from college, my English Professor who served as the Advisor for the Yearbook Staff wrote me a three page letter. I still have it in my cedar chest. It was what she said that touched me so. We know that we can touch lives with cards and letters, phone calls, emails.

Sometimes, we are touched by food, aren't we? A favorite meal, a favorite cookie, something can lift our spirits. We can't visit right now, but we can touch people's lives in lots of different ways. Nature touches us. Going for a walk. Music touches us. All kinds of things can touch us and can lift us from a dismal broken spirit.

I want you to think about how you can reach out and touch somebody with the gifts and abilities that God has given you. How can you touch them this week, this day, this morning? There are people that are not here. There are people that are here, but still need to be reminded that they are thought of and cared for. Can you do it through food, art, music, a card, a phone call? I want to challenge you to do that because it has a healing touch in somebody's life. Are you willing to be interrupted? Are you willing to touch somebody's life – in different ways besides the physical? Do you know that God loves you and no matter how big your concerns are, he cares about it and he's in the healing, redeeming business.

I have another story for you – told by Dr. John Powell, a Catholic teacher and book author. In one of his books called “Through the Eyes of Faith,” he shares a story about visiting a certain parishioner in prison every

month. He said one day he had an enlightening experience. “I was walking through the visitor’s center and there was an elderly lady beside me. She had the biggest smile on her face, like she was as happy as a lark. I dreaded going to prison since it’s such a dark, dismal place with a bad atmosphere. This lady spoke to every guard, smiled the whole way, and acted like the happiest person alive. When I got to where I was going, I stopped and talked to the lady. ‘Lady, you must bring a lot of love wherever you go with your smiling face and your words.’ She said, ‘Pastor, in my world, there are no strangers. They are all brothers and sisters, just some I have not met yet.’” He went back to his office and thought about what the lady had said. He came to the realization that all people are not all one thing - good or bad. They are all made up of warmth, love, and affection, but they are also full of weakness, mistakes, anger, and hurt. It’s up to us what we draw out of other people - good or bad - and that depends on our approach and our approach depends on our attitude.

So I want to ask you, what do you draw out of other people - good or bad? Do we bring out the best in them or the worst in them? How do you touch people? How do you have a healing effect on people? Jesus is in the healing, redeeming business. He loves all people. He healed the young and the old, the rich and the poor. God loves every one of us as if we were the only person on earth. God loves us all as he loves each of us. Your interruption may be the most important thing you’ve done all day. And I want to challenge you to reach out and touch someone this week, this month. Maybe, you can’t do it physically, but in what ways can you share your skills, talents, abilities and resources? May God help us to reach out and touch someone this day - this week. Amen.