

2021.06.27 SERMON

4th Sunday after Pentecost

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Double healings. Secrets. Silences.

Double healing - the daughter of Jairus and the woman who is bleeding Secrets - *“He strictly ordered them that no one should know this”*

Silences - *“she... came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak”*.

And Jesus knew. ‘Who touched my clothes?’ he wants to know. When I was training as a spiritual director we were given an assignment with this reading of imagining ourselves in the role of one of the minor characters. Or even a nearby building. Or the ground. I chose to be the cloak. It felt like this:

We are the cloth, golden, cream, white.

azure in the hollows, purple in the creases
we are plant strands, woven sheets of light
we wrap round his body, hiding, warming, shielding.

We are the garment, clothing this body, this man,
this sacrifice. We wander the earth with him,
eating the dust, tasting the earth once again
as it is pressed into our fibres, absorbing
the water, the rain, the sea, the salt of
the earth, of the sweat, we contain it all.

And they come to this One who we cover,
their voices stretch upon us, roll into our
pleats and seams, leaving no space untouched
by the sound of their questions, their cries
their supplications, their challenges. We keep it
from him, this constant surf of desire and
confusion, of hope kindled and taboos broken.
We strain out the chaff as best we can, we
are part of the earth, part of him.

We move with his bones, curve with his muscles
turn with his attention to face the one who
touched our hem. The dust and ground-in dirt
did not prevent our knowing, his knowing,
that one had touched, yes she touched, barely grazed the
surface yet pierced within his heart as she
touched the cloth and knew
who he was.

My friend Suzanne is captured by the woman's experience, imagining how *"it appears in the woman's memory: no pressing crowd to obscure her, surrounded by silence, the background washed away by insignificance, she reaches forth to touch and knows immediately that she's healed. Here is a picture of the inside of prayer - intimacy magnified."*

We too are captured by this moment, by the people asking for help, some in silence, some with words. As one writer puts it *"this is a process of crying out and reaching for help*

touching and being touched by loving silence"

The Persian poet Rumi hands it back to us. 'Here', he seems to say. 'Take this experience of feeling helpless, lost, whether because your beloved young daughter is dying or because you suffer from a chronic illness that separates you from all who might love and comfort you... Take this inability to save yourself and surrender to it'

Or in Rumi's own words:

*"Give your weakness
to one who helps.*

*Crying out loud and weeping are great resources.
A nursing mother, all she does
is wait to hear her child.
Just a little beginning-whimper,
and she's there.*

*God created the child, that is, your wanting,
so that it might cry out, so that milk might come.*

*Cry out! Don't be stolid and silent
with your pain. Lament! And let the milk
of loving flow into you."*

-Rumi 1207-1273, translated by Coleman Barks from The Essential Rumi

Rumi reminds us, as do both these Gospel stories, we are not alone. God does not leave us comfortless. My friend Suzanne writes this:

*“When despair has obliterated ordinary prayer; when the psalms fail and all words are stupid and meaningless, **the mantle of loneliness** surrounding me **becomes a mantle of dark and wordless love**. This darkness reveals
the paradox of prayer: in the absence of God, all there is, is God.”*

We may feel lost but we are not lost to God. We may feel bleak or hopeless or even despair but there is still light to be found. These two human beings in today's Gospel teach us that reaching out to God will lead us into that paradox of prayer, of the eternal companionship of God, maybe even into healed love with one another. In our loneliness is our salvation. AND sometimes it's only in our darkness that we can find the presence of The One who is the Holy of Holies, The One who is Jesus the great healer and radical world-changer, Emmanuel - God With Us. And sometimes the only way it works is to allow our desperation to emerge into the light of day. Sometimes it's when we truly give up that our surrender breaks us open to the milk of God's loving. And then... we *will* be changed, we will be fed, we will emerge from our solitude to touch the hem of God's cloak. And we will be touched in turn by that which is God.

Amen