

---

## My Sermon from Sunday June 27, 2021, 'Pentecost 5' ~

### *"The Power Of Touch"*

*Speak, Lord, your servants are listening. Amen.*

There is a field of study in science today that is called the 'Science of Touch.' Many studies have been done to understand touch and its importance, particularly between people.

In one interesting lab study, two strangers were put into a room with a barrier between them so they couldn't see each other. One person put his or her arm through a barrier. The other person was given a list of emotions and had to touch the person on the forearm for just one second. The object was to communicate the emotion. The person being touched had to guess the emotion. Remarkably, the participants being touched were able to guess compassion correctly nearly 60% of the time. They also guessed the emotions of gratitude, anger, love, and fear more than 50% of the time. The key message is that the touch language of compassion is essential to what it means to be human.

Touching gives life. I have read about orphaned babies who were left alone in cribs without being touched and how this touch-deprivation had a profound impact on their development. In fact, babies who are touch-deprived struggle to gain weight. There are cultural differences in touching also. North Americans and the British rarely touch friends during a conversation while people in the Mediterranean countries touch each other constantly. Now, of course, all this has changed since the beginning of the pandemic. I wonder if and when we will feel comfortable touching people outside of our bubbles again?

*"To touch can be to give life,"* said Michelangelo, and he was absolutely right. Touching can be soothing and it should signal safety and trust. That is another reason why the residential school survivors have suffered so much. They did not receive the gentle and kind touches that build caring relationships.



Warm touch stimulates the release of oxytocin which calms us. A caring touch helps us when we are under stress and it promotes trust and generosity.

Studies show that touching people with Alzheimer's can have a large impact on getting them to relax, and to connect with others.

I find it sad that in our pre-Covid world, we've had to be very careful about touching due to potential litigation. As a female priest, it has been more acceptable for me to touch people than male priests who must be very careful about touching children and youth. When patting the hand of someone we are talking with, they are more likely to have a positive experience.

Now this doesn't mean that when the pandemic restrictions are lifted we go around invading people's personal space and comfort zones, but we are aware of the power of touch. A gentle touch of the hand or shoulder. A hug for those who are comfortable with them. I feel blessed when I do healing prayers for a person and touch them on the head and anoint them with the sign of the cross

on their forehead. We need to connect with people on a basic physical level. This is why sharing the peace of Christ feels so good and is comforting to many.

Jesus knew the power of touch and used touch constantly in his healing ministry. As Christians, who have the light of Christ within us, the power of touch has a tremendous impact when we touch another person through the laying on of hands in the name of Jesus. In the early Christian church, people were ordained and set aside for ministry through touch, through the laying on of hands.

In our gospel this morning from Mark 5, Jesus restores a young girl to life and heals a woman. Both the restoration and the healing involve touch. A man of faith, a leader of the synagogue, named Jairus (pronounced 'Jay-eye-rus') spots Jesus, falls at his feet and begs Jesus to touch his daughter who is very sick. She is ***“at the point of death”*** (Mark 5:23). Jairus believes that if Jesus lays his hands on and touches his daughter, she will get better and live.



As Jesus is walking to the home of Jairus, an unnamed woman comes up to Jesus from behind. She reaches out and touches his cloak. She believes that if she touches Jesus' clothes, not even his flesh, her bleeding of 12 years will stop and she will be made well. She is right! Her bleeding stops instantly. Her ostracization from the community ends immediately. For 12 years, she was not permitted to touch anyone because of her bleeding. Imagine her emotional suffering. Not able to touch her family or her friends.

The story of Jairus' sick daughter intensifies. People who live in his home find Jairus and tell him that it is too late. His daughter is dead. No need for Jesus, the teacher to come. Imagine what was in the mind of Jairus. He was probably thinking that if Jesus hadn't stopped to speak with the women who touched his cloak, he would have been able to get to Jairus's home in time and heal his daughter. If the crowds around Jesus weren't so huge, Jesus would have been able to walk faster and get to the home in time. All the what ifs...

Jesus hears the conversation and tells Jairus to BELIEVE. Taking with him only 3 of his disciples ~ Peter, James, and John ~ they go to the home. People were weeping and wailing and grieving for this 12 year old girl. Jesus tells the mourners that the girl is not dead, that she is sleeping. And then in spite of their tears, they all laugh at him.

Jesus takes Jairus, his wife, Peter, James, and John with him into where the girl is lying. Jesus then touches her. He takes her by the hand and speaks to her in Aramaic: "TALITHA CUM" which means "Little girl, get up." The girl immediately comes back to life. She gets up and she walks and she eats.



What a story of grace and of power!

Everyone wanted to touch Jesus because they all understand this significance and the impact of

touching Jesus and being touched by him.

The gospels are filled with examples of Jesus healing through touch:

Matthew 14:36 ~

*The people begged Jesus that the sick people might touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.*



Luke 6:19 ~

*And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.*

Matthew 17:7 ~

*And Jesus came and touched them, saying "Get up, and do not be afraid."*

Matthew 20:34 ~

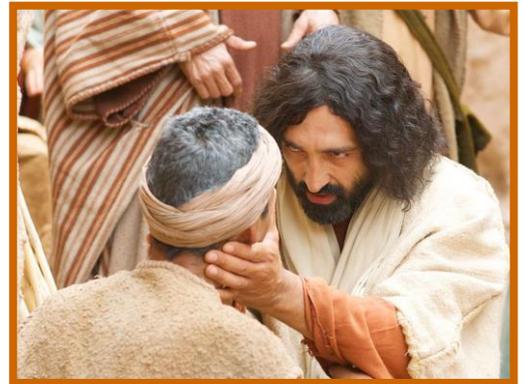
*Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.*

Mark 10:13 ~

*People were bringing little children to Jesus in order that he might touch them.*

Mark 10:16 ~

*And Jesus took the children up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.*



Jesus even put his fingers in a deaf man's ears and touched his tongue. Jesus was known to touch eyes which enabled blind people to see. He would take people by the hand and they would be healed immediately.

The first thing that Jesus does when a leper comes to him for healing is to stretch out his hand and touch the man.

The power of touch is real and essential. That is why it is such a sin when touch is abused and given in violence, in lust, in anger, in viciousness.

I pray that when the world opens up again, we as Christians can use touch in the way God intended. As comfort, as healing, as soothing, as compassion, as kindness, as connectedness to bring healing to the other person and glory to God.



The apostle Paul calls us to be imitators of Christ. Let's imitate the compassionate touch of our Lord and Saviour. **Amen.**

*Archdeacon Deborah+*

---