

XXIV Trinity 2023
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Colossians 1.3-14 St. Matthew 9.18-26

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Human beings are social creatures. The forced isolation of Coronatide was hard on all of us. When we were finally able to resume in-person Mass, we still had to keep our distance from each other. Virtual hand shakes and air hugs were the “new normal”.

This coming Thursday is Thanksgiving Day. We should give special thanks to God we are once again able to shake hands and hug each other after Mass. The human touch is, after all, a powerful reminder of our connection to each other. God’s touch is even more powerful.

Today’s Gospel is about all about touch...a human being touching God...and God touching a human being and healing them. All three of the Synoptic Gospels record the raising of the Jewish official’s daughter. Only Luke gives him a name, Jairus. He is no longer an anonymous character in the Bible...he has a name and we know something about him. Enter another element of the human connection.

Matthew identifies the Jewish official as an important religious and community leader at the Capernaum Synagogue. His world was about to be shattered by the impending death of his young daughter who was only twelve years old. He was taking a chance coming to Jesus for help. Most of co-workers at the Synagogue would have disapproved. But he does the unexpected...he kneels in front of Jesus and asks help. Jesus didn’t hesitate to go with Jairus.

Along the way something else unexpected happens. A woman who had been suffering from chronic bleeding for twelve years said to herself if she could only touch Jesus’ cloak she would be healed. We don’t know her name...and 4th Century Church historian Eusebius identifies her as a Gentile. She risked ridicule and humiliation if she was discovered. But she was determined and brave. Jesus turned around and called her his daughter...the only record in the Bible of Jesus having called anyone his daughter. He told her to have courage...her faith had made her well. A human being touched God and there was healing.

When Jesus arrived at Jairus’ house everyone was crying for the little girl because she was dead. Professional mourners would have been there to support the parents and help them grieve. When Jesus told everyone to stop crying...the little girl was not dead...they started making fun of him. It must have been quite a scene as Jesus told them to get out. He took the girl by hand, and told her to get up, and she did. He then told them to give her some food. God touched a human being and there was healing.

God our Father does not like to see people suffer. Jesus wants us to know we do not have to endure suffering alone. Jesus’ raised Jairus’ daughter and restored wholeness to his family. He healed the unnamed woman of a chronic bleeding condition and restored her to her family, friends and community. Jesus is the Great Restorer...the Compassionate Healer.

Suffering is not something we can avoid during this lifetime. We may ask ourselves why God allows us to suffer in a particular way...we may not get an immediate answer to that question...and we should not ask God for help and guidance only when times get tough. We should let our faith lead us directly to Jesus at all times, even when things are going well.

In his Letter to the Colossians, Paul prays for us...it is a very human prayer from a man who knew what it meant to suffer. He also knew what it was like to be touched by God’s hand. He wants us to be strengthened in knowing that Jesus has suffered and been through everything we have. He prays that we may endure all things with patience...and he instructs us to thank God for rescuing us from the power of darkness and death and leading us into the light and life that is his Son, Jesus.

The human touch is indeed powerful. The touch of Jesus on our lives is ever more powerful. It is life affirming, life changing and life restoring. We can learn from Jairus and the unnamed woman not to hesitate to ask Jesus for help...and what it means to have our faith in him make us whole.

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