

July 19, 2009 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost     *A Touch of Wholeness*

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

It was really starting to happen. What had been developing all along was really beginning to spread. Everywhere Jesus went the people came. In our text this morning Jesus and his disciples were trying to sail off to a place to be by themselves to rest. But when the people saw them heading that way they hurried through all the towns along the shore and got there first.

Why were they so anxious to be with Jesus? They knew there had to be more to life than what they experienced. The life most of them knew was a life of scarcity, sickness, social isolation, and death. It was a life so often cut off from God. It was a time when more and more of the farming land was owned by fewer and fewer people requiring of most the payment of rent out of a family's often meager harvest from which they drew their livelihood. They knew sickness. They knew poverty. They knew what it was to be separated from God. Religious requirements of purity and table fellowship kept proper relationship with God so narrowly defined that fellowship with God was severely limited to the fortunate few. If illness made you unclean, if your proper religious obligation could not be met due to physical disability or the limitations of age, if poverty prevented your proper sacrifice, you had no standing before God and no respect in the community. For so many people it was nearly impossible to maintain a relationship with God at the very time it was most difficult even to survive. With this very real threat to life at every level of existence people longed for just a

touch of wholeness. They wanted to be whole. They knew there had to be more to life than this.

Then this man Jesus came along—one who spoke with wisdom and compassion about the kingdom of God. He said the kingdom of God is very near. He spoke with authority about this. He had very little respect for the religious code of conduct and behavior that prevailed among them. After all, he touched a leper, an unclean woman touched his clothes, and he sat down and ate with tax collectors and sinners, and boldly declared that God loved them all. And he was not the least bit infected by their uncleanness and their sin as one would expect and the law surely declared; rather it was by his touch that they were made clean.

No wonder they flocked to Jesus. It was from him that they felt the touch of wholeness in their lives for the first time in a very long time—maybe the first time ever—and they just had to tell somebody. Yes, it was really starting to happen now.

Is it happening today? Do persons feel the touch of wholeness in our day? Is God still bringing healing out of illness, fullness out of poverty, life out of death? Are people still made clean today? How can you experience the touch of wholeness and, perhaps more importantly, how can you share it with others?

The text says, “Jesus taught them many things.” What did he teach them? What is he teaching you this morning? Right here in the text is all the lesson you need to feel and share the touch

of wholeness. I want to suggest that Jesus taught three lessons about the touch of wholeness in life. So let Jesus teach you this morning.

When Jesus saw that great crowd gathered to meet him, who were these people? Who were they? Surely among them were those lepers, tax collectors, sinners, and poor. They didn't look to him like the unclean and disobedient who now receive the punishment they justly deserve. No,

*He had compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.*

He offered them what they had so longed for—a touch of wholeness.

There it is the 1<sup>st</sup> lesson to learn if you are to feel and share the touch of wholeness. Jesus said; **Open your eyes to real need.** How often do we look at those around us, at one another, even ourselves, and see only what our culture determines is acceptable, never seeing the real need there at all? How does the culture in which we live judge acceptance? What makes persons “clean,” if you will, in our day? Whatever we may say about it, the culture clearly praises wealth, power, status, social class, youth, and physical attractiveness as the markers for acceptance today. In the eyes of the culture, they are the ones who are at the very center of life. They are the ones given all the worth and value the culture has to give. Who gets left out? The poor, the weak, the marginalized, the lower class, the old, the physically less attractive. If there's any question in your mind about this, which would you rather be: wealthy, powerful,

upper class, young, and healthy or poor, weak, lower class, old, and sick? The Gospel says whomever the culture considers unacceptable and less than worthy is the one in whom Jesus finds real need. “Open your eyes,” Jesus says, “to real need.” The ones left out, discarded, count out by the culture. Jesus 1<sup>st</sup> lesson is open your eyes to real need—that’s the first thing you have to learn if you are to feel and share the touch of wholeness.

That what Jesus was doing—keeping his eyes open to real need. And the news was spreading far and wide. It was spreading so far and so fast because Jesus gathered some folks around him whom he loved, taught, and trained to share God’s love with others. And they have just returned from their first missionary journey where Jesus had sent them out 2 by 2 to cast out demons and heal persons of their diseases. And so they did. Just like Jesus, they went out in defiance of the religious code of conduct and behavior of the time. They touched lepers, the unclean brushed up against them, they sat and ate with tax collectors and sinners. And neither were these friends of Jesus infected by the uncleanness and sin of those whom they reached, rather, it was by their touch that all those folks were made clean. By their ministry people felt the touch of wholeness. Jesus’ friends were sharing the Gospel of love in a powerful and controversial way...and it was upon their return from their very first missionary journey that they are called for the first time “apostles”—‘sent ones.’

Do you see what is beginning to happen here? The safe, predictable, and reliable world of the religious culture was

turning upside down. It was spreading so far and so fast by Jesus' design. Yes, it was really starting to happen now.

*Wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces...*

People everywhere felt the touch of wholeness in the midst of their shattered lives. Those who had been excluded for so long from life now have a place right in the middle of the marketplace. Jesus had so affected the culture that priorities of the marketplace shifted to the real need of real suffering people. Those who had been excluded so long from life now have a place right in the middle of the marketplace. The very center of economic and social life of the people was transformed into a place to meet real need. Jesus and his apostles had so affected the culture that even the priorities of the marketplace shifted to the real need of suffering people.

That's the 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson you see that Jesus teaches to those who want to feel and share the touch of wholeness. 1<sup>st</sup> open your eyes to real need; 2<sup>nd</sup> **make a place to meet the need.**

Warwick Memorial examples. Our youth made a place in Montana working with home construction and rehabilitation as they return home tonight. Our Honduras mission trip, though delayed, will make such a place. Yesterday we made a place in our Celebration Center for the Yard Sale sponsored by Children's Ministries to benefit non-profit groups that support children. And I can't wait for a "Cookie Walk," not only for the delicious treat but also for the place we will make for the benefit of others. The English Language Learning Lab makes a place

here to meet real need. And I have just recently learned that our congregation was not able to host PORT (housing for the homeless) until the completion of the Celebration Center. As a matter of fact, I also have just recently learned that our Celebration Center was designed to incorporate a number of features specifically with our hosting of the homeless in mind!

And so the ministry of Jesus and his apostles led people to make a place for real need right in the middle of the marketplace. God will not stop until we make more and more of those places again right in the midst of life. God will never give up until meeting real need like this is no longer unusual but our very way of life.

Jesus said 1<sup>st</sup> open your eyes to real need.

2<sup>nd</sup> make a place to meet the need.

What is the 3<sup>rd</sup> lesson you must learn to feel and share the touch of wholeness? Listen to the rest of the text and hear the cries of the sick in the marketplace:

*They begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.*

What must you learn after you open your eyes to real need then do all you can to make a place to meet that need? What is left to learn then? What do you have to do after that? When you have done this much already are you not eager to learn and do everything that Jesus wants you to do?

I have good news for you this morning and it is right here in the text. All you need to learn after you open your eyes to real need and make a place to meet it is **leave the rest to God.** All they

need to do is touch just the fringe of his cloak and God meets the need. You don't have to do anything else. God does the rest through Jesus Christ. It is then that you feel and share the touch of wholeness, purely by the grace of God.

Surely you can do that. Can you not leave the rest to God? That's the wonder and power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It was really starting to happen. Wherever the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed and heard it happens again and again and again. And when you truly open eyes to real need, make a place to meet that need, and then leave the rest to God, you may just find his cloak brushing up against you. Thanks be to God.

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