

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Epiphany 5

Quincy, IL

Saturday, February 6, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.

Rev. Stephen Southward

Sunday, February 7, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

“We Are Touched By The Love Of Jesus”

Mark 1: 30-31

In verses 30-31 of our Gospel lesson it says, “Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him (Jesus) about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.” We see here from this portion of Scripture that Jesus goes to Simon’s house where he finds that Simon’s mother-in-law is seriously ill with a fever. A fever in those times could be fatal. The gospel writer doesn’t record Jesus saying anything. We are simply told, “He took her by the hand and the fever left her.” She got up and made lunch for everyone. Yes, “He took her by the hand.” There were no words, just his presence and a touch. We see these kinds of things happen all during Jesus ministry. There was the man who was born blind. Jesus makes some mud with spit and with his fingers smears it on the man’s eyes and he could see. There was the deaf man who couldn’t speak. Jesus touched his tongue and put his fingers in his ears and commanded, “Be open!” He touched a man terribly disfigured with leprosy, a man no one else would touch and said, “Be clean.” He took the hand of the daughter of Jairus who had just

died and said, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” When children were brought to Jesus we are told he placed his hands on them and blessed them.

When Peter sliced off the ear of one of the men who came to arrest him we are told that Jesus “touched his ear and healed him.” (Lk. 22:51) When Jesus was talking to his disciples after his resurrection he began ascending into heaven and he raised his nail pierced hands and blessed them. It was as if he was laying his hands on each of his dear friends as he left. So what are we to make of all this touching and taking the hands of others by Jesus. He didn’t do it every time he healed someone but it seems that whenever he could he did. He didn’t have to touch anyone, his voice was enough. When Jesus commanded a demon to come out of the man, Jesus voice rang out with authority and power, “Be quiet, and come out of the man!” The demon shrieked and threw the man around and finally left him. His spoken Word was enough. It was that very same Word that had created day, night, the land and sea, and all the creatures at the beginning of time. But as we think about the voice of God at the beginning of time we notice something else. Did God use his voice to command the first people into existence? Something a lot more personal and special happened. God used his hands. “The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Gen 2:7) The language here is the same as that of a potter molding a pot with his hands. And when he created the first women there is no standing back and giving a command. He uses his hands and takes a rib from Adam and forms the woman. (Gen. 2:22) We know that God doesn’t really have hands but the writer of the book of Genesis wants to bring to our attention the special relationship between God and the people he puts on the earth. There is a connection, a closeness,

something personal, a special creative work different from everything else. At the beginning of time God reached out and molded and touched the first people. Jesus reached and touched those people whom God loved so dearly and yet were so broken and hurting because of what evil had done in the world. Now Jesus reaches out and touches us with his healing power.

He touches us with water at our Baptism and as his children we know we are special to him. He touches our ears with his promises that give us hope and reassurance. When we are depressed, upset, discouraged or grieving he touches us and blesses us with his presence. He will not abandon us in our troubles and promises that he will always be our refuge and strength in times of trouble. He touches us with the sign of cross when our consciences trouble us. He touches us with the body and blood of Jesus in bread and wine that we eat and drink in Holy Communion and we are assured that Christ is right here with us in the middle of the muck and mire of our lives. His touch encourages us and strengthens us to deal with anything. Now our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 40 is a song about the greatness of God. It concludes with these wonderful words of reassurance and comfort telling us that even though he is the all-powerful God who, “stretches out the heavens like a curtain,” created the stars, and reduced powerful rulers to nothing. He is a God who touches the lives of people with his love and compassion. Isaiah says, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall

mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” (40:27-31) There are times in our lives when our own strength is exhausted. There are those times when we are either emotionally, physically or spiritually drained, or perhaps all 3 at once. Isaiah uses words like “weary,” and “faint,” “weak,” and “exhausted.” There comes a limit to what we can endure. Jesus talks about those who are “weary and burdened.” (Matt. 11: 25) We can feel weary for all kinds of reasons. We feel weary because there is tension and uneasiness in our work place. We are weary from some kind of illness that seems to go on and on. We are weary and exhausted because there is some ongoing thing that is making us unhappy. We are heavy burdened because we have fallen into temptation and we are crushed by the guilt of having given in once again. Isaiah is speaking to weary people. He tells us about a God who reaches out and touches us in our exhaustion and weariness. We hear, “He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.” (Is. 40: 29) “But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” God reaches out and touches our lives and gives us a strength that is beyond what we can gather up in ourselves. There is strength in knowing that we don't have to go it alone, that we are never forgotten or ignored! We have a very special friend, Jesus, who watches over us at all times, who cares for us at all times, and who is open to having us come and speak to him in prayer at all times. He loves us! He forgives us! He will stand by us! He gives us something to hang on to and somewhere to turn even in our darkest moments! As Isaiah said, “They who wait on the Lord for help shall renew their strength.” Or as the apostle Paul said, “3 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (Phil 4:13)

Now while I was preparing for this sermon, I was looking for something on encouragement. And I found an old commercial showing a mom and dad who are seated in an auditorium waiting for a piano recital to begin when they realize that their son Tommy is missing, each thinking that Tommy was with the other. Suddenly the stage curtain rolls back revealing a little boy sitting at the grand piano playing “Twinkle, twinkle little star.” It is Tommy. A man appears on stage, obviously the guest pianist for the evening, and he walks up behind Tommy. Tommy is unaware of the man behind him and with a good deal on concentration on his face keeps playing Twinkle, twinkle Little Star. Mom and dad shrink down even further with embarrassment. The audience is restless. The man bends over the boy, puts his arms around the boy and says, “Don’t stop! Keep going!” Together they play one of Mozart’s variations of “Twinkle, twinkle little star” to the total delight of the audience, especially Tommy’s parents. At the end of the piece come the crowd applauds and the pianist puts his hand on Tommy’s shoulder and says, “Great job!” Yes, my friends, a lot of what happens in our lives is a lot like playing “Twinkle Twinkle little star” in a concert hall. We are alone on a great big stage. Anything can go wrong at any time. The Lord comes along and leans over and whispers in our ear, “Don’t quit. Keep going. I will help you.” And in that moment, Jesus presence, his love and his touch change everything. The boy in the commercial had a look of delight on his face when he realized that together he and the master musician can made beautiful music together. Just knowing that he is there means that everything is going to be all right.

I wonder what that moment with the master musician’s arms around his shoulders and his fingers dancing on the keyboard with his and then the words of encouragement had on that boy’s life in the future. Now it is true that Christ is no

longer visibly present with us as in the days of the disciples, but that doesn't mean that his touching presence is no longer here in our world. Christ reaches out and touches people in an even greater way than when he was here with his twelve disciples. I say that because Christ lives in us and is present with us as we reach out and touch those around us. His touch comes through your words of encouragement and prayers. His touch reaches out to the person loaded with all kinds of problems, and he uses your help and support to ease their anxiety and depression. Christ touches those who are burdened with a heavy conscience as we tell them of the wonderful freeing word of forgiveness in Christ. His touch comes through our care for a child who needs gentle encouragement.

His touch reaches out to a friend, or a family member who needs to feel that someone cares at that moment. If any of you have been troubled by anxiety, difficult decisions, or over-powering problems and have experienced the kindness and compassion of a friend, you will know what it means to have someone reach out to you and to feel that person's concern for you and help you through your difficulties. If that has been your experience then you have experienced the encouraging, healing touch of Jesus. We are his hands and he reaches out to others through us and makes them whole. God grant us the compassion and the desire to reach out and touch those in need with the love of Christ. I thank God that this has been made so for us all.

IN JESUS NAME. AMEN!