

Spiritual Senses #3: Touch

Luke 8 v 40-56

Context:

During this season of Lent we are exploring the spiritual senses of sight, taste, touch, hearing and smell. In today's study we turn to the spiritual sense of touch, and we see the way in which Jesus both *received* and *offered* touch which had remarkable transformative impact on those in need. The Hebrew word the Bible uses to describe the state of the earth in the beginning after God first created it is '*shalom*', meaning peace, harmony, wholeness – everything just as it should be. Tragically, this shalom didn't last, and in Genesis 3, after our first ancestors rebel against God, all kinds of horrible things are unleashed in the world, including sickness and death. The Halakah, the Jewish laws, regarded *some* sicknesses and *all* death as *unclean*, and to be touched by someone with a certain illness, such as leprosy, or to touch a dead body, would render a person ceremonially and spiritually unclean and therefore unable to mix with others or attend public worship and prayer until you had been ritually purified. This designation made sickness and death an even greater problem for the Jews than just the physical aspect of them. Well, we may not be able to *physically* touch Jesus or be touched by him in this life, but we can *spiritually* reach out for him and be touched by him in a way that can change our life for ever. So, let's see what we can learn from the example of this diseased woman and this deceased girl.

Observation:

1. Who welcomed Jesus and why in v 40?
2. Who came to Jesus in v 41? What did he do and why in v 41b-42a?
3. What did Jesus do in response and what did the crowds do (v 42b)?
4. Who does Luke specifically mention was in the crowd in v 43 and what was her condition?
5. What did she do in v 44 and what was the effect?
6. What question does Jesus ask in v 45a and what reply does he receive in v 45b?
7. How did Jesus know someone had *intentionally* touched him (v 46)?
8. What did the woman then do and how did Jesus respond to her (v 47-48)?
9. Who then came to Jesus and what did they say (v 49)?
10. What was Jesus' reply in v 50?
11. Who did Jesus allow to go with him into the house (v 51)?
12. What did Jesus tell the mourners in v 52 and what was their reaction in v 53?
13. What did Jesus do in v 54 and what was the result in v 55a?
14. What two things did Jesus tell the parents to do in v 55b-56 and what was their reaction?

Meaning:

1. How do you think Jairus would have been feeling and what would he have been thinking as he came to Jesus in v 41-42? Have you ever felt like that? What do you think had given Jairus the faith to believe that Jesus could save his dying daughter?
2. It is very likely that the woman hiding in the crowd was suffering from a chronic gynaecological condition. Jewish law would have designated her as unclean (Leviticus 15 v 19-23). Bearing this in mind and taking account of the fact that she had been in this condition for 12 years (for as long as Jairus' daughter had been alive!), and, according to Mark's Gospel account, had spent all her money on doctors without any improvement, what impact do you think this had on her daily life and how might she have been feeling as she hid in the crowd that day? Why do you think she didn't seem concerned that by touching Jesus she would have made him unclean?
3. Jesus would have worn a prayer shawl, a talith, which had a tassel or tzitzit on each corner. The corners of a prayer shawl were also known as 'wings'. In the last book of the Old Testament Malachi prophesies in 4 v 2 about the future coming of the promised Messiah with these words: 'the Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in His wings.' In light of this information, what do you think was the significance of the woman's actions and the outcome in v 44? What do you think the woman's words and actions indicate about her understanding of Jesus' identity?
4. Jesus was clearly being touched by lots of people (see v 42b and 45b). So, what was different about the *woman's* touch and what might we learn from her example?
5. Why do you think Jesus insisted on publicly identifying the woman? What do you think she expected Jesus to do or say (v47a)?
6. Bearing in mind the cultural and religious rules that applied to the woman's condition, what do Jesus' words and actions towards her tell us about Him?
7. How do you think Jairus would have been feeling towards Jesus when he sent the message in v 49 and what might he have thought to Jesus' response in v 50?
8. Why do you think Jesus restricted who he took with him into the house in v 51?
9. What would you have been thinking if you were one of the mourners in v 52?
10. Read Numbers 19 v 11-15. Jesus could have raised the dead girl with a word of command (as he did with Lazarus). So, why would Jesus' actions in v 54 have been so controversial and, as with the touch from the bleeding woman, what does this teach us about the nature and character of Jesus?
11. Why do you think Jesus commanded the parents to keep quiet about what had happened (v 56)?

Application:

1. What kinds of people are regarded as 'unclean' in our world today? How does Jesus feel about them and how should we feel about them?
2. Do you ever feel unworthy to come to Jesus and ask for his help, like the woman did? What do you learn from this passage to help you overcome such feelings?

3. What can we learn from the woman's actions about the way we approach Jesus when we are in need?
4. Jesus called the woman out of the crowd. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus doesn't want you to be anonymous to him?
5. Why do you think Jesus deliberately flouted the Law on uncleanness, both with the bleeding woman and the dead girl?
6. Why is it such good news that Jesus has power over sickness and death?
7. Both Jairus and the bleeding woman were in a state of desperation. How can desperation cause us to throw ourselves on God's mercy? Have you ever experienced this? What is the difference between *desperation* and *faith*?
8. In the Old Testament it was believed that *uncleanness* was contagious, so you had to keep yourself away from others, so they didn't catch it. In the New Testament, Jesus seems to operate on the opposite principle, that *cleanness* was contagious, that *his* cleanness could make *others* clean if he touched them or they touched him. How should this impact the way we live and serve God and others today?

Pray:

- Thank Jesus for his authority to heal and for his deep compassion for the suffering.
- Pray that God would give you the grace to serve others as Jesus did.
- Pray for anyone known to you who feels unclean or unworthy.
- Pray for faith to 'reach out and touch Jesus' in our need.
- Thank God that He has power over sickness and death.

