

St Columba
13th Ordinary Sunday: 28th June

Susan Adams

Mark 5:21-43

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Faith and Fear: Healing touch

Last week there were a number instances that have stayed in my mind. In one, a man stood before a crowd wanting to tell them of his grief; he was choked with tears and could not speak. I felt compelled to stand beside him and put my hand on his back.

In another, there was a very boisterous young man beside me excitedly talking and bobbing around in a way that was disruptive to the rest of the group that we were part of. I put my hand on his shoulder.

In yet another I was walking home after lunch with my sister. We had been sharing family concerns and a work related project that was causing her some anxiety. She took my arm and pulled me close as we walked.

In each instance, and there were others as I reflected over my week, the hand of another was a steadying touch and brought comfort.

Touch is something we are cautious about today. And rightly so; there has been so much unwelcome and unhealthy touch over the years.

Unwelcome touch is usually carried out by adults onto children, males onto females, or by someone with more power and authority onto someone with less.

There are many reasons why 'uninvited' touch is not appropriate – contagious virus and disease included. We do well to be cautious about who we touch and who touches us.

But that said, there are times when reaching out with a gentle touch can be experienced both as comfort and a steadying support. It is pity that we seem to have lost the art of reading the nuances of body language to know when a hug, or a hand on the back or the clasp of an arm would be welcome and appropriate. Touch, when welcome and appropriate can be very healing: my hand enabled the grieving man to steady himself and speak and the bouncing boy to slow down and become aware of the group. My sister's hand brought comfort to us both.

A woman dares to touch the clothing of an unrelated man and Jesus to touch the 'dead' daughter of a leader of the synagogue. Both these instances were unusual, improper we might even say. So why are we being asked to reflect on them? What was in the mind of Mark when they were selected for the written record?

Contemporary theologians invite us to read the healing stories of Mark with the health and wellbeing of community in mind rather than as miracle stories extolling Jesus' ability to bend the forces of nature for individual benefit. They suggest to us that these stories arise out of a community situation and point toward the changes needed for the communities to be restored to health.

The woman, suffering for 12 years with haemorrhages, stops bleeding and is consequently restored to her place in the community. She is no

longer 'unclean', marginal and therefore excluded from community activities. Once more she can take her place and take up her roles and tasks as required by family and community. She need no longer be shunned and avoided. The community is healed of that fracture when she who was pushed to the margins, representative of all who we marginalise, is restored.

And the daughter of Jairus? Jairus was one of the leaders of the synagogue and his daughter is at death's door at the start of our reading. Even those who are in high places are vulnerable! Jesus does not hurry or panic when Jairus calls on him, but makes his way steadily to Jairus' house. There he takes the hand of the child and she is restored to health. This young person, the hope and future for Jairus and his wife, points us symbolically toward the hope we all have in the next generation young people for our own wellbeing. Without children women and men in the first century were without support and care in their old age – they were very vulnerable; they were at the mercy of extended family to care for them.

The community is well and healthy when all its people can take their place and none are excluded from participation and none are vulnerable and in need.

What about our community, our city? Will the Super City enable us to heal ourselves and restore those we have marginalised to their rightful places, will we be able to provide all our citizens with what is necessary for their health and wellbeing?

If we pause briefly with Paul's letter to the young church at Corinth, we can see that he is urging people to share with one another according to

their ability: the abundance of one to meet the need of another. He says to his readers, desiring to do something is good but you must actually do something. Desiring to do something is not enough though it is a good start and indicates an awareness that something needs to be done – finish doing what you desire. Paul was putting one part of the emerging Christian community in touch with another. He was suggesting that the abundance of one part be used to meet the need of another part.

It is great that at this time of change in our city we, as citizens and people of faith, can challenge those who are planning the structures of the 'super city' and determining the roles of the local boards, to ensure that no one is marginalised by structures that silence. It's exciting that we can follow through our desire and our commitment to ensure the resources available to us collectively, are shared equitably in this diverse city, so all have access to those things that lead to living healthy lives. We need to ensure that resources are not gathered up by some in the decisions that are made, to the detriment of others, and not either squandered or hoarded.

Keeping in touch with one another is the basic to ways of doing this. Keeping in touch with what is going on, keeping informed, means we can take action as required. Votes, voices, letters and meetings are all ways we can make ourselves heard and keep in touch. Sometimes we will need the steadying hand to keep us focussed, and sometimes the hand of encouragement or comfort.

Whatever it is we are in need of, from amongst the community we have the means to strengthen, steady and heal ourselves if we keep in touch. In that we can experience the healing touch of God.