In the crowd, there is a woman who has been sick for 12 years. Twelve years; the age of Jairus’ daughter. The woman’s medical disorder has implications for how other people treated her. Mark tells us the woman suffered from “hemorrhages”, or what some other translations call “a flow of blood.” In the culture of Jesus’ day, women lived in semi-seclusion when they bled because the law of Moses declared them ritually unclean. Once the bleeding stopped, a woman would go to the *mikveh*, a ritual bath, to cleanse herself before being allowed to return to everyday life. This woman, because of her unusual medical condition, lived in an “unclean” state for a dozen years. She was an outcast from the community. Had she ever been married, the marriage ended long ago. If she is lucky, her family sends her a little food from time to time; if she has no family, she begs on the streets.

According to sociologist and biblical scholar Bruce Malina, the fact that she has spent a great deal of money on doctors indicates that she is (or once was) a woman of high social standing, since only the elite could afford to pay for physicians. But illness knows no social rank. The woman with the hemorrhage is the very picture of alienation and loneliness. She seeks healing for her medical condition; but even more than that, she seeks to be reconciled with her community, to no longer be an object of shame and pity.

That morning, she covers her head so no one will recognize her as she slips through the crowd. Jesus’ disciples, in Secret Service mode, block her way. She falls to the ground as they pass by, reaches out, and touches the hem of Jesus’ robe. A powerful feeling sweeps over her, and she knows in that instant she is healed. But then something unexpected happens. Jesus stops in his tracks. He looks around. “Who touched my clothes?” he asks. The disciples have no answer. Despite their best efforts to keep the crowd at bay, lots of people reached through the security cordon and touched him. But at that moment, Jesus is not interested in lots of people. He is concerned only for the one who touched him and was healed.

Imagine Jairus’ impatience as this woman stops Jesus in his tracks, just a few blocks from Jairus’ dying daughter. Then Jairus’ worst fears are realized when people come and announce that his daughter has died. The healing of the hemorrhaging woman has cost him his daughter’s life. Fearfully, the woman steps forward and identifies herself, but far from scolding her, Jesus blesses her: “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.” *Daughter*, he calls her (an intimate form of address) because Jesus is not only healing her body, he is also healing her broken relationships. He is welcoming her back into the community and into his own spiritual family. *Go in peace!* What blessed words for a woman who has known so little peace for such a long time!

Here is where I find it useful to contrast Jairus and the woman. Jairus has a name and an influential role in the community. He is no doubt a person of financial means. The woman is never given a name and she has spent all her money on medical treatments that did no good. Jairus approaches Jesus from the front, confident in his power and privilege. The woman approaches Jesus from behind, trying to avoid being seen. And yet, Jesus holds up the woman as the model of faith that Jairus must emulate. Jairus believes that Jesus can heal his daughter’s illness, but can Jairus now extend his belief to include Jesus’ power over death?

It also strikes me that while the woman prefers to remain hidden, her miracle is very public; but Jairus, a public figure, experiences a private miracle. Only Peter, James and John and the girl’s parents are allowed in the room when Jesus raises her from the dead. Jairus’ importance in the community does not mean much as he stands in the room, helpless, hoping that Jesus is right and all that is necessary is for him to believe.

But maybe Jairus and the woman are not so different after all. Their situations are desperate, they expend all other resources for healing, and Jesus defies their expectations by doing that for which they hoped. Commentator Allen Verhey notes that both Jairus and the unnamed woman exhibit “audacious hope.” This is not reasonable hope or hope that rests on a pretty good chance that it will be fulfilled. Audacious hope is hope that has exhausted all other options. Audacious hope is hope when there is no good reason left to hope.

Verhey is quick to point out that the kind of audacious hope expressed by Jairus and the unnamed woman is centered on the promises of God. From the beginning, God promised to restore creation. Jesus declared this promise as he announced the inbreaking of God’s Kingdom and demonstrated it in his death and resurrection. The confidence of Jairus and the woman in Jesus’ power to heal is centered in God’s promise in Lamentations 3:31-33: “For the Lord will not reject forever. Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.”

This is a story about touch and what a powerful force for good it can be in our lives. It was common in pre-pandemic worship services for people to share greetings with one another, to “pass the peace” with a handshake, a hug, or a pat on the shoulder. Such caring touch was a symbol of welcome, of community in Christ. A simple act, but a powerful, non-verbal message. The woman who touched Jesus’ robe was starved of human touch because of her unclean state and the resulting isolation. She somehow knew that if she squeezed through that crowd and touched Jesus, she would be blessed. And she was, in a beautiful and life-changing way.

So, too, was Jairus’ daughter. When Jesus touched her, she returned to life. He is the Son of God, after all, and God’s love is without limits. Not even death is greater than God’s love. Her resurrection is symbolic of the new and eternal life we all have in Jesus. God’s love for God’s creation is strong. In Jesus, we have the audacious hope that one day all will be well, as God restores creation to a place of justice and peace. This hope keeps us working for that new creation, based on God’s promised future in Jesus Christ. May we have the audacious hope that keeps us fighting for what is right and good in our society and our lives.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for the gift of today. Refresh me. Invite me to discover your presence in each person that I meet and every event that I encounter. Teach me when to speak and when to listen. When to ponder and when to share. In moments of challenge and decision attune my heart to the whisperings of your Wisdom. As I undertake ordinary and unnoticed tasks, gift me with simple joy. When my day goes well, may I rejoice. When it grows difficult, surprise me with new possibilities. When life is overwhelming, call me to Sabbath moments to restore your Peace and Harmony. May my living today reveal your Goodness. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen. (Pat Bergen, C.S.J.)

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**A Touching Tale**

Sunday, June 27, 2021 Mark 5:21-43

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

I suspect many of us have fantasized about what it would be like to live in the White House, either as president or as a member of the president’s family. There are some attractive perks for anyone who lives at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, but there is also a downside: from the very first day, you enter a security bubble which never goes away for the rest of your life.

Michelle Obama spoke of this in an interview with *People* magazine, more than a year after her husband left office. She said: “We don’t have the anonymity that allows you to be in the world with normalcy. I go to restaurants, I still work out and travel, but I can’t sit at a sidewalk cafe and just watch other people without it becoming a scene.” Asked what one thing she missed most about her pre-presidential life, the former First Lady said it was driving. She no longer has the freedom to get behind the wheel and drive herself wherever she feels like going. Her Secret Service protectors have veto power over such dreams.

In our reading today, Jesus hasasecurity bubble around him. When he steps out of his boat on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and begins walking through the crowd, the disciples form a moving wedge ahead of their Master, opening a space for him to walk. Their method is a good deal less sophisticated than Secret Service agents behind mirrored sunglasses and talking into their sleeves, but they get the job done, first-century style.

On that day, Jesus needed someone to run interference for him; he is a man with a mission. Jairus, an important synagogue official, has a 12-year-old daughter who is sick to the point of death. Jairus asks Jesus to come and heal her; he is confident that Jesus can do this, but there is no time to lose. We can picture him striding purposefully down the street, his disciples calling out, “Make way, make way for Jesus!” Around that group of disciples is the surging crowd: voices calling out, hands reaching out to touch Jesus. It is holy bedlam.