

Trinity XXIV Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

Bishop of Saskatchewan

Every year about this time, we get hit with panic about the flu. More and more experts, or at least the ones that like to get on the news, warn of the next deadly flu epidemic. One of the sad parts of all this, is that we start to look at each other as possible carriers or transmitters of disease. I know a little about this, because I go through about two containers of hand sanitizer and disinfectant soap, trying to avoid both kinds of flu, at work and at home. We worry about catching and giving, though honestly more about catching than giving, a contagious disease. Well, I think we can conclude today, that, whatever Jesus's got, it's contagious!

It is a Ruler who comes and kneels before Jesus in our Gospel, a ruler who recognizes someone higher than himself, a higher power. He believes that Jesus can save from death. Jesus is recognized in this amazing good news as someone who is stronger, a power higher

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than sickness and loneliness and rejection and death. And this is the Good News for you and me today.

We have two women before us in our Gospel, two women in hopeless circumstances. One has been hemorrhaging for years. Luke tells us that she has been sick for twelve years and has spent all her money and all her hope, on cures that never worked. This woman was not only sick but because of this bleeding, she would have been deemed ritually unclean. So first, we have a woman who has been suffering for twelve years with her affliction, an affliction that would make her unclean, and an outcast for twelve years. She suffered alone and hopeless for all this time. The religious and holy people would avoid contact with her at all costs. So she must try to steal a touch at Jesus' garment, by sneaking up behind him. And he assures her, "Take heart," that he is not offended by this contact. Instead of his being defiled by contact with her, she is healed by contact with him.

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We need to note how often this reversal of the order of contagion occurs in Jesus' healing miracles. We assume and it is our common experience, that when a well person comes into contact with a sick person, the contagious disease passes from the sick to the well. But here the opposite occurs. His wellness, his health and life and wholeness, is passed to the sick woman. The same occurs in the second story, for it is his life which is contagious. The abundance of life, that divine life in him, is contagious, and when he takes the girl by the hand, she rises, and she is alive.

So you can catch eternal life from Jesus Christ. But how? By his touch, but also, as our Lord explains to the older woman, by faith in him. He tells her, "Your faith has made you well." It is this contact with Jesus in faith, which is the means by which this transfer, this exchange, occurs.

Now, the younger woman was also in a hopeless circumstance. It is hard to tell when exactly she died, but by the time Jesus arrives

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at the house, they had begun the wake. So they tell him that she's gone and there is no chance of saving her now. Her case is hopeless, it's over. There is nothing left but to mourn and weep and howl. But despite these desperate circumstances, the father will not give up. Listen to how he speaks to Jesus. He admits she is as good as dead, but still he clings stubbornly to hope that Jesus can save her - even from death.

There is in both of these figures and cases what I would call "great expectations." "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." "If I only touch his garment, I shall be made well." Do you see here a faith in Jesus Christ, which on that basis has great hopes, great expectations?

Now Jesus says, "The girl is not dead but sleeping." For the Christian, death is not the end anymore. No, it is but a sleep, from which we shall arise when Christ calls, who can and does raise the dead. If any of you have buried a daughter, or a son, hear today

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Jesus' sweet and comforting promise: "The girl is not dead but sleeping." May we know it, believe it and hope it, with confidence and joy.

These two women and their stories are so beautifully connected and interwoven, that I cannot help but be moved whenever I hear them. And let us note, that we have here a young girl at the outset of her womanhood, and another in the twilight of her womanhood. These two represent all women, and all of us, both women and men. And they represent the ways in which we are sick and dead, lifeless and unclean, bleeding and finished. Is that you or a part of your life?

Now, there is more in this wondrous good news, for both of these are healed by contact with Jesus. And as we said, it is not by their curse being given to him, but by his blessing being shared with them. In one story, the younger woman is healed by Jesus' touch, and in the other, the woman is healed by touching Jesus. The perfect

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balance of these two holds to the end. Both agree in suggesting this idea of contact with Jesus, as the means of healing and life, and also both agree in pointing us to the real contact we make with Jesus, which is by faith.

Now our Lord does in the end, in his passion and death, take on the afflictions of these women, of all women and men. For he shall bleed for the hemorrhaging woman, and he shall die for the twelve-year-old girl, for them and for all of humanity to save us, that we might be redeemed, that we might receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life through him. He will bleed and he will die, on the cross, to save us and them from the stain and death of sin. He cleanses us from all sin, and he frees us from its grip and power. He makes the broken whole and he makes the dead alive, he who was broken and died for us all on the cross.

We have two miracles before us of cleansing and raising. And if these are to mean anything to us, if they are to be ours as well,

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then we need to recognize our own need for cleansing and raising.

We need to come to Jesus in faith and hope, and say, “Lord, there’s a part of me or all of me that is just dead, but come and lay your hand, reach out to me and give life.” And we need to say, “If I can just touch him, I know I will be made well.” We come seeking healing and life.

The Gospel is about the grace of God, Paul tells us in the Epistle reading. The gospel is about the grace of God which brings redemption to us in Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins. In us, this is a matter of faith, hope and love. For if we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we find a hope for ourselves, and we are filled with a love for all the saints, all God’s people. And we bear fruit and grow, by the influence of the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul says that this Christian life is one of growth and increase, and that is a word we need to hear. The Christian life means growing, the life worthy of him and pleasing to

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him means bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Getting closer, growing deeper.

Jesus is contagious, and you can catch the forgiveness of sins and eternal life from him. And that is the Good News. In him, we want to receive the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. Come to him, by faith, reach out to him in faith, receive him in faith, and find healing and life. Amen.