

Grabbing at Jesus

[This piece was inspired by Sunday's gospel lesson, Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26, and the sermon I heard on it by the Rev. Dr. Tom Schoenherr.]

Every time I take another big step in my life, part of me thinks that I should be able to handle things on my own now. It's not a part of me that gets to the surface of my mind very often, the surface where I'm aware of what I'm thinking. It's certainly not the part of me that is in charge of my theological compass (Handling everything on your own? Go directly to the Small Catechism, do not pass Go, do not collect \$200). But it's the part that says, "You know, you're old enough, educated enough and experienced enough to get on with your life without having to go to Jesus with every little thing. He's busy running the universe, the least you can do, considering all He's done for you, is to get up and get on with it without bugging Him all the time."

So I go about my business for days, weeks, months (?), reading my devotions, doing my ministry, being with my family, living my life without bothering Him about the details. Things usually go along fine for a while as I'm blissfully unaware of this decision I've made (again). I'm praying, I'm worshiping, I'm singing – what else could I possibly need?

But as time passes, I find myself fighting bitterness inside, straining to find the joy of the Lord in what I do and not succeeding. Why is my citizenship loyalty now based on my willingness to consume, to buy and wear red, white and blue Capri pants this summer, carry a flag colored straw purse? Why do the levels of the institutional church above me do nothing but gate-keep? Why can't other people see life the way I do and help me or, at the least, get out of my way? My innards get tied

into tighter and tighter knots until I don't know which way to turn, even though I'm still functioning well on the outside.

Then along comes this woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years. She was desperate, she wanted to be healed and she grabbed at Jesus, grabbed what she needed to become whole. She and I were companions for a long time, but now that I'm old enough, educated enough and experienced enough, I don't need to grab at Him like that anymore. She was desperate, but I've moved beyond desperation.

"When He heard this, He said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means.'"

It usually takes me a while to learn what this means. It takes a while to be grabbed, once again, by the reality that even in the midst of my education and experience, even as I find myself in leadership positions, I'm still the same person I've always been. No amount of education or experience will bridge the gap between my Creator and me. The Judge still says, "It's not enough."

It takes a while to learn, again, that the old story in the sermon (Mary and Jane are talking about going to church. Jane says she doesn't go because there are so many hypocrites there and Mary says sadly, "Yes, there are." But then she brightens and says, "Of course there's always room for one more!") is for me. Jesus grabs me with His love as I grab the fringe of his cloak. He wants to hear about my hangnails and my hang-ups, he calls to me, watches over me, is waiting for me to grab at Him once again. He alone is the one who has the power in the fringe of his cloak to heal my bitterness, to soften my heart that has begun to harden in the face of the vagaries of the world and my own sinfulness.

Some of the time, all the education I've had the privilege of receiving stands like strong, silent pillars holding up a mighty edifice, yet obscuring the reason the building was built in the first place. A few verses in Hosea read by the morning's lector can send me off on a long internal jag about how or whether the pastor will use Hosea in the sermon and whether or not she/he will be able to weave the historical/critical realities into the preached word. And I end up missing the psalm altogether as I ruminate.

Most of the time, my experience tells me that sometimes things work out the way I think they ought to and sometimes they don't. Sometimes great ministry gets done and sometimes we totally bomb. I'm too old to keep waiting for that perfect place, perfect moment or perfect circumstance when everything will work out just as we'd planned. My energy begins to wane as I wonder if it's worth doing at all.

All of the time, it is only when I bend down like the hemorrhaging woman and touch the fringe of His cloak, saying to myself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well," do I receive the hope that gives me the joy and the strength to go on.

We don't like to talk about this aspect of our relationship with our Lord. It's too sentimental, too emotional and yet it is in such unguarded moments that we tap into the beauty and the energy that give us what we need to function from day to day. And the reality is that when we have the courage to speak openly about what Jesus means for us in the desperate moments of our lives, we offer each other a great gift. We give to each other the gift of knowing that we are not alone in our desperate longings and we point to the One, the only One, who can fill that empty space inside with what our Creator always intended to fill us...God's self.

Grabbing at Jesus. It may not be sophisticated, but He offers us wholeness such that we can never find on our own. Go ahead and grab Him. He's more than enough.