

LOVE'S LIFE-CHANGING POWER – Mark 5:21-43

Practicing the Presence of God #3a

John Ortberg tells a true story of how a teacher's love changed the life of a young girl in his book entitled *Love Beyond Reason*. An elementary girl had the physical handicap of a cleft palate. She knew that she was different from the other children but didn't want to admit the reason to them because she longed for acceptance. When schoolmates would ask what had happened to her, she would just tell them that she had fallen with a glass in her hand and a piece of the broken glass had cut her above her lip. Somehow she reasoned that it would be more acceptable to them to think that she had suffered in an accident than to know that she had been born different. But there was no doubt that the fact that she was the only one in class with an apparent handicap affected her life and relationships with others – that is until she was in the 2nd grade.

Mrs. Leonard was her 2nd grade teacher. Mrs. Leonard was a short, round, happy, sparkling woman. All of the students seemed to love Mrs. Leonard as their teacher. Every year, the school had an eye exam and a hearing test for each of the students to know whether there was a physical problem that would hinder their learning. For the hearing part of the test, the student would stand against the door and cover one ear. The teacher, sitting at her desk, would then whisper something to the student, and if the student could hear it, the student would repeat back what the teacher had whispered. Everyone else in the class was aware of the procedure and accepted it as the norm. To most of the students Mrs. Leonard whispered *the sky is blue or I like your shoes*. But when

it came the turn of the little girl with the cleft palate, Mrs. Leonard whispered 7 words that would change her whole outlook on life. The teacher whispered, *I wish you were my little girl.* From that day on this 2nd grader had a different outlook on school and life. Even as an adult, she looked back on this experience as having the greatest impact on her life.

There is a power found in the expression of love that is just impossible to calculate. It is the power to change the whole course of a person's life. This is the kind of power that Jesus Christ illustrated on a regular basis, and it is the kind of power that He desires for us both to experience and to wield as we practice the presence of God in our lives and become channels of God's love flowing through us.

There are so many times in Christ's ministry where the power of His life-changing love could be illustrated that it is difficult to pick just one. But since we can't look at his entire 3 year ministry in just one message, we are forced to choose. I have chosen a scene from Mark 5 when Jesus dispensed His love to 2 people who couldn't have been more opposite. But in each case, Christ's love changed the entire direction of their lives.

The 2 people that Jesus met on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee had different degrees of faith. Dwight L. Moody once said there are 3 kinds of faith, the struggling faith of a person treading in deep water just to stay afloat, the clinging faith of a person hanging onto a piece of wood to stay afloat, and the resting faith of a person sitting confidently in a boat. The 1st person that came up to Jesus was a man of clinging faith. His name was Jairus – he was a leader in the local synagogue. His daughter was very ill, nearing death. Jairus

didn't have the faith of the centurion desiring for Jesus to only say the word for his daughter to be healed. No, he rather had clinging faith needing Jesus to come back to his home with him and lay hands on her. As Jesus and Jairus were going to the sick young girl, Jesus would meet another person – a woman who had struggling faith. She was so timid and ashamed that she tried her best to avoid meeting Jesus altogether. But both of these individuals would have their lives changed as they experienced the presence of Christ and received the love that he offered to them. Notice their stories with me in Mark 5:21-43:

MK 5:21 When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. ²² Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet ²³ and pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." ²⁴ So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. ²⁵ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶ She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. ²⁷ When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." ²⁹ Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

MK 5:30 At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

MK 5:31 "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' "

MK 5:32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³ Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and,

trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

MK 5:35 While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher any more?"

MK 5:36 Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

MK 5:37 He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." ⁴⁰ But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, "*Talitha koum!*" (which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). ⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. ⁴³ He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

This passage is a fascinating one because here we have a story within a story... or two healing stories rolled into one... and the people involved could not be more different. On the one hand the family of Jairus represented the “upper crust” of society. Jairus was ruler of the local synagogue. He was a man of substance...rich and powerful and religiously prominent. In the synagogue, he “called the shots.” He decided who would preach, what scripture would be read and what hymns would be sung. He represented the elite of society, especially the religious world, but this day Jairus was troubled. His 12-year-old

daughter was dying. On the other hand, the hemorrhaging woman in the crowd was a social outcast. She was considered “unclean”... as one who was under the judgment of God and therefore not allowed to set foot in the synagogue. In this magnificent passage, these two vastly different people... the down and out hemorrhaging woman and the upper crust daughter of Jairus are loved into life by our Lord.

Jesus and His disciples had been going from town to town. He has been preaching the gospel and healing people. Large crowds are coming out. They are clamoring to see Jesus and hear Him. And it might be interesting for us to note that archaeological finds have confirmed that there were natural sulphur springs on the western shores of the Sea of Galilee making this area almost like a health resort for those who were suffering from different ailments. In fact, Tiberius even today has natural sulphur hot springs. Sandy and I have soaked in one of them. So this area was known for many who were sick and deformed – a perfect place for Jesus to hold his healing ministries authenticating His claim to be the Messiah.

One day this man called Jairus came looking for Jesus. Jairus was the ruler of the synagogue. He falls down at the feet of Jesus and pleads with the Master to come to his house because his only daughter (who is about 12 years of age) is gravely ill and dying. Jesus agreed to go with him, and as they went, people began to press in around Jesus. The New English Bible puts it dramatically... “he could hardly breathe for the crowds.” The people were so excited to be near the Master that they were pushing and shoving and crowding in close to Him.

In the crowd that day was a woman who had been hemorrhaging blood for 12 years. She had tried everything she knew to try, but no luck! No relief, no help for her problem. No one had been able to cure her. She slipped up behind Jesus, working her way through the crowd... and when no one seemed to be looking she reached out tentatively, fearfully, and touched the hem of His robe... At once, the hemorrhaging stopped. For the first time in 12 years, the flow of blood stopped. Jesus simultaneously felt or sensed that something special had happened... it was a unique touch... and He felt strength go out of Him. Immediately, Jesus stopped. He turned around and asked, “Who touched me?” The disciples were astonished by the question in the midst of all the pushing and shoving and jostling. “What do you mean, ‘who touched you? Everybody’s touching you.’” But you see, they couldn’t tell a push from a touch. Jesus could! He knew the difference... and He knew that it was a tender touch that had drawn strength out of him. The woman had not expected to be detected, but when Jesus turned and asked that question, she knew that He knew... and she came forward trembling and she fell at his feet and confessed that she was the one who had touched the hem of his garment. She explained in a rush of words why she had touched Him and how she had been instantly cured. Graciously, Jesus lifted her up and said to her, “My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go now in peace.” Notice how gentle and loving Jesus was with her. As He gives her a new lease on life... He doesn’t chastise her for interrupting him. He doesn’t critique her theology... or her superstitious expectations. He doesn’t rebuke her for seeing Him as a “sort of last resort.” Rather, He gives her act

the most gracious possible reception. And although we know the healing came from Him, He gives her the credit...“Your faith has made you well,” He says to her.

Now, the rest of the story is even more remarkable. They tell Jesus that Jairus’ daughter is gone. It’s too late. She has already died! I’m sure at that moment Jairus (as any father would be) was devastated. His only daughter snatched away. But again, Jesus is gracious and generous and loving. I can just imagine Him touching Jairus’ shoulder and saying, “Don’t be afraid now; only believe, and she will be made well.” They go on to the house. The people are weeping and mourning. They scoff at Him for thinking He can do anything about this. But Jesus goes in to that little girl... and He resurrects her. He loves her into life... and then (I love this) He tells them to give her something to eat.

Now, of course, there are many beautiful lessons here in Mark 5 in these two dramatic stories of healing... and we could go off now in any number of directions. But for the moment, let’s look closely together at the power of experiencing Christ’s love... and the amazing, incredible things that His love can accomplish when it is given and when it is received.

FIRST OF ALL, CHRIST’S LOVE HAS THE POWER TO HEAL.

Scientific research is now confirming what many of us have suspected all along – that love plays a big part in the healing of a hurting body. Love has the power to heal not only physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well.

We have already seen this anonymous woman to be a timid, shy person who would do anything to avoid being in the spotlight. But there is a very interesting account in the writings of Eusebius that reveals a dramatic change in

her life. Eusebius was the pastor of the church at Caesarea in the 4th century. He is recognized as the 2nd great church historian, second to Dr. Luke who wrote a gospel and the book of Acts. I would like to read a paragraph from Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History of the Christian Church (chapter 18 – pp. 288,289):

“But as we have mentioned this city (Caesarea Philippi), I do not think it right to pass by a narrative that also deserves to be recorded for posterity. The woman who had an issue of blood, mentioned by the evangelists, and who obtained deliverance from her affliction by our Savior, was a native of this place, and her house is shown in the city, and the wonderful monuments of our Savior's benefit to her are still remaining. At the gates of her house, on an elevated stone, stands a brazen image of a woman on her bended knee, with her hands stretched out before her like one entreating. Opposite to this there is another image of a man, standing straight, of the same materials, decently clad in a mantle and stretching out his hand to the woman. . . This statue is a statue of Jesus Christ, and it has remained even until our times; so that we ourselves saw it while tarrying in that city.”

According to the eye witness testimony of this pastor named Eusebius, this once poor, timid woman became so open in her testimony for the Lord that she had a monument built in front of her house that was still a testimony to her miracle over 300 years after Christ had gone back to heaven. To say that the love of Christ had healed and changed her, not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually, would certainly be an understatement, don't you think?

SECOND, LOVE HAS THE POWER TO RECONCILE.

This is one of the reasons why Jesus insisted that the one who had touched the hem of His garment come forward. This woman was considered ceremonially unclean... she was not permitted to set foot in the synagogue. She was a social outcast. Isn't it interesting that this story brings together this woman who would have been excluded from the synagogue because of her unclean condition together with the one who was in charge of the synagogue. Jesus wanted to make it clear to everyone that she was well. He not only healed her, He restored her to an active place in normal society. He reconciled her with her community.

In his book, "The Preaching Event", John Claypool tells a story about identical twin brothers who never married because they enjoyed each other's company so much. When their father died, they took over his store and ran it together in a joyful collaboration. But one day a man came in to make a small purchase and paid for it with a dollar. The brother who made the sale placed the dollar on top of the cash register... and walked the customer to the door to say goodbye. When he returned, the dollar bill was gone. He said to his twin brother, "Did you take the dollar bill I left here?" "No, I didn't," answered the brother. "Surely, you took it," he said, "There was nobody else in the store." The brother became angry: "I'm telling you, I did not take the dollar bill."

From that point, mistrust and suspicion began to grow until finally the two brothers could not work together any longer. They put a partition right down the middle of the building and made it into two stores. In anger, they refused to

speak for the next 20 years. One day a stranger pulled up in a car and entered one of the two stores. “Have you been in business very long here?” the stranger asked. “Yes, 30 or 40 years,” was the answer. “Good,” continued the stranger, “I very much need to tell you something... Some 20 years ago, I passed through this town. I was out of work and homeless. I jumped off a boxcar. I had no money and I had not eaten for days. I came down that alley outside and when I looked into your store window, I saw a dollar bill on the cash register. I slipped in and took it. Recently I became a Christian. I was converted and accepted Christ as my personal Savior. I know now it was wrong of me to steal that dollar bill... and I have come to pay you back with interest and to beg your forgiveness.”

When the stranger finished his confession, the old storekeeper began to weep as he said, “Would you do me a favor? Would you please come next door and tell that story to my brother?” Of course, with the second telling, the two brothers were reconciled with many hugs and apologies and tears. Twenty years of hurt and broken relationship based not on fact, but on mistrust and misunderstanding. But then healing came; reconciliation came, because of that stranger’s love for Christ. The point is clear: Christ is the reconciler, but as the Apostle Paul put it, we can be “agents of reconciliation” when we experience the presence of God in our lives and live in the spirit of love. Love has the power to heal. Love has the power to reconcile.

THIRD AND FINALLY, LOVE HAS THE POWER TO REDEEM.

There is a legend about Zacchaeus, the tax collector. You remember the story of Zacchaeus from childhood songs, don’t you? Zacchaeus was a short man

who wanted to see Jesus so he climbed up in a sycamore fig tree so that he might see Jesus passing by. Jesus stopped at the foot of his tree and told him to come down, that He wanted to dine at his house that evening. Jesus received great criticism for this move, asking to dine at a sinful tax collector's house, but as a result of Christ's love, Zacchaeus was saved and completely changed his ways, giving back money that he had swindled and giving other money to the poor. Well, a Jewish legend tells how in later years, Zachaeus would rise early every morning and leave his house. His wife, curious, followed him one morning. At the town well her husband filled a bucket... and he walked until he came to a sycamore tree. There, setting down the bucket, he began to clean away the stones, the branches, and the rubbish from around the base of the tree. Having done that, he poured water on the roots and stood there in silence, gently caressing the trunk with both of his hands. When his amazed wife came out of hiding and asked what he was doing, Zacchaeus replied simply, "This is where I found Christ."

I can just imagine that for the rest of their lives, that woman who touched the hem of Jesus' robe that day on the street... and the daughter of Jairus who was raised up in that room in her home, continually brought people back to those sacred spots and said, "This is where I found Christ! This is where Christ loved me into life!"

Do you have a sacred spot like that? This is the Good News of our Christian faith, isn't it? Love has the power to heal, to reconcile, and to redeem. And the beautiful ministry that God has given to each one of us as His ambassadors is the privilege of being dispensers of His love to others so that we might bring

healing, reconciliation and redemption into their lives as well.

Have you experienced the healing, reconciling, redeeming love of Jesus Christ in your life? Are you experiencing the healing, reconciling, redeeming love of Jesus Christ every day in your life? Are you sharing the healing, reconciling, redeeming love of Jesus Christ with others around you?

There is no greater power on this earth than experiencing the love of God everyday in our lives.