

“Touch of Christ”
A Sermon by Max Lucado
Preached by Frank Mansell III
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Mark 1: 40-45

For five years no one touched me – not my wife, not my child, not my friends. They saw me. They spoke to me. I sensed love in their voices. I saw concern in their eyes, but I didn’t feel their touch. There was no touch, not once. What is common to you, I coveted – handshakes, warm embraces, a tap on the shoulder to get my attention, a kiss on the lips. Such moments were taken from my world. No one touched me. No one even bumped into me. Oh, what I would have given to be bumped into, to be caught in a crowd where my shoulder could brush against another’s. But for five years it has not happened. How could it have? I was not allowed on the street. Even the rabbis kept their distance from me. I was not permitted in my synagogue, not welcome in my own house. I was untouchable. I was a leper, and no one had touched me until today.

One year during harvest my grip on the scythe seemed to weaken. The tips of my fingers numbed, first one finger, then the other. Within a short time I could grip the tool but scarcely feel it. By the end of the season I felt nothing at all. The hand grasping the handle might as well have belonged to someone else. The feeling was gone. I said nothing to my wife, but I know she suspected something. How could she not? I carried my hand against my body like a wounded bird.

One afternoon I plunged my hands into a basin of water intending to wash my face, and the water reddened. My finger was bleeding, bleeding freely. I didn’t even know I was wounded. How did I cut myself? On a knife? Had I slid my hand across a sharp edge of metal? I must have, but I hadn’t felt anything.

“It’s on your clothes, too,” my wife said softly. She was behind me. Before looking at her I looked down at the crimson spots on my robe. For the longest time I stood over the basin staring at my hand, and somehow I knew that my life was to be forever altered.

“Shall I go with you to tell the priest?” she asks. “No,” I sighed. “I’ll go alone.” I turned and looked into her moist eyes. Standing next to her was my three-year-old daughter. Squatting, I gazed into her face and stroked her cheek with my good hand. What could I say? I stood and looked again at my wife. She touched my shoulder, and I touched hers. It would be our final touch.

Five years have passed and no one has touched me since, until today. The priest didn’t touch me. He looked at my hand, now wrapped in a rag. He looked at my face, now sadder than sorrow. I’ve never faulted him for what

he said. He was only doing as he had been instructed. He covered his mouth and extended his hand palm forward. "You are unclean," he told me. With that one pronouncement I lost my family, my farm, my future, and my friends.

My wife met me at the city gates with a sack of clothing, bread and some coins. She didn't speak. By now friends had gathered. What I saw in their eyes was a precursor to what I've seen in every eye since - fearful pity. As I stepped out, they stepped back. The horror they felt as a result of my disease overtook their concern for my heart.

Oh, how I repulsed those who saw me. Five years of leprosy left my hands gnarled. The tips of my fingers were missing, as were portions of an ear and my nose. At the sight of me fathers grabbed their children and mothers covered their eyes. Children pointed and stared. The rags on my body couldn't hide my sores nor could the wrap on my face hide the rage in my eyes. I didn't even try to hide it. How many nights had I shaken my crippled fists at the silent sky. "What did I do to deserve this?" But never a reply.

I grew so tired of it all, sleeping in the colony, smelling the stench, so tired of the damnable bell I was required to wear on my neck to warn people of my presence. As if I needed it! One glance and the announcements began. "Unclean! Unclean! Unclean!"

Several weeks ago I dared walk the road to my village. I had no intent of entering. Heaven knows. I only wanted to look upon my fields and gaze again upon my home and see perhaps the face of my wife. I did not see her, but I saw some children playing in the pasture. I hid behind the tree and watched them scamper away. Their faces were so joyful and their laughter so contagious that for a moment, for just a moment I was no longer a leper. I was a farmer. I was a father. I was a man. Infused with their happiness I stepped out from behind the tree and I straightened my back and I breathed deeply, and they saw me. Before I could retreat, they saw me. They screamed, and they scattered.

One lingered, though, behind the others. One paused and looked in my direction. I really can't say for sure, but I think she was my daughter. I don't know, but I think she was looking for her father.

That look is what made me take the step I took today. Of course it was reckless. Of course it was risky. But what did I have to lose? He calls himself God's son. Either he will hear my complaints and kill me, or accept my demands and heal me. Those were my thoughts. I came to him as a defiant man moved not by faith but by desperate anger. God had wrought this calamity on my body, and he would either fix it or end it.

But then I saw him. It was when I saw him that I was changed. You must remember, I'm a farmer, not a poet. So I cannot find the words to describe what I saw. All I can say is that the Judean mornings are sometimes so fresh and the sunrise so glorious that to look at them is to forget the heat from the day before and the hurt from times past. When I looked at his face I saw a Judean morning. Before he spoke, I knew he cared. Somehow I knew he hated this disease as much as . . . no, more than I did. My rage became trust,

and my anger became hope. From behind a rock I watched him descend a hill. Throngs of people followed him.

I waited until he was just paces from me, and I stepped out. “Master, Master.” He stopped and looked in my direction, as did dozens of others. A flood of fear swept across the crowd. People’s arms flew in front of their faces. Children ducked behind their parents. “Unclean!” someone shouted. Again, I don’t blame them. I was a huddled mass of death. But I scarcely heard them. I scarcely saw them. I’d seen the panic a thousand times. His compassion, however, I had never seen before. Everyone stepped back except him. He stepped toward me . . . toward me! Five years ago my wife stepped toward me. She was the last to do so. Now he did. I did not move; I just spoke.

“Lord, you can heal me if you will.” Had he healed me with a word I would have been thrilled. Had he cured me with a prayer I would have rejoiced. But he wasn’t satisfied with speaking to me. He drew near me. He touched me. Five years ago my wife had touched me. No one has touched me since until today. “I will,” he said, so close that he had to whisper. “Be healed!”

Energy flooded my body like water through a furrowed field. In an instant, in a moment I felt warmth where there had been numbness. I felt strength where there had been atrophy. My back straightened and my head lifted. Where I had been eye level with his belt I now stood eye level with his smiling face. He cupped his hands on my cheeks and drew me so near I could feel the warmth of his breath and see the wetness in his eyes. He smiled. “Don’t tell anyone about this. Go and show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded for people who are made well.” Then I think he winked, and he said, “This will show people what I have done.”

So that is where I am going. I will show myself to my priest, and I will embrace him. I will show myself to my wife, and I will embrace her. I will pick up my daughter. She is older now, but I will pick her up and I will embrace her. I will never forget the one who dared to touch me.

He could have healed me with a word, but he wanted to do more than heal me. He wanted to honor me, to validate me, to christen me. Imagine that. Unworthy of the touch of man, yet worthy of the touch of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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