

¹A large crowd of his disciples ... and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon... had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, ¹⁹ and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

Have you ever noticed how important human touch can be? For example... When we meet someone for the first time, we grip each other's hand; it establishes a bond of introduction between us. Researchers tell us that premature babies do much better when they are held and touched. Elderly residents of Care centers hunger for the touch of a human hand. And while sometimes we want to be alone in our grief and heartache... let's face it, the reassurance of a hand on the shoulder, letting us know that someone is with us, is one of the greatest gestures we could experience at that moment.

It is no surprise, then, that the people in our section from the Bible tonight, were trying to touch Jesus. It wasn't enough for them to hear Jesus; they wanted to touch him. Here's why... as Luke explains, ***power was coming from him and healing them all.*** Sounds pretty cool! Imagine it: Just a touch and you'd feel the power and healing emanating from him and flowing into you.

I suppose that if you or I had been there, we would have wanted to touch Jesus, too. Then again, maybe this isn't the first time you've wanted to touch Jesus. Maybe you've longed to touch Jesus before. You know, kind of like the kid that tugs at a parent's hip, as if to say, "Hey Jesus, I'm right here." Or even, "Hey, Jesus, did you forget about me?"

But we weren't there that day in the Galileean sunshine. We are here on this dark December day, with the same needs as many of them had *that* day. Many of us are contending with sickness and disease - our own or, perhaps even harder, someone else's. Some of us are struggling with the isolation of loneliness or the depths of despair. Some of us find ourselves separated from those we love. Mourning those we've lost. Grieving, hurting, questioning, aching.

Yeah, you better believe it. We'd *love* for some ***power and healing*** in *our* lives, huh? We'd love to be able to reach out and touch Jesus... But

we can't. So what do we do? What's the alternative? *Muddle through somehow* as the old Christmas song says? Maybe go to church week after week and hope for the best? Maybe find some engaging activity to keep us physically going but emotionally distant from those we love? Or worse yet, give in to some earthly vice as a destructive crutch?

Thank God that the same Lord Jesus who reached out to touch the sick and the hurting that day so long ago, still reaches out to touch the likes of you and me. You see, time and space are no barrier to him. In his Word and through his sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, he breaks through the barricade of history to miraculously, beautifully, deeply touch you with his healing love. He places his mighty Word within earshot so that by the power of his Holy Spirit you may hear and believe. He puts his very body and blood, in the bread and the wine, right in your hands and mouth as a pledge and promise of sins forgiven and the sure hope of eternal life. He accomplishes his good purposes in spite of, and often times even through, our bad experiences. And whether we feel like admitting it or not, through it all, it is Jesus himself who acts to lift the burden of sin and guilt, heartache and grief... to exchange them for life and freedom and healing. For where there is the message of Jesus to found, there is to be found life and comfort and, yes, even joy.

And if that's not power and healing, nothing is. Because you see, we're no different from those who

gathered around Jesus that day so long ago. We come seeking healing, hope, and strength from the Lord Jesus. Worn from struggle and fear, battered by sin and sorrow, we come with empty hands to receive his good gifts... and Jesus does not disappoint: he makes good on his promises now and forever. The power we seek comes from him to heal us all in the touch of his Holy Word. For in our *dark streets shineth, the everlasting light. The hopes and fears of all [your] years, are met in [him] tonight.*²

Almighty and eternal God, as you sent your only Son that we might see with our eyes, hear with our ears, and touch with our hands the Word of Life, the eternal Christ, give us grace to receive in joyful faith the message of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

¹ Adapted from Harold Senkbeil's *Where in the World Is God*.

² *Christian Worship* #65 st.1, adapted.