"Walking with the Wounded"
+ 4 Pentecost Year B +
Lamentations 3:22-33; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43
July 2, 2006

Once upon a time, there were three little bunny rabbits, "Foot, Foot-Foot, and Foot-Foot-Foot." One day when they were outside playing, all of a sudden Foot grabbed his head and said, "I'm really sick. I think I'm gonna die."

So Foot-Foot and Foot-Foot-Foot ran to find their momma and tell her Foot was sick and thought he was going to die. And, as you might expect, momma rabbit sent Foot-Foot and Foot-Foot-Foot off to fetch the doctor, who sadly arrived too late and Foot indeed died.

It was a sad day in the bunny hutch. Foot-Foot and Foot-Foot-Foot just sat around and moped until finally their momma sent them out to play saying "Foot died. That's all there is to it."

So Foot-Foot and Foot-Foot-Foot did as they were told; they went out to play but all of a sudden Foot-Foot grabbed his head and screamed to Foot-Foot-Foot, "I'm sick just like Foot and I think I'm gonna die."

So Foot-Foot-Foot dashed back into the hutch and said, "Momma, come quick. Foot-Foot's sick just like Foot and he thinks he's going to die." At that, momma rabbit dashed for the door and again sent Foot-Foot-Foot off to fetch the doctor. But when he got there, the doctor was busy so he said, "I'll get there as
soon as I can."

"Well," said Foot-Foot-Foot, "you'd better be quicker than last time 'cuz we've already got one Foot in the grave."

You know we humans are an interesting species; sometimes we laugh at sickness and death, even tell silly jokes about it, but neither sickness nor death is a laughing matter. Maybe we have to laugh some of the time so we don't cry all of the time. I was thinking about that strange paradox all week, because, as you can see, the Gospel for this morning begins with sickness and death; places where none of us wants to go; but all of us have been and will be again. Scary places, sad places, whether it is we who are sick or dying, like that poor woman as she made a desperate grab for healing at Jesus' hem or, like Jairus, as we anxiously keep watch over loved ones, hoping and praying that our anxiety won't end up in grief, as his did.

The Gospel ends with a couple of miracles, but as much as we all prefer happy endings, this morning, I don't want to get there just yet, because, frankly, many of our illnesses and all of our dying do not end with an eleventh hour intervention. For us, sicknesses have to run their courses and dying, well, everybody has a date with death.

Miracle is such a loaded word in our society – the preachers on TV tell us to expect and even demand them and while it has generally been my nature to believe
and anticipate them in life I was rather astounded to find out the word miracle doesn’t appear in the Gospels. In the Gospels they are called “signs.” And while it may just seem like a point in semantics there really is a difference: a miracle exists for its own sake and on its own terms, but a "sign" is always pointing – pointing to something/someone greater than itself. so that when the Scriptures call these wondrous acts "signs," they are lighting up a billboard, pointing an arrow, shining a spotlight, not on the act, and not really on the people involved, but on the One who accomplishes, Who gives the miracle...er, sign.

But you can’t ignore the people or their situation – the situation that requires the “sign” – the person in need of a miracle: Jairus, he’s a desperate man with a dying daughter; we'll get to him in a minute; A woman on the way, shoved aside by a mob of spectators; more about her still to come; and the disciples, kind of clueless and more than a little annoyed by a detour on the way and Jesus, their teacher/savior/friend who came to earth and chose to spend His time with this motley crew, "Walking With the Wounded."

Do you think it was merely a coincidence that Jairus and this nameless woman were brought together with each other, as well as with Jesus? Or is that joining a part of the sign? At first look no two people could have had less in common than they.

Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, a man of influence and considerable clout;
a man for whom crowds parted and fell silent as he spoke; a wealthy man since "leaders" of the synagogue were chosen based on their ability to support, maintain and even pay for the synagogue and its upkeep. (Aren't you Church Council members glad the New Testament church changed that job description?) And, if you were in the crowds that day, you, too, would be impressed that Jesus so readily and promptly consented to come with him to his dying daughter's bedside.

But an odd thing happened on the way to Jairus'. A woman "suffering from hemorrhages for 12 years “having endured much under many physicians and had spent all she had and was no better but rather grew worse," wormed her way through the masses with a daring and desperate plan.

But what's that grabbing for the hem thing all about? Superstition? A souvenir? A desperate lunge because she could get no closer? Or had 12 years of chronic hemorrhages also taken their toll on her soul? Among the Jews, if you bled, you might as well be dead. Seriously, bleeding of any kind kept you out of the Temple, unclean and unfit to worship. Bleeding wounds made others back off, unwilling to touch you and so contaminate themselves, so that those who bled were not to touch and not to be touched.

Can you imagine never being touched? No hugs or handshakes. Not ever. No pat on the back or hand on the shoulder. No high-fives or hand-holding, no caressing or cuddling. Mark says the woman was instantly healed and then with
fear and trembling admitted it was she who had touched, not a hand but a hem of Jesus’ clothes and terrified for being a woman publicly touching a man, and a sick woman touching a healthy man.

Now what would a woman like that have in common with a man like Jairus? Poor versus rich. Woman versus man. A nobody versus a somebody. There’s a subtle clue in Jairus’ request; a request to "come and lay your hands on her." You didn’t touch sick people; you didn’t ask people to touch sick people. You didn’t touch people who had touched sick people. Two outcasts on both sides of spectrum, linked together by the man in the middle who walked with the wounded. Do you get it? That’s how miracles turn into signs. A sign that grew more powerful when Jesus arrived too late to save a dying daughter. Any other healer would have stopped right there, not just because death was beyond their ability to fix, but because death, like blood, made people untouchable, unclean and unacceptable. But Jesus went in. People laughed when He said she was only sleeping and when the laughter died, they went back to their weeping and wailing. That’s what people do in the face of death. We weep; we wail. I used to think that was the point of the story, something like "Don’t laugh at Jesus."

But it’s not. The point is, the sign shouts, Jesus went in. I just said that a minute ago, but this is a sign that blinks and flashes and shouts and so bears repeating: Jesus went in. He went into the ungodly uncleanness of a hemorrhaging
woman and a grieving mother and a devastated father and a dead daughter and He touched them all. And when He touched them, He took their ungodly uncleanness on Himself. He got dirty before God and everybody.

And the sign says, when Jesus gets dirty, the people He touches and the people who touch Him get clean, because Jesus walks with the wounded. And we are those walking wounded.

Where are you wounded? Maybe in places nobody but you and God know. I know where I'm wounded. Sometimes by anger or sorrow or disappointment or grief or fear. Sometimes by sicknesses no doctor can cure. Always by sin, that leaves guilty stains on our souls and crushes our consciences. Rich or poor, man or woman, young or old, powerful or puny, Jesus comes to the houses of our lives, dusty and dirty and disheveled and He goes in. He goes in with "steadfast love" and mercies never ending and new every morning. He comes to spend the night with our weeping so that His joy will arrive in the morning.

He touches us. Here in water. There in bread and wine. Right next to each one of you as grace turns strangers into friends and friends into family. He touched a gross and grubby humanity with a bloody, splintered, sin-stained cross to take those stains away. He wrote His touch into a book and His Spirit wrote that touch upon our hearts. That's the sign that says Jesus walks with the wounded until the wounded are made well. In Jesus' name. Amen.
Now may God's peace that passes all understanding, bring healing to our wounds and hope to our hearts as we press on to the promises He's already prepared for those He loves.