

1

You may recall the commercial for AT&T back in the 1970s and 80s that encouraged us to “reach out and touch someone” by making a phone call to a loved one or friend—not with a cell phone, for that was back in the day when rotary dial phones were the norm. The ad was very popular, reminding listeners to call about significant events in their lives, such as a child calling a parent to tell about a lost tooth and money from the tooth fairy, a call home about a great fishing trip, or a call placed by a son away at college to his mom. The commercial tugged at our hearts, for we could all relate to the longing to talk to someone we love, the desire to reach out and touch someone across the span of miles.

Even those who lived before telephones existed could relate to the idea of reaching out and connecting to someone, as in the case of the woman who longed for healing from Jesus. As the Gospel writer Mark tells the story, she had been ill for many years. Numerous trips to the doctor did not help her improve, and so when she heard others

talking about the ability of Jesus to heal them, she had to find out for herself.

She stood in a crowd, hoping to get close enough to reach out a touch, but Jesus was in a hurry, for he was currently on another healing mission. The daughter of a religious leader named Jairus (jay-I-ruhs) was very ill, and Jairus insisted that Jesus come to his house and reach out and touch and heal his little girl.

But the woman who had the bleeding illness was desperate. She wasn't going to let anyone get in her way of possible healing for herself, and so she reached out and touched Jesus.

“Who touched my clothes?” Jesus asked.

“What do you mean, Jesus?” his disciples replied. “You see the crowd surrounding us? It could have been any one of them.”

As Jesus continued scanning his eyes among the crowd, searching to see who touched him, I wonder how Jairus felt about this sudden stop. He may have thought, *Come on Jesus. We're on a time schedule here. We've got to get to my house before my daughter dies. Who cares who touched you? Healing*

2

my daughter is important. These other people will just have to wait.

And then suddenly, a woman fell down before Jesus telling him about her life. “I’ve have been bleeding for 12 years. I’ve been to see many doctors and have spent all my money. Nothing has helped. I heard about you and thought if I touched the corner of your robe I would be healed.”

Jesus told her, “Your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed.”

And then messengers press through the crowd. “Jairus. We’ve been looking for you. We have bad news. Your daughter is dead. No need to bother Jesus now.”

I imagine the look of disappointment on Jairus’ face, mixed with the agony of frustration. If Jesus hadn’t been interrupted, he might have arrived at his home in time, but now his little girl was dead. Just how could Jesus take time to help this woman while his daughter was dying?

What a difficult decision Jesus had to face. Not a choice between good and bad, but a choice between two good opportunities to heal. In this story, Jesus’

decision lies in the balance of two people with different backgrounds.

- One was a twelve-year-old **girl**, the other a **woman** who had been bleeding for 12 years.
- One was the daughter of a **respected** leader of the community, the other an **outcast** due to her medical condition.
- The girl at home was dying and **depending** on her father to contact Jesus, while the woman took the **initiative** herself to find Jesus.
- The daughter’s father **spoke openly** to Jesus about his problem, while the woman **quietly touched** Jesus’ robe.

Do you hear the opposites in this story? Not a matter of one right and the other wrong, but a situation balancing two different sets of needs.

Have you ever noticed how life seems to be filled with opposites: up, down; male, female; left, right; night, day; on, off. Even our computers run due to opposites. Our complex databases and word processing programs and all the computer games function due to two types of information: yes or no,

3

on and off, represented as 1 and 0. These bits of data flow together to form bytes, then megabytes, and gigabytes of information to run our computers.

The entire creation is composed of atoms, containing negatively charged electrons circling positive protons in the nucleus, held together by the mysterious subatomic particles called quarks and gluons. Even at the subatomic level, an amazing balance occurs between two opposing charges: negative and positive.

Our very existence seems to be one of holding things together in balance, but sometimes our lives seem to fall out of balance, and that's often when we need one another the most, when we need to reach out and touch, make a phone call, write a letter, send an email, have a conversation. When those who come to us feel out of balance, it's a time to offer the gift of listening, to hear their inner struggle.

It's sometimes hard to do that though, isn't it, seek someone to hear us? We're afraid to reveal too much of ourselves to others, for we may feel like everyone around us has their act together and

might think less of us if we share our struggles. We may feel reluctant to reach out and touch, for in today's Me-Too world, we've become guarded and a little more protected. We may isolate ourselves, becoming like one who suffers from haphophobia, the fear of being touched. We may even believe that reaching out to another person will do no good, as though it's too late to heal the wounds within us.

Jesus reminds us that it's never too late to reach out, for upon the news of the death of Jairus' daughter, Jesus told the father, "Do not fear, only believe." When they arrived at the house, Jesus asked those who had gathered, "Why do you make such a commotion and weep?" Jesus reached out and took the young girl by her hand and said, "Little girl, get up." She got up and walked around, much to the amazement of everyone.

Even in today's world of hi-tech communication devices, sometimes it's still hard to reach out and touch, which one of our global missionaries discovered while serving in Zambia, Africa. Robert writes of his experience in trying to reach out and

④

touch the lives of those who lived in an area where technology didn't always work:

It is such a joy to be serving in Zambia and teaching for the United Church of Zambia (UCZ) University. I am challenged by some chronic problems—no reliable Wi-Fi for the classrooms, a needy library, one old copier that is not dependable, and a decaying water supply system—but we are succeeding. I arrived last winter to teach church history but have been drafted to teach African church history, research skills, theology, and missiology. My wife came a few months later to support the university library and has found other challenges in the computer lab...

Most of my students are hoping to become ministers in...Zambia's largest Protestant church...Ministry for my students will be the second profession for most. They will eventually serve all over the nation in diverse congregations. One recent graduate wrote to me about the challenges in rural ministry there. I suspect there are similar challenges in urban areas as well, like limited access to health facilities, poverty, unemployment, and risk of disease, among others. I

am guiding them to understanding these challenges in ministry.

The Christian faith is growing and vital here... Learning is taking place. New realizations are being formed. New understandings of Jesus and God's mission in the world are being shared and explored.¹

By reaching out to touch the lives of others, Robert has discovered a growing church—even in the face of struggling technologies, poverty, health care struggles, and problems finding a job. In some ways, their lives sound like our lives, for we are part of the same human family. The work they do in Africa is part of our work here at home, for as a partner with our Global Ministries, we are one church that reaches out around the world. This week, may you reach out and touch someone with God's hope.

¹ Robert Breckenridge, July 8, 2019, https://www.globalministries.org/august_2019