

Proper 8  
 2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27  
 2 Corinthians 8:7-15  
 Mark 5:21-43

## The Star Market

A couple of years ago, a poet named Marie Howe wrote a poem for these days we live in called "The Star Market."<sup>i</sup> This is the poem:

*The people Jesus loved were shopping at the Star Market yesterday.  
 An old lead-colored man standing next to me at the checkout  
 breathed so heavily I had to step back a few steps.*

*Even after his bags were packed he still stood, breathing hard and  
 hawking into his hand. The feeble, the lame, I could hardly look at them:  
 shuffling though the aisles, they smelled of decay, as if the Star Market*

*had declared a day off for the able-bodied, and I had wandered in  
 with the rest of them—sour milk, bad meat—  
 looking for cereal and spring water.*

*Jesus must have been a saint, I said to myself, looking for my lost car  
 in the parking lot later, stumbling among the people who would have  
 been lowered into rooms by ropes, who would have crept*

*out of caves or crawled from the corners of public baths on their hands  
 and knees begging for mercy.*

*If I touch only the hem of his garment, one woman thought,  
 could I bear the look on his face when he wheels around?*

Because our lectionary, the schedule of readings heard in church, runs on a three year cycle, once you been through a full cycle, the stories we hear become familiar. This is especially true during the long season we are in now, which is referred to as Ordinary Time, the time between Pentecost and Advent in which we hear in all three years of the cycle, repeated stories of Jesus healing people.

Today's Gospel reading has him going from one place to another seemingly in one day, staving off one person's death, healing a hemorrhaging woman, and then actually raising another person from the dead. It's easy to see how power drained from him when he healed people, that kind of schedule would be exhausting!

But when we move ourselves past the story's familiarity or themes, and really go to the place where Jesus is, we begin to realize how extraordinary he must have been to have stood in the way he did.

There were plenty of itinerant preachers and healers in Jesus' day but there apparently was something so different, so unusual about him, people did all they could just to be near him, believing that even such minimal contact such as touching the hem of his robe would somehow restore them to wholeness.

But I imagine there must have been something terrifying about his as well. When people came to him they often brought along something quite precious—namely their last vestiges of hope. Despite all the pain and disappointment they had suffered in their lives, they allowed themselves to believe, as best they could, that somehow Jesus, against all odds, could, and would, help them.

But there was something else about him as well.

To put so much trust in another person is hard enough as it is, but to feel or believe with a look Jesus could also peer into a person's soul, and strip that person down to his or her deepest core, magnified everything about him, everything he did.

Could any of us really bear to look upon his face when he wheeled around?

In our postmodern world, many of us live with a strange ambiguity or maybe suspended belief about miracles, and healing and the true nature of Jesus' power. We want to believe, we really do. We're just not sure what to believe in.

We discount, if not out and out dismiss, interpretations of scripture which ask us to believe that any of the healing stories really happened as reported in the Gospels.

We discount if not out and out dismiss the presence of miracles in our own lives and attribute things that might be considered miraculous as coincidences, twists of fate, or even karma. But not (God forbid) the result of heavenly intervention. We are at times, less than charitable in our assessments of our brothers and sisters who really do believe these things.

And yet, we also crave the miraculous. We yearn for contact with the divine, and hold on to and treasure those times in our lives, when we believe we have been in a thin place where heaven and earth almost seems to collide, and we somehow know we have been in the presence of the holy.

We want to believe prayers are not only heard but answered in ways not altogether rational or easily explained. We want to touch the hem of Jesus' robe with anticipation.

But, and perhaps this is the conundrum, if we do, we know innately, we will become completely vulnerable. We understand on a very personal level, how Jesus must have unnerved some of those around him, because he still can.

And so our skepticism, I think at least partly based on our wanting to shield ourselves from this vulnerability, often battles against our being open to seeing or accepting the presence of the miraculous—and authentic healing—in our lives. Dr. Louie Crew, founder of Integrity USA and a professor emeritus of Rutgers University, puts it this way:

No one wants to be taken in. The emotions that religion taps are the most powerful emotions of all. If we have been hemorrhaging for twelve years and a famous faith healer comes to town, surely we might want to touch the hem of the healer's garment, especially in a crowd where we won't likely be noticed. But no one wants the healer to stop the proceeding and say, "Who touched me?"<sup>ii</sup>

Could we bear to see Jesus' face when he wheeled around?

But here is the wonderful good news: By the grace of God, yes we could, and yes we can, time and time again. There may those moments just before we see his face when we wonder if we will be able to bear it, but when we do see it, we see pure kindness, absolute compassion and unabashed love.

Through Jesus, we have an entry into a place, a thin place, where we can see, as best as we are able, all the things God so wants for us to understand including how incredibly precious we are. Our very being, our DNA, our RNA, is God created.

Once again, Louie Crew captures the essence of what this means as he writes about coming to embrace who he is as a gay man and a child of God. He writes:

I would have rushed to sneak to touch the hem of someone who I believed could heal me of the homosexual desires and devices of my heart. Years later I made my way to the hem of Jesus and was healed -- not of my orientation, but of my sin in calling unclean anything God had made.<sup>iii</sup>

We are the people in the Star Market, carrying with us shopping bags full of our vulnerabilities, our disabilities, and our defenses, some of which can be seen and others not. Some of which we know and others not. At various times in our lives we are like those lowered into rooms by ropes, who crept out of caves or crawled from the corners of public baths on their hands and knees begging for mercy. Begging for understanding.

But not only at these, but at all times of our lives, Jesus bids us to come to him, for healing, for confirmation of the miraculous, for restoration to wholeness. He bids us to touch him, and gaze upon his face so we may be assured to the very core of our being, we are the ones Jesus loves.

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<sup>i</sup> Marie Howe, "The Star Market," *The New Yorker*, January 14, 2008.

<sup>ii</sup> Louie Crew, "Queer Eye for the Lectionary." Found at <http://queereye4lectionary.blogspot.com> (accessed 26 June 9009)

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.