**Touched by Jesus** 10/3/24dkm

Read: Mark 6:45-56, John 6:22-40

Text: Mark 6:53-56

Psalms: 103:1-11, 78:18-31, 126, 72old

Early in his ministry, Jesus went up on a mountain where he sat down to teach his disciples or followers. He said, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Mat 5:3). Many in the land of Galilee were poor at this time. The Romans were oppressing them with heavy taxes and violent repression. Their religious leaders were failing them, some siding with the Romans in corruption and oppression of the poor. Jesus came into Galilee preaching the kingdom of God and healing sick people. Here was a man like no other, a man who cared for the poor and needy. Jesus’ ministry in Galilee attracted crowds. Harassed and helpless people came to him in the hope of being healed. When John the Baptist sent two disciples to ask Jesus if he was the ‘coming one’, Jesus told them to tell John what they saw and heard, namely people being healed, lepers being cleansed, the dead being raised, and the poor hearing the gospel preached (Mat 11:5). John would understand these things as signs of the ‘coming one’ having come.

After feeding the five thousand with just five loaves and two fish, Jesus sent the crowd away and put his disciples in the boat to return via Bethsaida. Jesus then went up the mountain to pray. Very early in the morning he came to his disciples walking on the sea; they were having a hard time making headway on the rough sea. As Jesus stepped into the boat the wind stopped and in no time they were back on land. They landed in the region of Gennesaret, a fertile plain around from Capernaum, the place Jesus had made home.

All four gospels report the feeding of the five thousand, but Luke does not record Jesus walking on the sea. Mark, like Matthew, gives a brief account of Jesus’ ministry in Gennesaret, while John continues his account with Jesus back in Capernaum. He writes of those being fed, or as many as could get into some boats from Tiberias, finding Jesus back in Capernaum. We will venture into John’s gospel in our third subheading. Our subheadings are: ‘People in need’, ‘Powerful touch’, and ‘People wanting more bread’.

**1. People in need**

The land of Gennesaret was a few kilometres around the lake from the city of Capernaum. All manner of crops and fruits were grown on this fertile plain. It is not clear if Jesus or his disciples had been in this region previously, but he was immediately recognized as the man who could heal people as he preached the kingdom of God- although Mark does not mention Jesus preaching in this brief account. Mark, like Matthew, comments on this immediate recognition of Jesus, and the people running off to bring sick family members or friends to Jesus to be healed (6:54, Matt 14:35).

They were really sick people, as indicated by them being carried on beds (6:55). We were previously told about the paralytic, carried by four friends, being let down through the roof in front of Jesus (2:4). That was in Capernaum. We have also been told of the woman with the bleeding problem secretly touching the garment Jesus was wearing. When Jesus identified this woman, he said to her, ‘Your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction’ (5:34).

News of Jesus being in this region of Gennesaret spread like wildfire. People brought those who were sick to wherever they heard Jesus was, or they thought he was going to be (6:55). Again we think of Zacchaeus climbing a tree to see Jesus, and of Bartimaeus calling out, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ (10:47). Here in Gennesaret they laid the sick in the market places hoping that Jesus would come by, and when he did they would beg him to let the sick simply touch the hem of his garment (6:56). The people may not have understood that Jesus was the Son of God but they believed, or had faith, that he could heal sick people. It was a wonderful day in Gennesaret because Jesus had come into their midst, the man, the rabbi, the teacher, the prophet, who could heal sick people with a simple touch, even a touch of his garment.

**2. Powerful touch**

Would you have run off to bring a sick person in your family or among your friends to Jesus? You run off to the medical doctor or hospital when sick, and rightly so, but remember the woman with the bleeding problem had been to many doctors (5:26). Modern medicine and surgery is amazing, but still, not everyone who is sick can be healed. Jesus healed as many as touched him (6:56). Moreover, Jesus not only healed bodies- he healed souls. The Greek word translated, ‘made well’ at the end of verse 56 can also be translated, ‘saved’, saved in a spiritual sense.

The people running to bring their sick to Jesus were like sheep without a shepherd (5:34). Just as Jesus had compassion on the people when he fed the five thousand, so he had compassion on these people in Gennesaret (Mat 9:35, 36). Wherever he went he had compassion on people because they were like lost sheep; they were in need of a shepherd. Do you think people today are any different to the people of Gennesaret or Galilee? Sure we have better medicine, but still people die from disease and sickness. In some ways people in our society are even more like lost sheep because of family breakdown and loneliness. Mental illness has become so widespread that doctors are at a loss as to how to deal with this sickness. While demon possession is not the same a mental illness, Jesus healed all afflictions, physical and mental. ‘As many as touched him were made well’.

It is hard to believe that anyone touching Jesus, and being made well, departed without hearing a word from Jesus. Would he not have said, ‘Go in peace, your faith has made you well’ (5:34)? Healing sick people was a sign, a miraculous sign pointing to Jesus as the great healer, the divine healer, the healer of souls as well as bodies. Jesus was pleased to heal broken bodies, but more than this, he wanted to heal broken souls- and he had the power to do so! ‘Come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’ (Mat 11:28).

When Jesus said, ‘Go in peace’, it was not a platitude or even a sincere desire. It was a beatitude or blessing imparted to the heart of the person coming to him in faith. Faith is what Jesus looks for, and it is what he found in the hearts of those who came to him for healing. The very act of coming to touch his garment demonstrated faith, even if simple or childlike faith. Do you come to Jesus when you are in need of healing, healing of a broken body or a broken heart? Remember his promise of rest, and be assured that Jesus can and does keep his promises.

**3. People wanting more bread**

Let us skip over to John’s gospel for a moment where we find Jesus back in Capernaum. The timeline is not certain but Jesus probably headed back to Capernaum after landing in Gennesaret with his disciples. In the meantime, a group from the five thousand that Jesus miraculously fed had sailed back across the lake to Capernaum, and were looking for Jesus. They had seen the disciples set off in a boat without Jesus (John 6:22). When morning came and Jesus could not be found, they set off in boats for Capernaum.

The group eventually found Jesus in Capernaum and asked him how, or rather when, he got back (John 6:25). Jesus knew that these people had the wrong idea about who he was; they had tried to make him their king, but an earthly king. They wanted Jesus to give them more bread for their bellies. They were impressed by his ability, his miraculous ability, to multiply the five loaves and two fish, but did not see this as a sign of his divinity, of him being the Son of God sent down from heaven. They did not see Jesus as the man referred to by John the Baptist as the ‘coming one’ (Mat 11:3). They did not see Jesus as the promised Messiah, at least not in the true sense of this promise.

Years ago a student came to me telling how the pain in her arm had gone after she went to a healing service in town. Without questioning the veracity of her healing, I simply asked her what she was going to do in the light of her healing. If she had prayed to Jesus, and Jesus had healed her, would she give him thanks and praise, and indeed worship Jesus as her saviour and Lord. The people who saw the mighty works of Jesus near Bethsaida were back in Capernaum looking for more bread; surely praise and worship was in order!

Jesus told them to look beyond physical food that perishes to spiritual food that endures to eternal life (John 6:27). Thousands of books have been written about food - recipe books. God has given us such a rich variety of foods to enjoy, and given us, some of us, the ability to make tasty dishes. But too many people live for food, or made their bellies a god (Phil 3:19). The apostle Paul assures us that both stomach and food will perish (1Cor 6:13). It is sometimes said that poorer people eat to live, while richer people live to eat! Let us not be among the latter, but let us be those who give thanks to God for our daily bread.

Just as Jesus pointed the Samaritan woman away from spring water to himself as ‘living water’, so he pointed these people away from bread for their bellies to himself as the ‘living bread’, the bread of life sent down from heaven (John 6:33,35). They asked him about working for spiritual food, food that endures to everlasting life: ‘What shall we do that we may work the works of God’ (John 6:28). They would have been thinking about keeping the law, even about specific laws. They went on to refer to Moses the lawgiver, as well as the bread-giver.

Jesus had already told them that the Son of Man will give them spiritual food (John 6:27). They did not have to work for it as such, but simply had to believe and receive Jesus as the Son of God, the One on whom the Father had set his seal. The only work required was to ‘believe in Him whom He sent’, believe in Jesus whom the Father sent into this world (John 6:29). The miraculous signs were part of the Father’s seal of approval upon Jesus. Ultimately it would be in the cross and the resurrection that the Father’s seal of approval would be seen.

What then does God require of us? Listen to the answer to question 85 of the Shorter Catechism: ‘To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God required of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption’. The people of Gennesaret did not sit at home in their misery when they heard that Jesus was in town! Have you been sitting at home when you should be, by faith, feeding upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and bearing fruit in your life to his glory?