

Gloria Nethkin

Baptism of Clara Hart Hemlock

Introduction

One: Following the tradition of Jesus who welcomed children into his community, we celebrate the presence of children within this community of faith and offer to children the sacrament of baptism. We invite Clara and her family to come forward today and celebrate the sacrament of baptism. We affirm the love of God made known in this child and the sacredness of the covenant shared between this child, her family and this congregation to support this child as she lives and grows in faith.

Invitation

One: We are here to praise God for the life of *Clara Hart Hemlock*, our young friend, who in such a short time has brought us so much joy. Through Clara we have experienced birth again in a new and more conscious way; in her, God has created the world again, opening us to wonder and possibility that we had forgotten. We live not for ourselves alone, but toward God and for each other. Our lives are bound in a covenant of love with Clara, her family and one another.

We baptize Clara with our desire to show her a way of life that naturally displays love, respect, and justice. We baptize her with our intention to witness the unfolding of God's creation as she grows and changes. We baptize her with our desire to be in God's presence as we are in her presence. We baptize Clara with our desire to see her grow in spiritual maturity, in wisdom, and in soulful service to others, following in the spiritual footsteps of all the great mystics and spiritual teachers of the world.

Questions of the Parents/Family:

- ∞ Each of us here has a unique role in raising this beautiful child. Do you, her parents, commit yourselves to raising her in a manner that inspires faithfulness, compassion, and spiritual growth? If so, say,
We do
- ∞ Will you encourage your child to learn from the wisdom of the

prophets, doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with her God? If so, say, **We do.**

- ∞ Will you teach your child to honor the faith questions that belong to her throughout her life? If so, say, **We do**
- ∞ Will you journey with your child to discover the wonder of God's love made manifest here this day? If so, say, **We do**
- ∞ And do we, the family and friends of Clara commit ourselves to being a faithful community that will guide and support her through life? If so, let us say, **We do.**

Congregational Assent

One: Jesus calls us to welcome children into the full life of our community, opening our table and hearts to those most vulnerable, offering the wisdom of the ages to all who hunger for truth. Do you, who witness and celebrate this sacrament, promise your love, support, and care to this child being baptized as she lives and grows in this Christian community?

All: We promise our love support and care.

Baptismal Prayer

One: We thank you, God, for the gift of creation made known to us in water and word. Before the world had shape and form, your Spirit moved over the waters. Out of the waters of the deep, you formed the firmament and brought forth the earth to sustain all life. In the time of Moses, your people Israel passed through the Red Sea waters from slavery to freedom and crossed the flowing Jordan to enter the promised land. You have come to us through water in the stories of Jesus who was nurtured in the water of Mary's womb, baptized by John in the water of the Jordan, and became living water to a woman at the Samaritan well. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples and sent them forth to baptize with water and spirit. Bless by your Holy Spirit, gracious God, this water. Bless all who touch and taste this water that may be ever reminded of your abiding presence and claim on their lives. Amen. (UCC Book of Worship, adapted)

Act of Baptism

By what name will this child be called?

I baptize you with faith in the living God, Source, Servant and Guide.

May the Spirit be upon you, child of God, disciple of Christ, and member of the Christian church.

Prayer of Dedication

All: God of wonder and grace, we thank you for your love revealed here this day as this community, these parents, and this child come together making covenant promises. We pray that this community will have the grace to uphold the promises made here this day , providing a safe shelter of your love in which this child may grow and play. We pray that these parents may continue to feel the sweet wonder of your presence so transparent here today. We pray that this child will bask in your love as he makes his own journey through this life. Amen.

Hymn of Welcome

Presentation of the Child

Mark 5:21-43 (the Message)

After Jesus crossed over by boat, a large crowd met him at the seaside. One of the meeting-place leaders named Jairus came. When he saw Jesus, he fell to his knees, beside himself as he begged, "My dear daughter is at death's door. Come and lay hands on her so she will get well and live." Jesus went with him, the whole crowd tagging along, pushing and jostling him.

A woman who had suffered a condition of hemorrhaging for twelve years—a long succession of physicians had treated her, and treated her badly, taking all her money and leaving her worse off than before—had heard about Jesus.

She slipped in from behind and touched his robe. She was thinking to herself, "If I can put a finger on his robe, I can get well." The moment she did it, the flow of blood dried up. She could feel the change and knew her plague was over and done with.

At the same moment, Jesus felt energy discharging from him. He turned around to the crowd and asked, "Who touched my robe?"

His disciples said, "What are you talking about? With this crowd pushing and jostling you, you're asking, 'Who touched me?' Dozens have touched you!"

But he went on asking, looking around to see who had done it. The woman, knowing what had happened, knowing she was the one, stepped up in fear and trembling, knelt before him, and gave him the whole story.

Jesus said to her, "Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you're healed and whole. Live well, live blessed! Be healed of your plague."

* * *

While he was still talking, some people came from the leader's house and told him, "Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher any more?"

Jesus overheard what they were talking about and said to the leader, "Don't listen to them; just trust me."

He permitted no one to go in with him except Peter, James, and John. They entered the leader's house and pushed their way through the gossips looking for a story and neighbors bringing in casseroles. Jesus was abrupt: "Why all this busybody grief and gossip? This child isn't dead; she's sleeping." Provoked to sarcasm, they told him he didn't know what he was talking about.

But when he had sent them all out, he took the child's father and mother, along with his companions, and entered the child's room. He clasped the

girl's hand and said, "*Talitha koum*," which means, "Little girl, get up." At that, she was up and walking around! This girl was twelve years of age. They, of course, were all beside themselves with joy. He gave them strict orders that no one was to know what had taken place in that room. Then he said, "Give her something to eat."

A Reflection by Maren Tirabassi

The woman's story about comfort is the comfort we reach for, a fabric of care.

An Alzheimer's patient makes rosary from the silky binding of a blanket,
a toddler holds quilt or teddy bear,
a young woman fingers the lace on a wedding dress,
a grandmother touches a curl of hair, rubbing the old locket,
a man folds gently the apron of the partner who has died,
a patient awakening from anesthesia, desperately reaches
for the scrubs passing by,
and scrubs pauses and sits down to be compassion ...
like Jesus, and like Jesus goes on,
for in the next place,

"Give her something to eat,"
is Revised Standard Version translation of casserole in hand at a door
where there has been grief
or a new baby born,
also of pie delivered to an overwhelmed new neighbor,
and the order for "slice and a coke," for an awkward teen,
a coffee or beer with a side of listening for anyone making a decision,
also an ice cream cone for every lonely hungry child.

Healing Touch

Reach out and touch someone near you. Lay your hand on their hand or shoulder. Keep it there – can you feel the power... the power that surges between you? The power of touch is remarkable. It sustains us, inspires us, heals us. Without the power of touch, we cannot survive.

In 1938, a little girl named Anna was born to a mentally impaired woman that lived with her father. Anna was left in the attic and was given only enough milk to live on and lived there until she was five. She was given no affection, no smiles, no hugs, no loving touches. When social workers saved the girl, she was completely unresponsive, she did not laugh or speak. However, with some help and guidance the girl did learn how to walk, speak a little, and even care for herself. But, she died at the young age of 10.

When we withhold touch, we withhold life.

Today we heard the story of a woman and a girl who were dying. And, like little Anna, they simply needed the loving touch of a hand. God's presence was made manifest in the touch of a hand.

But let's take a step back. Jesus has already had a long, exhausting day. After hours of teaching and preaching, he suggests that he and the disciples cross the lake to find some peace and quiet. As we heard last week, he fell asleep as soon as the boat took off, only to be awakened by the disciples' desperate cries. As exhausted and depleted as he already was, Jesus reached deep down and was able to calm a violent storm with one simple word, teaching the disciples an unforgettable example of what true faith means.

So, as he stepped off of the boat, surely Jesus looked forward to that long-awaited rest and relaxation... a time to have a peaceful meal with his friends and enjoy some quiet time together.

But, of course, things did not go as planned. Just as he had left the crowds behind, a new crowd had gathered to meet him. A powerful leader of the

synagogue named Jarius broke through the crowd to meet him, brought not by faith but by pure desperation.

"Please help me! My daughter is dying. She is only 12 years old. Lay your hands on her so she may live!"

How could he say no? He rushed after Jarius, knowing that the time to help was short. As he pushed through the crowd, one woman tried to push closer to him. We are told that she had been bleeding for 12 long years... as long as the little girl had been alive.

Think about it – for 12 long years, this woman has hemorrhaged. For 12 long years, she has been considered unclean by her community, pushed to the outskirts. Untouchable. And, anyone who touched her would be unclean too.

Twelve long years without human touch, without human love.

In her own way, this woman was as desperate as Jarius. Desperation that turned to hope in the face of Jesus, as he passed her by. She pushed through the crowd to get closer. "If I could just touch the hem of his cloak..." She reaches out and touches it as he rushes by, and suddenly, amazingly... she felt a surge rush through her body. She was healed!

Jesus literally stopped in his tracks, "who touched my clothes?"

"What are you talking about?" said the disciples. "You are surrounded by people pressing up against you, and you want to know who touched your clothes?"

But of course, this was not any ordinary touch. Jesus knew immediately that something had happened... he felt the power surge and leave him. He felt the woman be healed.

He turns to her and hears her story. And then he claims her as his own: "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." Daughter... my child... a member of my own family. As the book of Revelation says, "I will wipe

away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more," so this woman walked away, healed and whole, and rejoined her community.

But there is another family waiting for him. But Jarius gets the news that it is too late. His daughter is dead. Because Jesus stopped to help an anonymous woman, his beloved daughter is dead.

Or is she? I wonder if the touch of the woman's hand, which at first depleted his power, ultimately re-energized him... giving him what he needed to save the girl. Because he went to her and held her hand. Touched her with love. As calmly as he stopped the storm, he said ""Little girl, get up!" And that's exactly what she did. This child who had died in bed, got up and walked around and rejoined her family.

"I will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more."

And in these stories of healing and hope, we get a glimpse of who God is and how God acts. We see what God is like. We see a God who has more than enough time for all of us... no one is left behind. We see a God who is willing to push through crowds to be in the midst of our lives. We see a God who will stop if we reach out a tentative hand. We see a God who needs our touch as much as we need God's.

So much can happen with the touch of the hand. It happens to the one who touches, and it happens to the one who is touched. Perhaps it happened here today, when we touched each other. A healing here, new life there. God's presence made manifest in the touch of a hand.

I wonder what happened after these healings. How were the people who experienced God's healing presence changed? Did Jarius stand up to the other religious leaders who wanted to bring Jesus down? Did his daughter and the other woman join the crowds that followed Jesus? Or did they re-enter their communities and live loving productive lives? We don't know. But we do know that when God's presence is made manifest through our loving touches, that the world changes.

So reach out again and touch the gospel promises... take them to heart. "I will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more." In Jesus, the Son of God who walked amongst us, we know that blessings and love found in the touch of a hand.

Daughter, son, beloved child of God... your faith has healed you. Go in peace!