

SERMON- Proper 5 (A)

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Hosea 5:15-6:6

Psalms 50:7-15

Romans 4:13-25

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

June 7, 2026

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

OPENING:

“Just do it” says *Nike*.

“Have it your way” says *Burger King*.

These advertising slogans say so much about our wants and needs as Americans, and even much about our yearnings and limitations as spiritual beings.

“Just do it” speaks to our preference for self-reliance;

“Have it your way” our need for individual expression.

Both obscure God and the role of the community in our lives.

The third member of Madison Avenue’s “Trinity” is that famous jingle from yesteryear: “Reach out and touch someone.”

This was *Bell Systems/ AT&T*’s Long Distance phone tagline and it was used for years, won advertising awards, and made the company A LOT of money, if only from the Cowherd household

On the surface, I get it, nothing wrong with this one: being able to talk to people all over the world is a great thing. I think it predicts, though... all the utopian visions of how technology was supposed to connect us and fulfill us which... in hindsight... we see how lacking that promise has been.

Don’t worry... not on a Technology Crusade this morning.

Am just on a Jesus Crusade.

I want to talk about Jesus’ “touch”—his transformative, resurrecting, healing, life-giving, powerful touch.

One that indeed ‘reaches out and touches us’ and crosses all boundaries and limits.

It costs nothing, it’s free. And it costs us everything

GOSPEL:

In our Gospel reading, we read about Jesus’ touch in two interlocking stories. In one, Jesus heals a dead girl of the synagogue leader in this dramatic scene. Notice how Jesus starts outside the house, then enters into it, and then goes into the daughter’s room, kneels by the bed, and takes the sick girl by the hand.

Jesus is like a heat-seeking missile, determine to go deeper, to hold the child, ‘skin to skin,’ to feel her, to touch in her sickness.

This very intimacy might make us blush, it’s so visceral that the crowd has to mock

Jesus in order to handle it.

In the other story, Jesus does things one better. Touching a dead body was bad enough. But then he double down on the importance of touch in his contact with the menstruating woman. In this story, Jesus flips things and allows himself to *be* touched. As a holy person, as a reputable man in the society, that was unconscionable.

In both stories, Jesus' touch changes everything.

We yearn for that touch. Even in our modern, technological world, we want God's healing touch more than ever. We pray for it as bed sides, at hospital beds, around the dining room, and here in church.

We all join the chorus:

"If I only (could) touch his cloak, I will be made well."

HEALING:

I wish I had an illustration of precisely that, Jesus healing me or someone I knew with simply his touch...

I do remember at Seminary, we once had the Rector of St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Houston, Texas, visit and celebrate a healing Eucharist. St. Martin's is, by a long shot, the largest Episcopal church in our denomination. The Bush family attended there, James Baker (Lady Gaga even attended the morning of the Super Bowl one year)... so big deal. That day in chapel, the first person to approach for healing prayers happened to be a friend who was in a cast for a broken foot and so she kinda wobbled forward and the Rector looked at her and said: "If I heal you with this prayer, it's really going to be something..."

"If I only (could) touch his cloak, I will be made well."

Here is another story about touch and healing, closer to home.

Last year, we had the Bishop's Visitation for Pentecost, and it had all these confirmations/ laying on of hands. It was a bilingual service, with this big meal afterwards.

It was such a great service that I found myself rewatching it after the fact and it was indeed marvelous, the music and the huge crowd.

The thing, though, that caught my eye on rewatch was the Acts reading where we had two parishioners come up to read the lesson (in Spanish and in English). In that moment, the camera zoomed into the podium and the Livestream revealed that the two lectors were standing in such a way that they were touching one another.¹

¹ <https://youtu.be/SWgzB5Cidhk?t=1856>

It's an odd image for me to fixate on, you might think, but it was a beautiful one. The Pentecost story of many into one, and it was happening right here, this image of unity within our diversity, of the closeness and familiarity and love of these two individuals.

Now they weren't draped over each other or anything like that... they were simply ONE in that moment by their posture, in their relationship to one another, and with God, across borders and boundaries.

SHIFT

Another story: to become a priest, you have to go through this battery of tests, worthy of an Apollo astronaut. Background check, financial check, physical, psychological, in addition to the spiritual. You also have to see a marriage counselor. And, for whatever reason, we did that one last.

So Michelle and I were in Richmond (2015) at this counselor's office. He sits us down, we are 'on the couch', he is in the chair opposite, and at some point early on in the session, he begins to hand us a piece of paper of some importance. And he does so hesitantly, slowly, waiting for us to take it. Holding it there...

The test was, he later told us, that he could figure out a lot about the couple from how they *touched* that piece of paper.

Sometimes one member of the couple (usually the man) would grab it and kind of hog it for themselves.

Other times, neither would really accept it, showing uneasiness about taking this thing into themselves.

It was ideal if the couple were to take the paper, shared it (this is what Michelle and I did!) such that their bodies touch and you would hold the paper together and hold each other up in the process, if you can visualize that.

I know, I know... if only marriage were that easy.

If only life were that easy, if we could just touch more, things would be okay.

I will say that church does provide 3 opportunities for touch (the Peace, Communion, the Receiving line after church) in an appropriate (!) way.

And that mountains of studies have shown the importance of touch and its effect on our mental well-being.

And that the telecommunications industry sold us on "reaching out and touching someone" through our landlines and then through cell phones and the next and the next medium.

And all it has done is made us lonely and miserable and anti-social and violent with one another.

“If I only (could) touch his cloak, I will be made well.”

When I do pre-marital counseling,
when interacting with the smallest, most intimate of Christian communities,
I use that “method,” the piece of paper with the couple.

At some point, early on, I fold and tell them the “secret.” I say that marriage is leaning on the other person, falling into someone sometime, propping the other person up at other times. You cannot be self-sufficient, you need to be leaned upon and to lean on someone else for the thing to work.

CONCLUSION

And in this particular arrangement, this community, there is a third person, that Hallmark or a therapist will say is the abstraction known as the “marriage” or simply “your love.”

I call that person, present in your marriage, that’s God,
God is holding us up, nudging us forward, pushing us, even shoving us sometimes.

God is present, of course, in all sorts of arrangements and communities and in our individual relationships with God.

We are never alone, praise God,

Dare I say that we know that about life because we know that about God LIKE what the Trinity is about, like what God is about, relationship, diversity, commonality, community

It's about physical proximity, and posture, but more than that.

How do you do that?

It takes hard work, in a marriage, you have to give yourself to the other person, while somehow still maintaining who you are.

In church life, it’s hard work too... all you have to do is give yourself to the church. Give your very self to walking together.

Then you can stand at a podium and deliver and you are one, but you are also separate. They have only committed their lives to this church. That’s “all it takes” for it work.²

Jesus thus “risks marginalization for resurrection.”³ **AMEN**

² [Reading the Acts Lesson, Pentecost 2025, Bishop’s Visit](#)

³ Luke A. Powery. “Homiletical Perspective.” 2011. *Feasting on the Word*. Year A. Volume 3, 119.