

## **TROUBLE THE TEACHER**

**Mark 5:21-43**

**June 11, 2008**

**Credentialing & Retirement Service**

**West Ohio Conference**

Grace and peace to you from God, our Creator, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who instructs us, “Do not fear, only believe.”

It is a blessing and honor to stand, this evening, before the 2008 class of retirees. Your witness and work have set a standard for all of us. I thank God for your faithful and fruitful ministries on behalf of the Gospel. And, I thank each of you for all the times and places you have proclaimed the transforming love of God, and for all the times and places you have extended Jesus’ healing touch to broken lives and a hurting world.

We have gathered here this evening to honor your sincere faith, your steadfast discipleship and your exceptional service. This class has contributed over 1080 years of service to Christ and The United Methodist Church. I invite the congregation to stand with me and express our deepest admiration and gratitude. (Applause)

I am equally honored to stand before those who come this evening to be received into associate membership, to be commissioned as probationary deacons and elders, and to be ordained as full member deacons and elders. It is a holy privilege to commission or ordain each of you to Christ’s ministry.

Paul's words to his beloved Timothy express my sentiments at this moment: "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." (II Timothy 1:6-7) God, through the Holy Spirit, is about to do a holy and sacred act through the laying on of hands and the granting of Spirit-power and authority. The Church, assembled here tonight, joins me in thanking God for each of you saying, "Yes, Lord, here I am." (Applause)

Retirees and those being commissioned and ordained, you are not here alone this evening. That is obvious from the thunderous applause you have received. No, you are literally surrounded by a host of witnesses – beloved spouses, parents, grandparents, children and grandchildren, former pastors and current colleagues, past and present parishioners, mentors and teachers, and your friends in the faith. Many of these folks drove significant distances so they can "party" with you tonight!

These are the persons who have given you life, who prayed for and with you, who helped you discern your call and stood by you as you sought to faithfully fulfill that call. They have come to celebrate new beginnings with you this evening. They are proud! They are excited! They are relieved! They are ready to embrace you! I welcome and salute those who have gathered to thank God for your work and witness. I invite our candidates and retirees to now stand with me to express our gratitude for your presence this evening.

Please pray with me. Holy and gracious God, you “who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to your own purposes and grace” (II Timothy 1:9), pour out your Holy Spirit on these your faithful servant leaders. Anoint each with your blessing and power. Grant to those who are retiring the joy of resting in you. Grant to those who come to be ordained and commissioned the hope of your abiding presence. Grant to those here tonight who may yet be discerning your call, the clarity and assurance of a heart strangely warmed. Grant to all of us the courage to do no harm, to do good and to stay in loving relationship with you and our neighbor. And, now open our hearts and minds, by the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may hear with joy and wonder your Word for us on this sacred evening. We offer our prayer in the precious name of Christ Jesus. Amen.

You know and love these two powerful healing stories that were read this evening from Mark’s Gospel. Once again, Jesus had crossed the Sea of Galilee only to be mobbed by a great crowd eager to get to him, to touch him, to be in his presence. Jairus (Ja – i – rus), a ruler of the local synagogue and a wealthy and influential member of the community manages to get Jesus’ attention, falls on his knees, beside himself with anxiety, and begs Jesus to come and lay hands on his daughter who is dying.

While Jesus is on his way to Jairus’ house, with the whole crowd tagging along, pushing and jostling him, a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years, a nameless member of this huge crowd, a woman had been relegated to the margins of society by her poverty, her disease, her gender

and her perceived sinfulness, pushes through the crowd to touch Jesus' cloak, seeking his healing, liberating, saving Spirit-energy.

Both Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman are desperate for Jesus' healing touch – the woman for herself; Jairus for his daughter. The father throws himself at Jesus' feet begging for help. The woman pushes through the crowd, ignoring social and ritual boundaries to approach Jesus. They will not be ignored, or overlooked, or pushed aside or separated from Jesus. Tyat will preach!

You know the rest of the story. There are two healings. The impoverished, hemorrhaging woman is healed. And Jesus announces, "Daughter, you took a risk of faith and now you are healed and whole. Live well, live blessed, live in peace. Be healed of your disease." (Mark 5:34) And, Jairus' daughter is healed. Jesus takes her by the hand and says, "Little girl, get up," and she awakens from her near-death sleep.

The Gospel messages are straight-forward and clear. The woman and the father each approach Jesus with some fear and trembling -- common responses to the presence of the divine. Who here has known the fear, awe and wonder that causes us to collapse before the Lord? Both the hemorrhaging woman and the religious leader had more faith than fear; the balance between faith and fear in each of them tips in the direction of faith. And, Jesus honors such faith. Who here has stepped out in faith, risking all, only to be caught, upheld and healed by Jesus? Jesus' saving and healing

presence demonstrates that the kingdom of God is near. Who here has had a “kingdom of God is near” moment, when you have been embraced or kissed by the very Spirit of God or flooded with Christ’s forgiving and restoring grace? Yes, the Gospel messages are clear!

But, there is a sub-plot to these healing stories. Did you catch it as Dr. Wright read the text? Let me give you a clue – always, always pay attention to the questions. There are three questions asked in the text. Two were asked by Jesus. When the crowd was pushing and jostling him, Jesus asked, “Who touched my clothes?” When he was surrounded by the crowd of people wailing and weeping at Jairus’ house, Jesus asked, “Why do you make a commotion and weep?” But, the question that reveals the sub-plot is asked by folks like you and me – the messengers who came to tell Jairus his daughter was dead. Do you remember their question? Candidates for commissioning and ordination, do you remember their question? It is on the test – it is in the examination. The question is, “Why trouble the teacher any further?” This is a question born of fatalism. The crowds and the messengers presumed far too early that the daughter was finished. Don’t hope for the impossible and get hurt. Accept reality. Your daughter is dead. Don’t trouble the teacher.

Dear friends, and especially those of you soon to be commissioned or ordained, there are a lot of people running around these days asking, “Why trouble the teacher any further?” Some of these folks are even in our churches!

- Why trouble the teacher?  
It's too late, our congregation is dead. Accept reality.
- Why trouble the teacher?  
We don't even believe in miracles any more.
- Why trouble the teacher?  
We have been handling everything on our own for some time now. Thank you very much!
- Why trouble the teacher?  
We certainly don't want the Holy Spirit to come and change anything.
- Why trouble the teacher?  
Jesus might come and heal us of our cynicism, our skepticism, our fatalism.
- Why trouble the teacher?  
It is too late; our church can't grow or transform lives any more.
- Why trouble the teacher?  
I am much too busy with my work, my ministry, my life to have Jesus bother me.
- Why trouble the teacher?  
Maybe if I just pretend the Holy Spirit is not whispering to my soul, Christ's call to discipleship will fade from my ears and from my heart.

- Why trouble the teacher?  
What if Jesus blesses me with more power and authority than I want?
- Why trouble the teacher?  
Jesus might invite us to travel with him through Samaria.
- Why trouble the teacher?  
Jesus might awaken my hunger and desire to know God with every fiber of my being.
- Why trouble the teacher?  
Jesus might ask me to become vulnerable and reveal my deepest hurts and wounds.
- Why trouble the teacher?  
Jesus might come and plow the soils of my soul.
- Why trouble the teacher?  
Jesus might tell me I need to be born again.

One of the most difficult lessons to learn and practice as a disciple of Jesus Christ is that we need to keep troubling the teacher. And one of the greatest dangers of ministry is that we stop troubling the teacher. Jesus is always seeking those who are awakening to their hunger for him. But, we need to constantly approach Jesus, even pushing through our crowded lives, our fears, the skeptics – all the obstacles to drawing close to Jesus.

Jesus is so sensitive to anyone who desires to touch him that he can feel the Spirit-energy flow out of him. And, he looks all around to see who has

touched him. I believe Jesus is looking all around this crowded auditorium tonight looking for those who are pushing or jostling or hungering to touch him. “Who touched my robe?” Jesus asked. The disciples thought Jesus’ question was an expression of anger or frustration at the press of the crowd. But for Jesus, I believe, this was a question of invitation – “Who touched me?” Jesus was searching the crowd to find the one whose faith had overcome her fear.

“Who touched me?” That is the question Jesus stands ready to ask any one of us here this evening who comes seeking his healing, forgiving, redemptive and transforming presence in our lives. Who here tonight – show me your hands – is trying to get through the crowds or the obstacles in your life to come and touch Jesus? Would you like to push through the crowd tonight?

Candidates for commissioning and ordination, take a good look at the class of retirees. These are your forerunners in the faith. These are those who have prepared the way for you. These are the ones who have persevered and thrived in ministry. Do you know how they have done this? They have done so by troubling the teacher. They have turned to Jesus time and time and time again to touch the hem of his robe. They have sought Jesus’ life-giving Spirit-energy. They have pushed through the crowds; they have been on their knees before Jesus; they have overcome the temptation to rely on their own energy to fuel their ministry; they have pushed and jostled their way beyond the fear of change, the fear of the unknown, the fear of taking risks and placed their faith in Christ and Christ only.

So, candidates, do you know how to trouble the teacher? Do you know our unique Wesleyan model for troubling the teacher? We have been talking about this the past several days and weeks. It will be in the examination I will give you in a few minutes. How about the rest of you here tonight? Do you know our United Methodist Way of troubling the teacher?

As Christians in the Wesleyan tradition, we trouble the teacher by “attending upon all the ordinances of God.” Or, as Bishop Job has articulated in Three Simple Rules, by attending to those practices that keep us in love with God. We trouble the teacher when we worship God, go to the Lord’s Supper, maintain a regular schedule of private and family prayer, search the Scriptures, fast as essential, and participate in covenant community. Wesley saw that the consistent practice of these spiritual disciplines kept those who sought to follow Christ in touch with the resurrected presence and power of Christ, so they could fulfill their desire to live as faithful disciples.

Retirees, you are not retiring from your discipleship or your vocation or your call. Keep troubling the teacher. You know what to do! Keep up the faithful witness. We are inspired by and depend on your leadership.

Probationers, associate members and ordinands, as you come to kneel this evening and receive the laying on of hands, I invite you to come with a fearless faith.

- Come and trouble the teacher.

- Come and reach out to the power.
- Take authority to proclaim the stories of salvation and transformation.
- Take authority to live as servant leaders among God’s people.
- Take authority to honor the sacred moments and administer the sacraments.
- Take authority to minister to the poor and announce pardon to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind.
- And take authority to trouble the teacher, to call upon the teacher, to touch the teacher, to love the teacher every day.

This is the source of your power. This is the source of your light. This is the source of your authority. This is the source of your love.

As you come tonight and kneel to receive the laying on of hands, Jesus will be asking, “Who is reaching out to me? Who is seeking to touch me? Who seeks my Spirit-energy?” And your response will be, “It is I, Lord.”

In the name and spirit of Christ Jesus, may it be so in this holy moment and every day. Amen.

**Bishop Bruce R. Ough**

**Ohio West Area**