TRANSFERRING POWER
Scripture: Mark 5:21-43

FOCUS: God’s healing power is offered to each of us if we will but reach out and touch him and as we are healed we are called to become instruments of healing.

Distracted driving. It is a hot topic these days. On Thursday morning there was an alarming story on the morning news which highlighted the matter. A study commissioned by AT&T found that on any given day as many as one in 10 drivers could be video-chatting on their drive home. 61 percent of those interviewed admitted to [texting and driving](http://www.cbsnews.com/news/can-the-federal-government-help-stop-texting-and-driving/), a third to checking their email and 17 percent admitted to taking a steering-wheel selfie. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says distracted driving caused over 3,100 deaths in 2013. Research shows that drivers are about three times more likely to crash if they're dialing a number on the phone while driving and 23 times more likely texting and driving.

Twenty-two percent of the people surveyed who admitted accessing a social network while driving gave "addiction" as the reason. While most probably didn’t mean it literally, Dr. David Greenfield founder of the Center for Internet and Technology Addiction at the University of Connecticut says, concerning our obsession with digital media, "In essence, it's a drug, or what I call a digital drug," Whether or not we would call it an addiction, most of us will have to confess that digital media can certainly be a distraction in our live, and if we allow it to be that when we drive it is a dangerous, even potentially lethal distraction.

It isn’t just digital stuff which distracts. Perhaps you are hard at work on an important project, the phone rings and you are summoned to an unexpected meeting. Or a friend going through a difficult time drops in and asks if you have a few minutes to listen to their story while you are struggling to meet a deadline. A coworker peers into your cubicle and encourages you to take a break and go for a cup of coffee and a snack. It might be that as you try to focus on the task at hand you remember something you were supposed to do yesterday and feel compelled to stop and handle it. In fact as I was working on this sermon and writing these very words I remembered that I had failed to send Clairice the hymns for today and I stopped what I was doing and sent them to her. And while I was at it I checked the news headlines and since I had to open my email account to send the bulletin of course I checked my incoming mail. Maybe Dr. Greenfield was right about that addiction thing!

We discover in this morning’s text from the Gospel of Mark that not even Jesus was immune to intrusive distraction. He was about important business. Jarius, a leader of the synagogue, a mover and shaker in the Jerusalem hierarchy, had convinced Jesus to make a house. He pulled on Jesus’ heartstrings, fell at his feet in distress as he told of the devastating illness which had overtaken his beloved daughter. Moved and ready to bring wholeness to a troubled family Jesus was accompanying Jarius to his well-appointed home. On the way to do something good and worthy for an important religious and political figure Jesus is distracted by a nameless woman who intrudes on his mission. It is impossible to overstate the remarkable nature of both this woman’s gall and Jesus response.

She wasn’t supposed to be there but she was desperate, desperate for help, desperate for healing. But she wasn’t supposed to be there in the crowd sneaking through, trying to touch just the hem of his cloak. She knew better than to speak to him. Surely if she could just touch a hem, she would be healed. With the great crowd no one would be the wiser, he would never even know she had done it.

But she wasn’t supposed to be there and if she got found out she would be in deep trouble. Culture and custom said she wasn’t supposed to be there, social courtesy said she wasn’t supposed to be there, the law said she wasn’t supposed to be there. In Leviticus 15 we read, “If a woman has a flow of blood for several days she remains unclean as long as the flow continues, and for seven days after it stops. Anyone who touches her is unclean until evening. Anyone who touches anything she has touched will be unclean until evening.” This woman had been bleeding for twelve years. She has been ritually unclean for twelve years. For twelve years anyone she touches has been rendered ritually unclean until evening. If she touches someone, they are prohibited from having social contact with anyone else for the rest of the day. For twelve years she has been persona non grata. She was supposed to stay home and avoid all human contact, for twelve years. She wasn’t supposed to be out in public pushing her way through a crowd trying to touch Jesus or even the hem of his garment. She had plenty of reasons to be terrified and plenty of people to be terrified of, including Jesus, who she would be rendering unclean.

She pushed her way through the crowd, face hidden, name unknown, taking her chances, praying she would not be noticed. It was only a momentary opportunity. Jesus was in a hurry, it was obvious, and he was accompanied by one of status and power. This was no time to interrupt him, he was on a mission of mercy, dealing with an emergency. A precious little girl was dying and there was not a moment to lose. She was twelve years old. For twelve years she had been healthy and happy. For twelve years she had grown up as the precious daughter of one of the most important men in the town. For twelve years she had had everything, but now her life was hanging by a thread. This was no time to interrupt Jesus he had more important business to attend to, he had a little girl’s life to save. “If I can just touch the edge of his coat as he hurries past, surely that will be enough. Surely that will make me better.” She thought

So she did it. She pushed through the crowd and touched his cloak as he hurried by. And she immediately felt the bleeding stop. She had been right! She was healed. The disease was gone! No more feeling anemic and lethargic, no more hiding in the shadows, avoiding everyone She pulled a scarf around her face and slipped back into the crowd. She had what she’d come for and she was off, no harm done. No one had recognized her, no one knew who it was that had brushed against them She’d just melt back into the crowd and slip off home

Then he spoke, “Who touched my clothes?” Jesus had stopped, distracted by her bold move on his way to an emergency. Jairus is pulling on his arm, ***“Who cares who touched you, it could have been hundreds of people in this crowd, we have been bumping into people all day long. Come and save my daughter, quickly, before it’s too late.”*** Ignoring his powerful companion Jesus said again, “Who touched me?” She froze in fear. She’d been outed, busted. She meant no harm, she was desperate. She had been careful not to interrupt, not to get in the way, but now she was going to be exposed, now the game was up. She had plenty of reasons to be terrified. She wasn’t supposed to be there

She just knew she was done for, but there was nowhere to hide. He knew, somehow he knew and now she would be exposed, just as she was finally freed from the nightmare which had been hers for twelve long years she was exposed and facing a new kind of nightmare as she would certainly face devastating consequences for her audacity. She had transgressed both religious and civic law and there would be consequences once Jesus turned her over to the authorities. Out of the frying pan into the fire, or so it seemed.

Terrified and humiliated she confessed her boldness and crumpled at Jesus feet. And then the unthinkable happened. Jesus reached out his hand, ***“Daughter, you took a risk of faith and it has paid off for you. Welcome back to the world of the healthy! Shalom! May peace, health and happiness be yours, and may your illness be gone for good.”*** He didn’t shun her at all. Quite the opposite. She had been touched, for the first time in twelve years, by one who knew she was supposed to be untouchable. He had offered her a blessing, he had taken time to interact with her. And the way he greeted her. She had been invisible for twelve long years, avoided, required to shout out as she walked in public that she was unclean to insure that she had no contact with another, required to humiliate herself for the protection of others. But this remarkable man, the one she had turned to in faith when all else failed, called this woman who had been deemed a nobody by all the world, “daughter”. He didn’t just speak to her, and the fact that he said anything at all is remarkable for good Jewish men never spoke to women who were not their wives and rarely even spoke to wives in public, Jesus called her daughter, a term of endearment which implies connectedness, a designation which places her within the family, the family of God. For the first time in a very long time she was treated with respect, accepted, valued, acknowledged and given a blessing.

And all the while Jarius, that powerful, well respected and honored fellow is left standing there while Jesus allows himself to be distracted by one the leader of the synagogue almost certainly considered to be unworthy of any attention. Not only that, this was a woman who had broken all the rules, who had no right to take Jesus away from him. I can only imagine that father’s anger in the moment. I can certainly imagine how livid I would have been. Sure the woman had a situation, but my twelve year old daughter is on her deathbed, couldn’t you have dealt with this later Jesus, if you feel you must fool with such people?

Then comes the worst possible news. There was a commotion as a group of folks who were clearly known to Jarius rushed up and pulled him aside. ***“It is too late!”*** they said, ***“No need to bother Jesus any more. She is dead.”***  Interestingly, we have no account of the father’s reaction. It may be that he was stunned, unsure what to do next in that horrible moment. Jesus overheard the report and quickly addressed the situation. ***“She isn’t dead, she is just asleep.”*** We are privy to the reaction of the crowd when Jesus arrived and repeated his declaration that the girl was only sleeping. It is perhaps more crass would be ours, but I suspect our thoughts would have been similar. They laughed. I would hope I would have a bit more respect for the seriousness of the moment and would avoid chuckling at the comment, but I would be no less disbelieving.

Jesus took only the girl’s parents and the three disciples who had accompanied him up to her room. The gawkers, the skeptics, the curious were left outside. Jesus wasn’t interested in putting on a show. Jesus was never interested in putting on a show. He was only interested in one thing that day, restoring to wholeness one who was broken. Tenderly, with great compassion and grace Jesus took a dainty little hand in his and said simply, ***“Get up little girl.”*** And she did. As she began to walk around the room Jesus said ***“Get this child something to eat!”*** No victory lap, no fanfare, no scolding the critics, just concern for the welfare of a precious little child of God.

Two very different stories, two very different people. One, named Jarius, was powerful, wealthy, respected and had been on top of the world for the twelve years that his little girl had been the apple of his eye. The other was an unnamed woman, not the gender of powerful or honored folk in that day. She was impoverished, having spent all her resources visiting doctors and others who claimed to have healing powers, but to no avail. She was weak, most certainly anemic as her issue of blood had continued relentlessly for twelve years rendering her unclean, unwelcomed and to be avoided by all.

Two very different people, both touched by one powerful, compassionate and caring spirit. Jesus saw no difference in the two. He didn’t see a powerful man and a pitiful outcast woman. He saw two of God’s children in need, and he had compassion. Compassion for one who by all rights should have avoided him at all cost but came because she had faith that he could do what all the doctors had not be able to do. Compassion for one who felt his very authority and power were challenged by Jesus and the Gospel message but who, when faced with unimaginable heartache, somehow discerned that Jesus was who he said he was and that Jesus could bring healing to broken people, like his daughter.

These are powerful stories. They speak not only of the power of Jesus to heal but also of the willingness of Jesus to transfer power to broken people as he binds up broken lives. His power is available to all. But we must be willing to be plugged in to the source if we are to receive. Though they didn’t have much in common Jarius and the nameless woman did share a trait which enabled them both to find wholeness. Did you notice that they both fell at the feet of Jesus? When they felt they could not go on they fell at Jesus feet and, relying on him, had faith that he could bring wholeness where none other could.

Michael Lindvall, pastor of Brick Presbyterian church in New York tells of a dear friend of his, a man of deep faith, who was diagnosed with Parkinson’s in his fifties. The man and his wife prayed faithfully for his healing. Twenty years after being diagnosed, in the last stages of the disease the man told Lindvall that his prayers had been answered. “I have been healed, not of Parkinson’s disease, but I have been healed of my fear of Parkinson’s disease” he said.

What an example of what it means to receive a true transfer of power from Christ. For a woman struck with a debilitating disease healing was physical. For that twelve year old girl death was overcome. For that New Yorker the disease was not lifted and death was not avoided yet all three were healed because all three fell at Jesus’ feet and allowed him to bind them up in the way he alone knew to be the best. And we too can be assured that if we fall at his feet and allow ourselves to be plugged into the power of his Spirit we will be bound up as well.

Distractions. We all have them and we all need to be aware of them. Some, like texting and driving, definitely need to be overcome, put aside. But others, like being alert to human need even when we are busy, like being compassionate, even when we are in a hurry, like allowing others to occupy our time when we really don’t think we have it, like serving those who reach out to touch us when we just want to be left alone, distractions like these call for us to open our hearts and to respond as Jesus did.

We are called to avoid being distracted like a teenager addicted to social media, by those things which tempt us to be focused on ourselves. But, like Jesus, it is our calling to be ever ready to respond to those distractions which arise as we are confronted by broken lives. And when we are, we can be assured that power enough is available to us through the Spirit of Christ to see us on our way.

For your sake, for the sake a world filled with broken lives, and for the sake of the kingdom of the one who can make them whole, let it be so. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN.