

HOMILY
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A business executive became depressed. Things were not going well at work and he was bringing his problems home with him every night. Every evening he would eat his dinner in silence, shutting out his wife and five-year-old daughter. Then he would go into the family room and read the *The Journal*, using the paper to wall his family out of his life.

After several nights of this, one evening his daughter took her little hand and pushed the newspaper down. She then jumped into her father's lap, wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him strongly. The father said abruptly, "Honey, you're hugging me to death!" "No, Daddy," the little girl said, "I'm hugging you to life!"

This was the greatness of Jesus. He took people where they were and hugged them to life. That is precisely what we see Jesus doing here in today's gospel story. He is loving needy and hurting people, bringing them to life. With our own ears we hear how two vastly different people are loved into life by Our Lord. Jesus loves the down-and-out hemorrhaging woman and the twelve-year-old daughter of the upper crust Jairus and brings them to life.

There are many beautiful lessons here in these two stories of healing. We could go off in any number of directions, but for this moment, let's look closely at the power of love and the amazing incredible things that love can accomplish when it is given and when it is received.

First, love has the power to heal.

Scientific research is now confirming what many of us have suspected all along—love plays a big part in the healing of a hurting body. Love has the power to heal physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The Menninger Institute in Topeka, Kansas, once had a fascinating experiment. They identified a group of crib babies who did not cry. Let me explain, it seems that babies cry because they instinctively know that this is the way to get attention.

Crying is their way of calling out. These babies, however, had been in abusive situations. Their parents let them cry for hours on end and never responded. Do you know what happened? The babies eventually quit crying. It is almost as if they had learned it was not worth trying. So the Menninger Institute came in for an experiment. They got some people from retirement and nursing homes and everyday these people held these babies and rocked them. The object was to get these babies to start crying again. And, you know, it worked. Physical touch can make a difference.

As important as physical touch is, there is another kind of touch that is even more important. It is spiritual touch. This is that special touch that influences and impacts the lives of people. Jesus reaches out to the hemorrhaging woman and the daughter of Jairus—love has the power to heal.

Second, love has the power to reconcile.

There's a story told about two identical twin brothers who never married because they enjoyed each other's company so much. When their father died, they took over his store and ran it together. But one day a man came in to make a small purchase and paid for it with a dollar. The brother who made the sale placed the dollar on top of the cash register and walked the customer to the door to say goodbye. When he returned, the dollar bill was gone. He said to his twin brother, "Did you take the dollar bill I left here?" "No, I didn't," answered the brother. "Surely you took it. There was nobody else in the store." The brother became angry. "I'm telling you I did not take the dollar bill!"

From that point suspicion and mistrust grew until the two brothers could no longer work together. They put a partition right down the middle of the building and made it into two stores. In anger, they refused to speak for the next twenty years.

One day, a stranger pulled up in a car and entered one of the two stores. "Have you been in business very long here?" "Yes, thirty or forty years," was the answer. "I need to tell you something. Some twenty years ago I passed through this town. I was out of work and homeless. I jumped off a boxcar. I had no money and I had not eaten for days. I came down that alley outside and when I looked into your store window, I saw a dollar bill on your cash register. I slipped in and took it.

“Recently, I became a Christian. I was converted and accepted Christ as my personal savior. I know now it was wrong to steal that dollar bill and I have come to pay you back with interest and to beg your forgiveness.”

When the stranger finished his confession, the old storekeeper began to weep. Would you do me a favor? Would you please come next door and tell that story to my brother. With the second telling, the two brothers were reconciled with many hugs and apologies and tears. Twenty years of hurt and a broken relationship based not on fact but on mistrust and misunderstanding. But then healing came because of that stranger’s love for Christ. The point is clear: Love has the power to heal; love has the power to reconcile.

Third, and finally, love has the power to redeem.

There is a beautiful story about Zaccheus, the tax collector. It tells how, in later years, he rose early every morning and left his house. His wife, curious, followed him one morning. At the town well he filled a bucket and he walked until he came to the sycamore tree—the very one where he met Jesus and his life radically changed. There, setting down the bucket, he began to clean away the stones and the rubbish from around the base of the tree. Having done that, he poured water on the roots and stood there in silence gently caressing the trunk with both of his hands. When his amazed wife came out of hiding and asked what he was doing, Zaccheus simply replied, “This is where I found Christ.”

I can just imagine that for the rest of their lives, that woman who touched the hem of Jesus’ robe that day on the street and the daughter of Jairus who was raised up in that room in her home continually brought people back to those sacred spots and said, “This is where I found Jesus.”

Do you have a sacred spot like that? Come to Jesus. Reach out to Jesus. Remember, Jesus wants to love every one of us into life!