

“The Finishing Touch”

LUKE 5:12-13 CEV JESUS came to a town where there was a man who had leprosy. When the man saw Jesus, he knelt down to the ground in front of Jesus and begged, "Lord, you have the power to make me well, if only you wanted to."¹³ Jesus put his hand on him and said, "I want to! Now you are well." At once the man's leprosy disappeared.

LUKE 8:43-48 CEV IN the crowd was a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. She had spent everything she had on doctors, but none of them could make her well.⁴⁴ As soon as she came up behind Jesus and barely touched his

clothes, her bleeding stopped.⁴⁵ "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. While everyone was denying it, Peter said, "Master, people are crowding all around and pushing you from every side."⁴⁶ But Jesus answered, "Someone touched me, because I felt power going out from me."⁴⁷ The woman knew that she could not hide, so she came trembling and knelt down in front of Jesus. She told everyone why she had touched him and that she had been healed right away.⁴⁸ Jesus said to the woman, "You are now well because of your faith. May God give you peace!"

The great Polish concert pianist, Ignace Paderewski, was scheduled to perform at a great concert hall in the mid-west. It was a black-tie affair--a high-society extravaganza. In the audience that evening was a nine-year-old boy, brought by his mother in the hope that he would be inspired to practice the piano, himself, if he could just hear the great Paderewski perform.

Well, the boy was getting weary of waiting for the concert to begin; after all, he was there against his wishes in the first place. His shirt collar was too tight, and his tuxedo was too hot, and, besides, he'd rather be home playing baseball with his friends. So he was squirming restlessly in his seat. When his mother turned to talk with friends, he slipped out of his seat and down the aisle, strangely drawn to the beautiful ebony concert grand sitting majestically at the center of the huge stage. In the pre-concert hubbub, nobody noticed as he walked up the steps and across the stage. Nobody noticed as he circled the magnificent instrument, admiring its mirror polish. Nobody noticed as he sat down on the tufted leather bench, placed his small hands on the keys. But everybody noticed when he began to play "Chop Sticks".

The crowd hushed, first in shocked disbelief, then in indignation. Irritated and embarrassed, some began to shout, "Hey, get that boy away from there!" "Where's his mother?" "Somebody stop him!"

Backstage, Paderewski heard the commotion and came out of his dressing room. When he saw what was happening, he hurried to the stage, still in his dressing gown, and, without a word to the audience, walked up behind the lad, reached around either side of him, and began to improvise a countermelody with his right hand, and an accompaniment with his left. As the two made music together, the master kept whispering in the boy's ear, "Keep going. Don't quit. Keep on playing."

And then, there they were: the nine-year-old and the concert master, taking bows together, receiving applause from the same crowd that only moments before

was jeering indignantly.

Sometimes we hammer away at life, and everything comes out sounding like "Chop Sticks". (*Some of you are saying, I can't even play "Chop Sticks"!*) Wouldn't it be great, sometimes, to feel somebody walk up behind and reach around to add a finishing touch to our "Chop-Sticks" life? Wouldn't it be great to hear a believable voice, whispering in our ear: "Don't give up. Don't quit. Keep on going?"

We're pretty good at beginning things. How many diets are started every New Year's? I went to the gym the first Monday after New Year's Day, and the parking lot was packed. Three weeks later it was back to normal. We're pretty good at starting. What we don't hear much about is finishing: sticking with something 'til it's done; hanging tough when the excitement ebbs and the fun fades; being just as committed eight minutes into the fourth quarter as at the kickoff, when fatigue sets in, and the going is tough, and all that keeps us going is discipline and conditioning and guts.

There *are* times when reality demands that we accept defeat. Sometimes the plug has to be pulled, because life is over. No matter how hard we work, some endeavors are just 'lost causes.' But too many in our generation toy dangerously with a mentality that says, "I'm tired, let's just quit." Dieting requires discipline, so most Americans are overweight. Finishing school's a hassle, so too many drop out. Working through marital problems is often a painful struggle, so far too many just give up.

The "let's just quit" mentality is upon us. We need to hear a voice in our ear whispering, "Don't quit." "You can do it." "Don't give up." We need a finishing touch that will embrace our lives—that will take our feeble, "chop-sticks" efforts, and make them sound like a concert masterpiece.

Lots of voices promise they can do that for us. Walk through the "self-help" section of any good book store, and read the titles. From pop-psychology to "New Age" theology—they promise everything from flatter abs to fatter bank accounts. They promise a healthier marriage, a stronger self-image and inner peace. And some of them work—for some people—for a while. Most of us need a finishing touch.

In our texts this morning two people sought that finishing touch, and found it when they reached out to Jesus. In the second story, the woman is the one who did the touching. And Jesus said to her, "It was your faith that made you well." It was something you already had within you. You just activated it.

In the first story the man said to Jesus, "If you want to, you can heal me." It's never really a question of "whether" Jesus wants to add that finishing touch to our lives. It's never Jesus who holds back.

Listen to the words of the Master, recorded in Paul's letter to Philippi: "*...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*" (PHILIPPIANS 1:6 NIV)

"The Touch of the Master's Hand."

*Well, it was battered and scarred, and the auctioneer felt
it was hardly worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
but he held it up with a smile.
"It sure ain't much, but it's all we got left.
I guess we oughta' sell it, too.
Now who'll start the bid on this old violin?
Just one more, then we'll be through.*

*Then He cried,
"One, give me one dollar, who'll give me two dollars?
Only two dollars, who'll make it three?
Three dollars twice (now that's a good price),
But who's got a bid for me?
Just raise your hand and don't wait any longer,
The auction's about to end.
Who's got four, just one dollar more
To bid on this old violin.*

*Well the air was hot, and the people stood around,
As the sun was setting low.
From the back of the crowd a gray-haired man
came forward and picked up the bow.
He wiped the dust from the old violin, and
tightened up the strings;*

*Then he played out a melody pure and sweet;
as sweet as an angel sings.
Then the music stopped, and the auctioneer,
with a voice that was quiet and low,
Said, "What am I bid for this old violin?"
Then he held it up, with the bow.*

*And then he cried:
"One, give me one thousand, who'll give me two thousand?
Only two thousand, who'll make it three?
Three thousand twice (now, that's a good price)
But who's got a bid for me?
Then the people cried out, "What made the change?
We don't understand!"
Then the auctioneer stopped, and he said with a smile,*

"It was the touch of the master's hand."

*And there's many a man with his life out of tune,
who is battered and scarred with sin,
And he's auctioned cheap to a thankless world,
Much like the old violin,
Then the Master comes, and the foolish crowd,
They never understand
The worth of a soul, and the change that's wrought
By the touch of the Master's hand.*

One more thing: we have a tendency to want that "Touch of the Master's Hand" to be a one-and-done thing. Anyone who ever has played an instrument knows that when that "grey-haired man from the back of the room ... wiped the dust from the old violin and tightened up the strings," that tuning was not a "one-and-done" thing. Anyone who has ever played an instrument knows that it has to be tuned frequently. A stringed instrument has to be tuned every time it's played—and several times during an extended practice session or concert.

"The Touch of the Master's Hand" is something we need daily, and sometimes hourly, if we are to become instruments in the Master's hands.