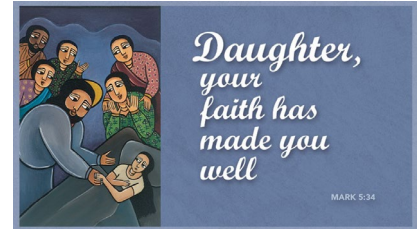


Pastor John Kepler
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 Mark 5:25-34



Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from Almighty God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The woman in this gospel story fascinates me. I am drawn to her; I would like to have known her; I would like to have been able to be with her and listen to her story. She is so real, so human. I think she would have much to teach us about a life enduring the most difficult of circumstances.

For twelve years she had been suffering and the nature of her ailment would have been the talk of the town because, sorry to say, even the most private of situations became public domain. She was labeled an unclean person. Even though her condition was seemingly a personal matter, the word would have gotten out.

The same thing happens today. Because of the labels it puts on people, I get nervous about how much we share about others in the name of "being concerned" or prayer. How many times has someone been pointed out a chronic fault or challenge in another but, we're told, "It's not for public knowledge?" Then why share it in the first place? It amazes me today how much some people share about themselves and others on social media.

The Biblical basis for her being unclean comes from the book of Leviticus and might seem primitive and harsh by today's standards. Social contact and even worship would have been a hardship simply because she was to be shunned...and she was to avoid others: out of sight, out of mind. It's difficult for us to understand this in today's world.

Or is it? Is it hard for us to understand that her situation had been long-standing and socially debilitating? We just might be more like them than we care to admit, and their first-century response might not have been as primitive as we think.

For instance, mental illness. People who struggle with it sometimes get labeled and terribly misunderstood. They perhaps feel unclean in a situation over which they might have little control...and if others find out about it, they sometimes begin to read into his/her life all kinds of prejudicial things, making the person to be a little "odd."

So, this woman in our text is not isolated to the first century. She is a living, breathing reminder to us all that there are people all around us who have been struggling with life, who have tried over and over to correct things but may be at their wits' end. My hunch is that most of us have had moments like this.

We might have thrown our prayers to the Lord, tried to remedy our situation through any means. Or maybe we have given up on God as just being completely irrelevant.

Perhaps this woman is a picture of our society, indeed our own lives. We will try just about anything to make our lives happy and right these days. We are a society of seekers whether it be personal fulfillment, happiness, wealth, or security.

I think what we are often seeking is some sense of wholeness, completeness, a sense that things can be right with our lives...and what we know, or at least suspect, is that it lies outside ourselves. As the Bible says, "...she had been under the care of many doctors..."

We all have those things with which we wrestle, seeking some way that we can have peace and fulfillment. It may be over family concerns, or jobs, or relationships that have been strained for years.

This woman is quietly reaching out, like many of us, in the hope that she can be made whole, have peace in her life. Our text tells us that, "She had heard about Jesus....." What had she heard? It's pretty much guess work but consider this: she obviously knew that He had some power.

Word of mouth was the e-mail, text messaging, twitter of the day, so as this large crowd was gathered so were words about Jesus.

If she could just touch even his clothes she might be healed. Indeed, to touch the holy things of life is to be placed in the presence of something powerful. I remember stooping beside an ancient, reputed holy well in the countryside of Ireland. During the days when Catholicism was banned and priests were arrested and executed, this remote, secretive site was where Catholic faithful would gather for Mass.

As I dipped my hands in the cold water and touched it to my lips I must say a strange sensation went through my body, something outside myself.

When a person brings his or her faith into contact with the sacred, something is going to happen. It may not be something spectacular, such as this physical healing, but something will happen. As one writer shared, "If God doesn't seem to be giving you what you ask, maybe he's giving you something else." (Frederick Buechner)

This woman's faith had been torn, worn, and scorned for twelve years. How many prayers of desperation have been uttered by and for folks like this? It's a wonder she had any faith left at all.

Is it helping us to deal with the struggles of seemingly unanswered prayer with all those pat phrases that hold truth, but are so terribly misused? "Prayer works," ...when I get what I want, or "All things work together for good," it's easier to see that ten years from now, or "Everything is God's will and is according to His purposes," think about that for a moment...really? Can you hear those words being told to this woman over twelve years?

There are people whose idea of faith is a bravado that covers up the real hurts, pains, confusion, and even doubts of others. I really believe this kind of faith is sometimes an effort to conceal one's own fears, a denial of realities. Everyone else is a spiritual second-class citizen. These are people who, I think, are afraid to admit that there are always cracks in the sidewalks of life.

I prefer the faith of this woman who was able to have a shred of hope to dare to reach out and just touch Jesus' clothes. It is a frail, tried, almost hesitant faith. It is a quiet faith.

What faith are you bringing into this sanctuary this morning? Is it a faith that has served you well over the years with all the peaks and valleys of living life? Is it a faith that has been worn down because life has been hard or because it has become more of a Sunday habit than a reality for living life? Or a faith that has been tried by some sudden challenge that alters your life?

Is your faith tentative, you're just not quite sure if you can let go and believe and hope in much of anything? Do you feel that your faith is small, so small that it is seemingly insignificant?

Remember, there is no such a thing as a faith-less person in this world. We all place our faith somewhere, in someone or something. It could be our checkbook, our family, or a light switch.

I think many of us are more like this woman: we are seekers for someone who can make us whole. Perhaps we have not had her trauma, but we know our lives need to touch something outside ourselves to be drawn toward wholeness.

So, let me repeat: When a person brings his or her faith into contact with the holy, no matter how quiet that faith may seem to be, something is going to happen. This morning, I invite you to bring what you have in the way of faith into this room. For it could very well be that in the quiet a most significant whisper is heard: the healing touch of Jesus.

You may not "feel" a thing..."feelings" are vastly overrated in our society...but something is happening. Jesus Christ will know that some power has gone forth from him and he'll be asking you and me, "Who touched me?"

Hudson Taylor was truly one of the great missionary giants of the 19th-20th centuries bringing the Christian faith to China. In 1900, he returned to London from China suffering a mental and physical breakdown. To top it off, word reached him that 58 of his fellow missionaries and 21 children had been massacred in the Boxer Rebellion. Devastating.

He admitted to his wife, "I cannot read; I cannot think; I cannot even pray; but *I can trust.*" It was the story of this woman being repeated over and over centuries later.

It is interesting to me that Jesus says, "*Your* faith has made you well." We always need to be careful on this one because it is all too easy to place the emphasis in the wrong place. I don't think Jesus was identifying the quality or quantity of this woman's faith...her faith simply was all she had left and she reached out to the Lord with it. That small, quiet faith was sufficient.

It is the object of her faith wherein lies the power: the Holy Son of God, Jesus Christ. It is the unclean to which Jesus came to cleanse. It is the hopeless to which Jesus came to give hope. It is the broken that He came to mend. It is the wanderer that He came to give a home, indeed a Kingdom.

This morning, walk in the life of this woman, become this woman, for in a sense each of us already is her...and hear the words of Jesus, "Daughter/Son your faith has made you well....go in peace and be healed." It need not be a flamboyant, spectacular moment. But it's even a quiet act with a quiet faith that can change lives. AMEN.