

REFLECTIONS



THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 5:21-34

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.” So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

“You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’” But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

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TOUCHED BY FAITH

by

Norm Wright

The story of this anonymous woman who touched Jesus's garment and was healed is found in the gospels of both Mark and Luke. It occurs shortly after Jairus' desperate plea for Jesus to put his healing hands on his dying daughter, as Jesus was heading to Jairus' house to do so. While we don't know exactly what this anonymous woman's bleeding condition was, her way of handling it in this situation strongly suggests it was an ongoing menstrual condition that Leviticus 15 addresses. It would explain why she saw a need to sneak up on Jesus to touch his cloak from behind.

Asking Jesus in public to heal her would have risked revealing a condition that would have exposed her as being in a perpetual state of uncleanness. It would have placed both Jesus and her in an awkward position which, in her mind, would have risked her being turned away by Jesus.

While Jairus could ask Jesus to place his hand on his young daughter because bleeding wasn't an issue, Jesus laying his healing hands on this woman would have made Jesus unclean until evening; basically putting Jesus out of commission for the day. It would have also put Jairus and his daughter in a hopeless position. If Jesus would have physically touched her or she inadvertently touched his skin, he would have been considered unclean and Jairus, being the leader of the synagogue, would have felt compelled to follow the law. Suddenly this healing story is filled with nuanced complexity.

We know from other healing stories, Jesus was capable of simply healing someone by telling a person he or she was healed, but this suffering woman had no way of knowing that. She was going on what she heard Jairus ask Jesus. "If you put your healing hands on my daughter, she will be healed." Understandably, she likely thought being touched by Jesus was a necessary factor in being healed by him.

Her approach to Jesus, however, reveals her to be an astute biblical scholar, because she saw a possible way out of her dilemma. While Jesus couldn't touch her or her clothes or anything she sat on, the law was silent about a woman touching a man's clothing and maybe, just maybe, touching Jesus's cloak would be enough to be healed, such was her faith. So in the press of the crowd surrounding Jesus she sees an opportunity to reach out and touch the back of his cloak. In doing so, she is healed. At the same time, Jesus feels healing go out of him; that someone had been healed and so he asks, "Who touched my clothes?" In response, his disciples say, "Who hasn't touched your clothes in this crowd? We're all being touched."

If the disciples were amazed by Jesus' question, the woman felt caught, exposed, and filled with fear because of it. She immediately confesses she touched him and tells him everything, to which Jesus says, "Daughter your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from suffering."

This humble woman was a person of deep faith; a faith that sustained her hope, a faith that prompted her to act from love, and a faith that led her to find a way. Faith kept hope alive in her. Faith and hope was all she had left, after trying everything she could to find a cure. She lost her savings and her livelihood, but she didn't lose her faith, and she didn't lose hope.

When hope came to her in the person of Jesus, she didn't think only of herself. As desperate as the stakes were for her and seeing that particular moment as the one and perhaps only opportunity to change her life around, she wasn't thinking only about herself. Selfishness on her part, at that moment, risked harming not only herself, but also Jesus, Jairus, and his daughter. She didn't want to risk harming others. She exhibited a love of neighbor and with the eyes of faith she found a way.

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Have you noticed, how often the people Jesus healed and who exhibited the deepest faith are never named; like the woman in today's reading from Mark or the Roman Centurion who sought healing for his slave, the Samaritan leper, the blind man from his birth, or the paralyzed man lowered through a roof by his loving faithful relatives and friends? We don't know their names, but we recognize their faith. Faith is not about who we are but about how we trust and in whom we put our trust.

Faith is always an action. Faith in Christ always makes room for hope and love. Faith is important to our health and well-being, not merely as Christians but as human beings. Faith needs to be exercised, and it often is when we are faced with things beyond our control; situations that place us in a some sort of dilemma or predicament, the proverbial locale of finding oneself between a rock and hard place.

Faith makes us alert to what is going on in our lives. Faith becomes an exercise in patience when there is no clear path ahead. Faith never gives up; always seeking a path forward, and when one appears, faith prompts us to take it and act upon it, like this woman.

As we were reminded several Sundays ago in an excellent homily by Liz, we are a family of faith. We need to keep that in mind moving forward. We need to keep putting our trust in God and in each other to continue the redemptive and healing work of Jesus in our time.

We have spent almost four full years searching for priest and getting by with what we have. We lived through most of 2020 and the early part of this year having no services, and yet, here we are back in our church home. It has not been easy and when our options and a quick path forward seemed to dim early in our search process, we grew patient in faith, and faith found a way that led us seekers to find another seeker in Fr. Mike. Faith finds a way if we keep it and are willing to be patient; if we are willing to let go and let God show us the way.

Amen