

Sunday June 30th, 2024
Canada Day Weekend

Mark 5:21-43
“There is Always Hope”

I read a story about a minister who became quite ill. His illness kept him away from his duties, including preaching a couple of Sundays and the monthly board meeting. The morning after the board meeting the chairperson called the pastor to bring him up to speed on the meeting and to ask how he was fairing. Suddenly the chairpersons said, “Oh I forgot to tell you that the board had a vote to decide if we should pray for you to get better. The vote passed 5 to 4.”

Surely, one of the experiences that all humans face is being sick. Whether it is the flu or cold or something more serious we can all conclude that sickness is the Great Interrupter of life. Sickness enters without knocking, thwarting all plans, mocking the idea of certainty, and is serious enough, diminishing hope for the future. It intrudes like a burglar in our home, touching every part of life. Sickness in one person influences others in our homes, places of work and even here in the church.

Whenever we are ill, we will do just about anything to feel better. The cold and flu aisle at any pharmacy is usually a busy one in the winter months. When you are ill you soon lose interest in everything else to find ways to ease pain, or other discomforts. When the illness is life threatening or life altering, it becomes the central focus of our lives. Everything in our lives takes a back seat to feeling better or being cured.

Such an interruption by illness occurred to a woman in Jesus’ time. Portrayed beautifully in the Chosen series. Her encounter with Jesus is told in Mark 5. The incident takes place on a city street. It is a narrow-twisted street packed with a crowd of excited people. Unlike the malls at Christmas, people were moving past bazaars and stores with noise and confusion. The crowd is there not to purchase gifts, but to catch a glimpse of the one named Jesus.

Jesus walks like a king, wading through the mob. The common people speak of Jesus with deep affection. The beggars whisper His name softly. The children may be heard singing about Him. Yet, most important to today’s scripture lesson is that Jesus known to the diseased. Jesus has been healing people, some of whom were very sick. His fame has trickled down to the streets of forgotten men and women. Who is this renowned healer? He is Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus’ journey through the crowd began at the request of one named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue. The ruler of a synagogue was not a rabbi but rather more like an administrator, but still someone greatly respected. Jesus is on His way to restore to complete health Jairus’ dying daughter. He is on a mission of restoration, and the crowd is following Him to see Him perform this miracle. Opinion is divided. There is argument and discussion. Some are declaring He can do it; others are doubtful.

Jesus’ walk is interrupted by a very sick woman. Her face is marred with lines of agony. Her body is racked with pain. Who is she? Tradition gives her various names, but I cannot tell you who she was. It does not matter. It is enough that she was a woman in pain. She is typical of countless cases of endless pain and suffering. For twelve years she had suffered, and twelve years is a long time.

What does she want from Jesus. She wants relief. Restoration. Health. Life. She hopes Jesus can heal her as she has heard he has healed others. She had every reason to want to be healed. Her sickness, like any sickness, had a profound effect on her. She felt the losses caused by her illness every day. In sickness, as in any battle, there are losses, even for the victor. The pain and uncertainty of illness usually amplify the sense of loss experienced by the victim.

Among the most common feelings of loss are: 1. Loss of control. Suddenly the body, rather than obeying you, has its own agenda and behaves any way it pleases. It's like driving a car on an icy highway. Suddenly your car hits an ice slick, and you are out of control. Hit the brakes, twist the steering wheel — nothing helps. All you can do is hang on and wait for the crash. It is a sickening, helpless feeling. This was the embarrassing condition of the woman. She "had been subject to bleeding for twelve years" (Mark 5:25). Her body was out of control.

2. Loss of identity. Sick people become defined by their illness. Isn't it interesting that the lady in the story is not called by name. Simply, "A woman was there who had been subject to bleeding." The same is true today. We speak of certain people and say, "She has cancer," "He has AIDS," or "She suffers from manic depression." Sick people lose their identity in their sickness. One is no longer the person they were; they are the person who has an illness, who is disfigured, who endures chronic pain, who is dying.

3. Loss of certainty. With a chronic illness everything becomes contingent upon the condition. Vacations are contingent upon the body. One will go to work if the sickness allows. Even getting up in the morning is stipulated by the sickness. What was once predictable is now provisional.

4. Loss of place in society. When sick, losses go beyond the body. Sickness often puts a strain on relationships, on jobs, on hobbies, on families. The sick person feels a better fit in the hospital with other sick people, but not in the healthy world. They don't fit in. This was certainly the case for this poor woman declared ritually unclean. Unable to socialize, or go to the synagogue, get married or any of the things that would have brought meaning to her.

5. Loss of resources. The older woman in the story "had spent all she had" (Mark 5:26). She was financially bankrupt, emotionally spent, and physically weak. She reminds us that vast fortunes of time, energy, and money can be squandered to bring healing.

6. Loss of hope. Perhaps the most chilling aspect of this lady's life was that she had tried everything "yet instead of getting better she grew worse" (Mark 5:26). She was beyond human help and hope. She was at her wit's end. As a last resort, she comes to Jesus hoping against hope that He could heal her. She was desperate enough to try anything.

Sickness makes us do some strange things, doesn't it? Pain can make us desperate. Not satisfied with conventional treatment, the sick may seek alternative treatments unendorsed by traditional medicine. Some alternatives may prove valid, even miraculous. Others may flirt with quackery, but at least they are something to do and to try.

The older woman in the story was desperate. She was willing to try anything to bring healing to her body. She had heard about Jesus. A healer. Strangely, something awakens in her heart.

Resolution gradually builds in her mind. I must find Him. I must go to Him. He can heal me! Her resolution now emerges as faith. So “she came up behind Him in the crowd and touched His cloak” (Mark 5:27). It is really that she touched the fringe or prayer fringe hanging from his cloak. Like a frightened, whipped puppy edging toward a bone, she wishes to steal a blessing and remain anonymous. All she wants to do is to touch His garment and depart.

She thinks to herself “If I just touch His clothes, I will be healed” (Mark 5:28). Can you imagine her nervous reasoning? Touch Him ... yes ... just to touch Him — there would be no harm in that! On the head? — no, that would be irreverent! On the hand? — no, that would be too familiar! But there cannot be any harm in touching His robes as He passes. It would be enough — just to touch the hem of His robes. If I just touch Him. If I get some of that power.

If? Stop for a moment to consider the magnitude of that little conjunction. That’s the issue, isn’t it? This woman believes in Jesus’ power. She knows in her heart that Jesus can pull off a healing. Or, at least, she is desperate enough to give it a try. She squeezes through the crowd, despite the cultural prohibitions against brushing up against people. She reaches out to touch His garment, and slinks back into the crowd. It is a daring move. She, in one moment, displays both faith and fear. While others bump into Jesus, she reaches out and touches Him.

There is a significance difference here being described. In a crowd, incidental bumping among people, was expected. We all know what accidental or incidental contact with people is like. But this woman’s contact was not incidental. It was driven by faith, and by intent. She made the effort to touch his garment hem.

What does this say to us? When we are so desperate and so dead that we know we have nothing left to lose, we can risk being brave and reach out to Jesus. As instantaneously as the women touched Jesus, He sensed that healing power had gone out of Him. No one else noticed her — only Jesus. He turned around to see who had touched Him, who had just been healed and why. He asks, “Who touched my clothes?” (Mark 5:30).

He looks for her, but she does not wait to be found. Once again, as in the initial healing, she comes forward on her own and presents herself to Jesus. Jesus says to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering” (Mark 5:34). Jesus calls her daughter. She had been a daughter of death; now she is a daughter of life. In an instant, her body regains control, she is granted a new identity, she now has a certain future, she regains her place in society, she is restored to wholeness, and she discovers hope. In an instant, Jesus heals her sickness, eases her suffering, grants her freedom, and saves her soul.

That is the record. These are the facts. It is a matter of history. That is the miracle. Jesus heals a woman who had a bleeding problem. What a miracle it was! The only miracle recorded in scripture where no word was spoken, or action displayed by Jesus. Is there another miracle lurking here? Notice she did not meet Jesus in a house of worship. Where did she meet Jesus? She met Him on the street.

She had no private audience with the Lord. She touched Him in a crowd.

She touched Him in faith — in desperate believing faith and He stopped. That is the miracle I don't want you to miss. The touch of one anonymous woman in a crowd halted the Lord of glory. That is the glorious message of this miracle. She touched Him. And so can we. The other miracle is that the human touch has the power to arrest God. Yes, to stop Him, to halt Him, to make Him aware of your problems, your petition.

We need to touch Him. Most of us are thronging Him — just like the crowd. It is easy to throng the Lord and never touch Him. A great many people in the church, and perhaps a great many outside the church, are thronging Jesus but not trusting Him; seeking Him but not being found by Him; coming close to Him but never actually touching Him. Coming close to Jesus is not enough. It is like missing a train. You may miss it by one minute and that's close, but you have missed the train. It is gone, and you are left behind.

Thronging, following the crowd, saves nobody. Coming near to Jesus will not bring healing. We must touch Him for ourselves. How can I touch Christ? It is one thing for that woman long ago, but how can I touch Him today.

Well, let me suggest a few ways you can touch Jesus.

1. Give God a chance. Take your problem, whatever it may be, to Him in prayer. Tell Him about it — just as if He did not know a thing. Hold nothing back. Dare to be honest.
2. Believe that God will hear you. Remember that He heard the poor woman who only touched the hem of His garment. Believe with all your faith that He cares what happens to you. You must believe that. You can't doubt how much he loves you when you look at the cross.
3. Be willing to wait patiently for the Lord. He does not answer every prayer on Sunday afternoon. You may have to wait until Friday. But wait. God is never in a hurry. The person who waits on God loses no time.
4. Recognize when he is in your presence. When he is drawing a crowd or working a miracle. Reach out and touch Him. It is one thing to throng the Lord and quite another to trust Him. Many people bump into Jesus, but few reach out and touch Him. In faith, reach out as He passes by.
5. When He speaks to you, do what He tells you. He may not tell you audibly. You may not hear His voice, you will not see writing in the sky, but generally through your own conscience or through trusted counsel of friends He will indicate a course of action. When He lets you know what you must do, do it.

The message of this miracle is that one woman, at the end of her rope, had the courage to step out of normal procedures to find healing and hope. She touched the Lord of the Universe. And He stopped for her. He will stop for you, too. Don't miss that miracle.