

Mark 5:25-34

²⁵Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸for she said, ‘If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.’ ²⁹Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

³⁰Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my clothes?’ ³¹And his disciples said to him, ‘You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, “Who touched me?”’ ³²He looked all round to see who had done it.

³³But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’

Our National Conscience

In honor of the upcoming 4th of July holiday I did some reading on American history. **I’m a patriot.** I’m very proud to be an American. And progress in this nation has always been prompted by patriots, from the first patriots back in the 1700s who were willing to fight and die for what Abraham Lincoln described as *government of the people, by the people, and for the people* - to the patriots today who advocate for liberty and justice, which means speaking up when people are denied liberty and justice. As one people we understand that injustice to one is injustice to all. And we have a proud history of advocacy – we stood up against the king of England when we were treated as second-class citizens, we fought a very bloody civil war over the right of *all* people to be free from slavery, we passed laws to ensure that all adults regardless of race or gender would have the right to vote for their representatives and be allowed to enter businesses freely. Our penchant for fairness may be due to the fact that we are descendents of the marginalized; so many of our ancestors came to this land to escape persecution elsewhere. And so it’s in our blood to stand up to dictators, to deplore the mistreatment of others whether it occurs in our own country or abroad.

Our Christian heritage, too, connects us with the marginalized; we are children of Israel, familiar with slavery in Egypt, and our God tells us to **“love the foreigner, for you too were foreigners in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10:19)**. Jesus gets critiqued by the religious leaders because he’s hanging out with the sinners, he’s actually *touching* the lepers, and *talking to women in public*. He tells the good Jews a parable about the good Samaritan, the despised foreigner. Yes, our Christian heritage too connects us with the despised and the downtrodden. We love the underdog like God loves the underdog.

And it’s our American sensitivity to the plight of the marginalized that has drawn and continues to draw people into our country, whether legally or not; people have faith that the United States is not only a place of economic opportunity but also a place where they may someday be accepted if not embraced. They take the words of Emma Lazarus seriously:

**“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”**

If we were a brutal police state that indiscriminately abused and killed people showing up at our borders people would stop coming here, but *that’s not who we are*. Thus it has been a real dilemma for the current President and has for previous Presidents. Our own national conscience won’t let us persist in mistreating human beings, especially children, whether they come here *legally* or not, and we should be proud of our national conscience.

As we should be proud of our Christian faith which has had such an impact on our national conscience. As Christians we are called to be disciples of the Son of God who tells us, **“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,”** and we say, “Okay.” We have the humility to know that we’re not perfect, but that doesn’t stop us from striving to be perfect. And so we can look at Jesus’ words and actions in today’s Gospel reading, put that into our current context and know how we ought to act. A woman comes to Jesus, and remember a woman was not highly regarded in those days; if you visit a Hassidic Jewish community today you’ll find that women tend to stay in the background. They don’t spend a lot of time in public. And the woman in today’s story is not just any woman; she is a *sick* woman, and not just sick; she’s hemorrhaging – that means she’s losing blood, and in Jewish law bleeding women were *unclean*; they had to remain outside of the community for seven days from the onset of menstruation (Leviticus 15:19), but if she was hemorrhaging for 12 years, she shouldn’t be anywhere near a crowd of people. She would have been outsider in every sense of the word, and she would have been an *outlaw* for being in a crowd where everything she touched would be considered unclean. Oh, and did I mention that she touched a *rabbi* which would have been an even greater sin? And did I mention she was *broke*? She had spent all her money on doctor’s bills and was no better for it. And she came to Jesus *illegally* because she could see no option. She tried to sneak in undetected, and then just disappear into the crowd. But unfortunately she was detected – Jesus said that power had “gone forth” from him; and notice that this passage doesn’t say that Jesus had *lost* power, that her illegal action had *depleted* his power; it just says “power had gone forth from him. **The wonderful thing about God’s power is that it can’t be depleted; it comes from a limitless source. And acting in faith is to trust in that limitless source.** America has become the greatest nation on earth because we understand that immigrants do not deplete our power **but instead make us stronger. That has been our faith as a nation. Do we still have such faith that those who come to our nation make us stronger?**

Well, knowing that she had been detected, the woman decides that her best course of action is to confess, to come out of the shadows and say, “I’m the one you’re looking for.” And how does Jesus respond to this woman once she has admitted to her “crime”? “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” He didn’t say, “I forgive you for touching me and making me dirty; go and sin no more.” *Instead he commended this woman for her faith!* So how should the church respond to those who come for help, whether openly or clandestinely? Does the church respond to the needs of those who come to her, or do we

commend them for their faith and work to restore them? What would Jesus do? I think you know the answer to that.

And what of those of you who come needing to be restored? Do you come to the church with the faith of this woman, trusting that there are no limits to what God can do, trusting in his ability to love and accept, to heal and restore? Do you have faith in this body of believers called Bethel United Methodist Church? I pray that you can forgive us for the times we may have failed you and that you would continue to trust in this community to serve your needs, to heal your wounds and restore you.

I was a wounded, angry young man in my teens and twenties, seeking to be healed of my cynicism and loneliness, and I'm thankful that I found Christians who received me when I stepped forward in faith looking to be healed. I met Christ through many of those people. I came to disagree with many of them on matters of theology, but God has a funny way of working through people despite their differences and flaws. I would pray that we as a church would be instruments of God to bring people new life and new hope, and I would pray that we as a nation – a nation founded by Christians – would be an instrument of God to bring new life and hope to people from every corner of the earth, regardless of the conditions under which they come to us. Of course we must be vigilant and screen for those who would seek to harm us, but let us not be consumed in fear. Let us not lose our national conscience and our trust in God to continue to lead us as a nation of immigrants, a nation of dreamers, and a nation that stands for the oppressed.