

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

Pentecost 5
Mark 5:25-34

27 June 2021
Salem, Bridgeport

“Touching Jesus”

For the 4th time that day, she had cleaned and rewrapped herself in the rags,
and was once again washing the blood soaked rags she had just removed.

She was so tired of the constant flow of blood - day in and day out.

For most women it was just one week a month but for her it never ended.

Just keeping herself washed was almost a full time job.

If that was the only issue, she could deal with that.

But it wasn't.

It was the social isolation.

Anyone who was bleeding was unclean – and no man was allowed to touch an unclean person.

And if she touched any man – even by accident – she could be stoned to death.

The flow had started when she was 16, 3 years after her marriage.

Her husband had paid the best doctors and they had tried everything that they could think of,
but nothing had worked.

After a year of bleeding her husband had divorced her.

She didn't blame him.

She couldn't be a wife to him.

And she couldn't give him children.

He had remarried but she knew he still cared about her.

Every so often over the years when she'd heard of some new treatment,
he'd paid for her to try it.

But nothing had worked.

After 12 years, the blood still poured out of her,

and with it, life and love and joy and faith and hope until it seemed there was nothing left.

She collapsed onto sleeping mat and curled up into a fetal position and the tears flowed –
just as the blood.

“Please, God, please! Cure me or kill me! I can't do this anymore.”

“Sheerah!” It was her friend Miriam at the window. She ignored her.

“Sheerah! That Rabbi healer is in town! You want to go see him?”

“I can't, Miriam. There will be a crowd. I'm unclean. I can't take the chance.”

“No one will know. You should come.”

This may be your chance, Sheerah! This may be the answer to your prayers!”

“After 12 years? I don't think so.”

“You sure you won't come with me?”

“I'm sure. Thanks anyway, Miriam.”

After her friend left the tears began to flow again.

And then suddenly something her head a voice said clearly,

“Get up! Go! What are you waiting for?!”

She tried to ignore the voice but it was insistent!

She found herself on her feet, hurrying towards the door.

It was as if someone else had taken over her body and was propelling her forward.

She fairly ran down the street.

And as she made her way, she could hear the noise of the crowd getting louder.

There they were!

A huge crowd, and in the middle a man who was speaking, teaching, preaching, as he walked.

By now she had caught up with them, but the crowd was thick around him.

She'd have to work her way through it,

which meant she'd be touching people and they'd be touching her.

This was so wrong.

She shouldn't be here!

She was breaking all the rules and if she was caught she could lose what little life she had left.

“So what do you have to lose?” said the voice in her head.

“Go. Get closer. Touch him!”

While her head was trying to decide, her body was already in motion.

Thank heavens she was only a slip of a thing - not much bigger than a child.

She slipped between the people, and then suddenly his back was within her reach.

Should she call out to him?

She couldn't.

But something inside her was causing her arm to reach out.

No! She couldn't!

She stumbled and fell forwards and there right in front of her hand was the hem of his robe.

She reached out and touched it,

and her entire body lit up on the inside with life energy like she had never known before.

It surged through her like waves of the sea,

until every part of her felt bathed in light, felt clean and whole and alive!

And she knew without a doubt she had been healed.

What an amazing story!

Not just for that woman. But for us.

Because we, too, are afflicted with a disease that has gone on

day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year.

It's the disease that drains life energy out of us.

It's the disease that drains love and hope and faith out of us.

It drains peace and patience and goodness and kindness and gentleness out of us.

It drains self-control out of us.

It drains gratitude and positivity out of us.

It drains the awesome, amazing, abundant life that God wants for us out of us.

That disease is called sin.

It shows up in our thoughts and words and behaviors

when we grumble or complain or speak negativity into the atmosphere.

It shows up when we blame or judge or are critical of others.

It shows up when we are not grateful for the present moment

but prefer to retreat into an illusory past or escape into an imaginary future.

It shows up when we work to maintain our own power and privilege

rather than be willing to give it away to those who we feel are less deserving than we.

Such negative sinful thoughts and words and behaviors are like fibroid tumors that grow in us
and cause life energy in all of its abundance to drain away,

leaving us weak and sick and tired and alone.

But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus is right here in our midst.

We can stay where we are, a bit apart, and watch him from a distance.

We can hear his words, we can shout words of praise,

we can whisper prayers in our heads or under our breath.

We can come hear every week and have God fill us up with the saving blood of new life.

But if we have not touched Jesus,

if we have not experienced his power flow into us,

if we have not been healed,

then everything we get here, will simply leak out of us,

leaving us forever unsatisfied, forever thirsty, forever hungry,

and making no difference in our lives –

no difference that we can tell, and no difference that others can see.

Do you want to get rid of your discouragement, your depression, your despair?

Do you want to be freed of your anger and anxiety and angst?

Do you want to stop those murmurs of self-doubt,

those judgmental thoughts of others and of yourself,

those lies that the enemy of God whispers into your ear, filling you with fear?

Do you want to loose the chains of fear of the future,

that strong resistance to change, the obsessive need to be in control?

If so, then three things are required.

1. Like the woman, we must be willing to reach out and touch Jesus,
not physically of course, and not just mentally either, but with our hearts and spirits.
This isn't about thinking about Jesus, or reading his story, or hearing his teachings;
it's about encountering Him, feeling Him, experiencing Him,
in a way that is so amazing that we cannot help but share our experience.
2. We must be open to being changed,
and the way we are changed is by relationships with people who are different from us,
relationships in which we open ourselves to learn from the other,
in which we try our best to stand in the other person's shoes
and see and hear and feel things from their perspective,
relationships through which
our hearts are transformed, our minds informed, & our wills conformed to God's will.
3. And we must be willing to commit to step into our healing.
We can experience a moment of healing, but if we begin to doubt our healing,
if we go back to living the way we were living before, the healing stops.
If we ask Jesus to heal us from our grumbling and complaining,
but we keep on grumbling and complaining
we will never experience the peace that comes from that healing.
We actually have to change our thoughts and our words and our actions
and live as someone who has been healed.

And that's a lifetime process, of course. It's a journey, not a destination.

But that journey starts right now right here – if you want it to.

If you have more fear than faith, if you have more judgment than grace,
if you have more despair than hope, then reach out and touch Jesus.

If you have more self-centeredness than love, more pain than joy, more worry than peace,
then ask Jesus to heal you and change you.

If you have more dissatisfaction than gratitude,
if you are less than kind and good and gentle to those you dislike,
if anger and rage burst through your self-control in your words or actions,
then ask Jesus to help you live into your healing.

This isn't a one and done kind of thing.

No matter how much you have experienced of God, know that there is always more.

What God desires for us is so much more than we desire for ourselves.

It's so much more than we can ever dream or envision or imagine

God says, "Today I have heard the longings of your hearts. I have seen you reaching out.
So go ahead, touch me.

Touch me and you will feel my power and love flow into you, healing you, making you whole,
and starting you on a whole new journey unlike anything you have ever known.

It will change you. I will change you. But I will change you into my likeness.

And you will shine with my power and love. Touch me and believe.

Your faith will make you whole. Abundant life is yours."

Jesus is here. So what are you waiting for? Reach out and touch him. **Amen**