

Proper 8 B
Mark 5:25-34
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“A Touching Story”
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And a large crowd followed [Jesus] and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, ‘If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.’ Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my clothes?’ And his disciples said to him, ‘You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, “Who touched me?”’ He looked all round to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’

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This last Monday, I attended a White Sox game at Guaranteed Rate Field with my partner and an out-of-town friend from LA. Truthfully, I’m not invested enough in sports to really care who wins or loses, but they both are and they were there to support the visiting team – the Los Angeles Dodgers. After 6 riveting innings, the score was still tied: zero to zero. I was biding my time until we could sneak away during the seventh inning stretch. And then, the unthinkable happened – the Dodgers scored two runs. We weren’t going anywhere. At least, it didn’t seem like we’d be

going anywhere until it started raining and the game was delayed. Fans flooded the dimly lit hallways filled with hotdog and beer vendors. We shuffled our way toward the nearest exit at a snail's pace, but move forward we did.

In my mind, this is the kind of crowd Jesus must've been dealing with that day. Jesus was hardly unfamiliar with crowds: the pressing heat of unwashed bodies, the thrum of muted conversations and the shuffle of sandaled feet, the pulsating expansion and contraction of a hoard of humanity taking up all the available space in a tight corridor, a narrow street, a city square, a small clearing. So many people seemingly going nowhere and not getting there very fast...

If you've ever been in such a situation, you know that folks hardly respect the personal bubble many of us prefer to maintain in other settings. No, you will get bumped, pushed, elbowed, and stepped on, by everyone. Jesus knew this too. And yet, someone had touched him intentionally – had siphoned healing power out of him and he knew it. “Who touched me?” he called out. His friends looked at one another and back at him, “Seriously?” they asked. “There are people everywhere.” But Jesus knew. Someone had touched him, had meant to touch him. Then he saw her, the woman trembling at his feet. She told him her story. He called her daughter, praised her faith, and sent her away in peace. It's a *touching* story, wouldn't you agree?

Of course, this story isn't really just about making a sick woman feel better. It's in the Bible, after all, and that means it's layered, multi-faceted, complex. Mark's author tells us that the woman had been sick, bleeding constantly for twelve years. She had subjected herself to the experimental treatments of physicians, had depleted all her financial resources, and she was no better. In fact, she was worse than before. Besides the fact that she was ill, that her very life flowed out of her unceasingly, she was also ritually unclean. We don't know the degree to which her community would have ostracized her for her condition, but we know that Levitical law prohibited her from entering the Temple or

participating in religious customs. The fact that touching another person would also make them unclean meant that the woman likely eked out a lonely existence far from those she loved and the community in which she'd been socialized.

As foreign as this all may sound at first hearing, we all know of people who've been bankrupted by the cost of treating a serious illness. We remember the "untouchables" of the COVID-19 pandemic or the early years of the AIDS crisis. We have heard of folks relegated to the margins of society by multiple factors beyond their control: their ethnicity, their religion, their sexual orientation, their gender identity. Maybe even some of us have felt the strain, or the isolation, or the exhaustion of these realities in our own lives. In an almost allegorical way, this woman is a stand-in for all who are marginalized, struggling with chronic illness, or beyond the reaches of the social safety net. But she reaches out. She claims the healing that she'd been unable to pay for with money, the connection she'd been unable to buy with tears.

She believed that touching Jesus' garment would heal her, make her whole. Imagine the courage it would take to throw caution in the wind, to disregard social norms and religious laws, to approach Jesus and procure for herself an antidote to the isolation, illness, and poverty she'd been forced into. Imagine the courage it still takes today for those who reach out in faith, hoping beyond hope to be whole, to be in community, to be free. "Daughter," Jesus says, "your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

For the author of Mark's gospel, Jesus is nothing less than the long-awaited Messiah, the Anointed One, the bearer of the Good News about the realm of heaven. In referring to her as daughter, Jesus emphasizes kinship with the marginalized woman and, by extension, with all who are marginalized, oppressed, isolated, and in need. Her healing bears witness to the reality that in the coming realm all the forces that marginalize or isolate people from community will have no power – that healing, wholeness, community, and liberation will be for all.

For first-century audiences in the Greco-Roman world, healing stories were not uncommon. Healers were not uncommon. For this gospel's author, the miracles and healings performed by Jesus mustn't be looked at as isolate examples of Jesus' goodness or benevolence. Rather, they point beyond themselves to a new reality sprouting like seeds in the cracks of empire and oppression. The realm of heaven was breaking in and healing, wholeness, community, and liberation would be for all. Everything Jesus said, did, taught, and ultimately died for was evidence of this new reality.

After the rain delay on Monday, the Los Angeles Dodgers beat the Chicago White Sox 3 to 0. By the beginning of the 7th inning, though, it wasn't clear that would be the case. Delayed gratification is tough. As sports commentator Joe Posnanski once said, "I never argue with people who say baseball is boring, because baseball is boring. And then, suddenly, it isn't. And that's what makes it great." Likewise, it's been 2,000 years since Jesus walked the earth and the realm of heaven doesn't appear to be getting any closer. But as the church that bears his name, we are called to be about the very things that he taught it would encompass: healing, wholeness, community, and liberation for all.

When we stock shelves at the Interfaith Food Pantry, or stand with an oppressed community, or march in solidarity, or mentor a Greenman student, or house a family, or provide resources for abused women or meals and beds at Hesed House or school supplies for students, or reach out with calls or cards to sick or homebound folks, or reach out to welcome neighbors, or sing out to lift human spirits, we are doing it, like Jesus did, as evidence of a new reality slowly but surely sprouting like seeds in the cracks of empire and oppression. Waiting is boring. Until it's not. And our "waiting" – Christian waiting – was never meant to be passive, sitting on our hands, hoping and praying for change in our world while doing nothing to usher it in. We are the church of Jesus. Everything we do bears witness to our faith in the possibility of healing, wholeness, community, and liberation for all – the realm of heaven.

Today, if you resonate with the woman in the story, know that we honor you, we affirm you, we welcome you into community and commit to standing with you as we seek wholeness together. Today, if you resonate with Jesus' desire see the realm of heaven on earth right here and right now, for all, know that you are among kin. Together we will do our part to make it so. And today if you resonate with the bored watcher of a baseball game, know that Christian waiting was never meant to be boring. It's time to do something.

May it be so. Amen.

