

“The Middle Story”
Mark 5:25-34
Fifth Sunday After Pentecost
June 24, 2018
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Mark 5:25-34 (NRSV)

²⁵ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶ She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” ²⁹ Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” ³¹ And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” ³² He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

After our weeks of lessons from OT David, it’s kind of refreshing, in season of Pentecost where we are learning to put the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ to work in our lives, to come back to the gospel of Mark.

Today’s particular reading is one of four times when Mark starts to tell a story and in the middle of it, he starts another story.

Do you know anyone who does the “squirrel!” and “off-they-go” thing?

Today’s reading is bookended by the story of Jairus and his sick daughter, who died but was raised from the dead by Jesus.

It’s like a news flash interrupting our favorite tv show, in the middle of Jarius’ story Mark interrupts himself to tell us about a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. I’m calling it a “middle story.”

In preparation for today, I was thinking about the power of faith and of believing. Both, I think, are powers!

When we go to the doctor, we believe that that doctor will give us the correct prescription for what ails us. When the doctor emphatically guarantees we'll feel better when we follow instructions and take the big, awful tasting pills for a week, we believe we'll get better. As a faithful patient we follow instructions and can return to tell the doctor "It really worked!"

In some studies, patients were given big ugly pills for what ailed them, not knowing they were actually sugar pills without medicinal value. There were placebos. But they'd been prescribed in such a way that the patients were convinced they were medication and BELIEVED they'd get well by taking them.

There's power in believing.

Our daughter, Susan, teaches "growth mindset" in her 2nd grade class. My simplistic understanding is that if a person believes they can solve a problem – even if they fail, it's a success because they can continue solving from that point.

If we believe we can solve a problem, chances are increased that we will.

There is power in faith.

There's power in belief.

Well, today's reading is a faith story about a woman who had the power of belief. She doesn't have a name (shame on Mark!) but she has belief.

She's been bleeding; her monthly cycle hasn't stopped for 12 years! Good grief!

Not only it that embarrassing for her, but also to those who knew her. She's an "unclean" outcast from society. And she's poverty stricken, too, in several senses of the word: financially (*all those expensive doctors with no cure,*) from her community (*who are probably gossiping about her*) and from her place of worship (*Jewish "purity" laws say she can't come.*)

In a last ditch effort, this woman has heard, and has a deep belief in, Jesus having the power to heal. She's convinced that Jesus can do it.

However, commentaries that I read called that a superstitious faith.
“If only I could touch the fringe of his garment, I will be healed.”

She might have been thinking, “He doesn’t need to see me or speak to me. He doesn’t need to lay his hands on me or spit in the dirt and wipe that mud on me.” She’s heard about Jesus’ healing; the miracles.

Touching fringe – primitive yes; but it was an absolute faith in the power of Jesus to heal. But be clear – it wasn’t the fringe!

As usual, there was a large crowd around Jesus, jammed together, pushing, shoving, trying to get closer.

And according Mark, this woman somehow (they sure weren’t paying attention to this “unclean” one among them) gets through the crowd, and came up **behind** Jesus and touched his cloak.

Immediately (and Mark uses that word often, but in this case I’m so relieved for the woman!) Immediately she was healed.

She knew, in her body, she was healed of her dis-ease...not just bleeding but golly, she’s going to be welcomed in society again.

Jesus, too, has an immediate reaction!

Power has “gone forth from him!”

He feels, in HIS body, that he’s given something of himself to bring renewal.

“Who touched me?”

What do you mean, “Who touched you?”

It’s a crowd!

Jesus asks again, “Who, in this crowd, received healing power?”

And the woman can’t hide.

I imagine that she’d like to be jumping up and down because she knows she’s healed. But, she can’t hide from Jesus, so trembling, she kneels and tells Jesus everything.

Everything! All the details. She didn't leave anything out from the One who knows all. It says, "She told him the whole truth."

Scripture doesn't say it but I envision Jesus taking her hand, pulling her up from her knees and telling her with his compassion, "Your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your dis-ease is healed."

What does this primitive, somewhat superstitious story say to us, 21st century people who have hospitals and researchers and technology available to us?

Well, Dear Ones, first and foremost, this story is not about the woman. This story is Mark telling us about Jesus who is the Son of God and had the power of God in him to heal and restore and make whole.

And I'm not just talking about an individual here or there. A blind man or a bleeding woman.

This is Jesus who came to bring God's people back to their "in the beginning, created-selves," in relationship with God.

Remember the surrounding of our "middle story" had Jesus raising a dead girl to life.

Anyone who has power over disease and death must be a special person. In fact, that person who has such powers **must be** the Son of God.

Mark wrote down all the details for us to know that it isn't a story about a "that woman" in the crowd. It is. But, more importantly, the story is about Jesus, telling us that he is the Son of God.

But the woman is important for us to know. She has some qualities we should notice and admire.

The first is that this woman wanted to be healed and made whole. The initiative is entirely hers.

If we pay close attention, we'll realize that she's quite a contrast to the rest of the pressing crowd, 'cause, what did they want from Jesus?

Healing?

No. They were clamoring to get close to Jesus so they can go home and brag about what they've heard. They weren't coming for healing or to have *their* lives made whole; they were just hoping to witness a miracle so they could be entertained!

And that still happens today in the life of the church.

Sometimes, too often, we come here to see our friends and HEAR about Jesus – but not necessarily come to REACH OUT for healing in our own lives.

We think, “Things are good in my life. I just came to church ‘cause it’s what I do on Sunday mornings. That’s all. I don’t need to be healed.”

One of the things we can admire about the woman in today’s story is that she knew the truth. About herself. She needed to be healed.

She was anxious, but she was aware that she didn’t have her life all together. So, she came to Jesus, unashamed, and asked to be healed.

And, I’ll ask you to broaden your view - come to Jesus – NOT JUST for yourself; as an individual. I truly believe, especially as I listen to the news about the various kinds of crisis in our country and the world that we’d better start asking for collective, community healing too.

We can learn that from her.

We can come with our needs – ALL our needs - and look to Jesus for healing.

The second admirable thing about this woman, is that she told Jesus the whole truth about herself; the twelve years of doctors and poverty and societal rejection that caused feelings of guilt that SHE must have done something wrong, but what?

We’re invited to do the same with Jesus...to tell him the whole truth about ourselves. All the details – big and small.

And the third thing quality of this woman is her great faith in the power of Jesus to make her whole.

It was a simple faith; but it was a major factor of her healing.

Did you hear that? The order of things?

Her healing was not the cause of her faith. Faith was the starting point.

Too often, it's the opposite for us.

We think, "Lord, show me a miracle and then then I'll really believe in you."

No. Please NO!

Let's have a faith like the woman in today's "middle story" who had a basic, simple faith, and as a result, she was healed.

Do you know someone who "really believed" in this Jesus.

Maybe it was the simple, devout, overwhelming faith of a grandparent or a friend.

And boy, don't we want to have that?

What was (or is) the object of that kind of faith, like the woman in Jesus' crowd?

Was it faith in her own ability to solve her problem?

No. She'd been sick long enough to lose faith in her own abilities.

Was her faith in her self-confidence?

No. I don't think she had much.

Was her faith a faith in faith?

No. That is the placebo, to have faith in faith.

The phrase "faith in Christ" is written over 300 times in books of the NT.

Faith IN CHRIST.

It's not faith in faith...

...or faith in self-confidence.

Now, keeping this real, don't misunderstand and think that because a person **believes** in the power of Christ, that that person **will be** healed of diseases.

We can't think to ourselves, "If I really believed like the bleeding woman, I'd be healed too. My illness or mental turmoil; my marriage, my kids' drug abuse...If I only believed like her, I'd be healed."

That's NOT what these verses are about. I don't think it works that way.

Just because someone is a devout Christian with the deepest of faith, doesn't mean they don't get sick. Or die. We all do.

Frankly, those things are just too far beyond our comprehension, that is, until we can ask God, someday.

Today's gospel lesson is our "middle story" about two people.

It's about Jesus who had the power of God within him to make miraculous things happen.

And it's also the "middle story" about THAT WOMAN, the one in the crowd, the one who reached out and was honest about her needs.

Her example is an invitation for you and me to have the same kind of simple faith in Christ, to call on him and the power of God for all our needs.

Praise God for the "middle story!"

Amen.