

Mark 5:21-43
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
Greg Bensted

Grace and peace to you beloved of Jesus, from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages 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 haemorrhage 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 around 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." Let's pray:

What do you think would happen if I tried to fill this bucket with water?... Doesn't this describe how we sometimes feel? Do you ever feel like the bucket of your life has a hole in it? That it leaks faster than you can fill it? No matter what you do, how hard you work, how much you pray, where you go, who you associate with, you just can't fill it up. You can't seem to get enough. The outflow is greater than the input. You're left drained of life: tired and weak, frustrated and hopeless, angry and resentful, sorrowful and grieving, fearful that you'll never have the life you want. If you know what that's like, then you know the haemorrhaging woman in today's gospel.

We aren't told her name. We don't know where she's from. We don't actually know anything about her. She could be any one of us. She's anonymous; just another in an ocean of faces. So, what do we know about this woman? Well, she's sick, desperate, and in need. She's been bleeding for 12 years. In all that time no one has been able to help her. She's spent everything: time, money, energy, only to get worse. Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year it's always the same.

However, the woman's condition is more than physical. She's losing more than blood. She's losing her life, its warmth, vitality, and fruitfulness. That's a spiritual matter. Life and death always are.

At face value, this is a story of an individual woman. More deeply, though, it's a commentary on the human condition. Her story is our story. It's as much about men as it is women. Drained of life, we go through the motions. We're alive but not really living.

Often, we convince ourselves that once this or that happens everything will be better. You know what I'm talking about – our “as soon as” thinking. As soon as he changes, as soon as she does what I want, as soon as the economy gets better, as soon as I get a new job, as soon as I have enough money, as soon as I have more time, as soon as the semester ends, as soon as winter is over... We all have our “as soon as.”

I suspect the bleeding woman spent many of the last 12 years thinking, “As soon as...”, yet, today is different. Something in her has shifted. She's heard something about Jesus. Maybe she's heard about his teaching, about him casting out demons, about him healing the sick, or about him calming the storm on the sea.

We don't know what she's heard about Jesus but it's enough to make her believe that she's more than a bleeding woman. She'll no longer wait for others to fix her life. No more rushing to the Emergency Department, no more lengthy stays in the ICU to be stabilised, no more ambulance ramping. She refuses to be defined by her predicament. Today she will reach beyond her situation; she'll reach out and take matters into her own hands.

To the last breath of her being this woman knows, “If I can just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” She knows that Jesus offers a life that is “unleakable,” a life that can never be drained from her.

She strains and touches his cloak. In that moment she is flooded with the power of God; completely transfused if you like. It's enough to touch. The connection is made and a relationship established. Life has reversed from draining out of her to flowing into her.

The haemorrhaging has stopped but the healing continues. “Who touched my clothes?” Jesus asks. Jesus is calling her out. The woman is too valuable to Jesus to remain a nameless face in the crowd. He refuses to allow her to drift off into obscurity. He gifts her the most esteemed name, “Daughter,” and sends her on the path of peace. She will no longer be known as the bleeding woman, rather; Daughter, Child of God, with an identity, a place, and a relationship. She’s healed and made whole. This woman is now fully alive and free to go in peace.

That’s the “unleakable” life Jesus offers all of us. We no longer have to exist drained of life. We too can confidently and comfortably call ourselves, “Son” or “Daughter.” We too are free to walk the path of peace fully alive. If we but touch his clothes we too will be healed.

At every moment of our lives, we have the opportunity to touch. We must see past the circumstances of our lives. We must no longer live “as soon as” lives. We must take matters into our own hands. Now, please don’t hear this as me suggesting that we’re in control, rather; that Jesus invites us to exercise our faith, to boldly reach out to him, trusting that he won’t reject us, trusting that he will accept us, trusting that we are his family. How do we do that? We do that by looking at the clothes Jesus wears.

Jesus drapes himself variously in silence, solitude, and prayer; mercy and forgiveness; thanksgiving and gratitude; compassion and generosity. Always, Jesus is wrapped in self-giving love. Each of these things are great things to emulate, and I commend them to you, for sure. But what do we have that we can physically reach out and grasp today, in the same way the woman touched the hem of Jesus’ cloak while he still walked this earth? Dearly beloved of the Lord, and I call you that most sincerely; these very attributes and characteristics of Jesus’ life are always available to us in his holy word and sacraments.

God’s word and sacraments are both a great comfort and a visible sign of his divine love. We must cling to them as determinedly and faithfully as our patriarch, Jacob, clung to the staff when he crossed the Jordan river [Genesis 32:10], or as to a lantern which navigates us safely along the dark path of sin, death, and hell, as the prophet says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a

light to my path” [Psalm 119:105], and as St Peter declares, “So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” [2 Peter 1:19].*

These signs point to Christ and his image, enabling us to say along with Luther when life bleeds from us, “God promised and in his sacraments he gave me a sure sign of his grace that Christ’s life overcame my death in his death, that his obedience blotted out my sin in his suffering, that his love destroyed my hell in his forsakenness. This sign and promise of my salvation will not lie to me or deceive me. It is God who has promised it, and he cannot lie either in words or in deeds.”**

They are the clothes he wears and the clothes we can reach out and touch.

Whenever you feel drained of life and hope, touch the clothes of Christ. Connect to Jesus by reaching out and touching his sacraments. Let them transfuse you with his life, his love, and his power. Touch and be healed. Touch and be named. Touch and go in peace. Brothers, sisters, Christ has bled for you that you need never haemorrhage. In Christ, you are always fully alive. Your faith keeps you well; live in peace; you are healed. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Luther’s Works *American Edition* Volume 42, pages 108-109.

***ibid* page 109.
