

Reflection: Healing Faith

Based on Mark 5:21-43

Sickness is the Great Interrupter of life. It enters without knocking, obstructing all plans, mocking the idea of certainty, and diminishing hope for the future. It intrudes like a burglar in our home, touching every part of life. Anyone who receives a lifechanging diagnosis such as cancer, MS, dementia, or Parkinson's, lives on a roller-coaster of emotions that begins from that moment on and stays with you throughout your journey. I should know – David was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2014. We were on that roller-coaster for 6 years. I still attend the Parkinson's Caregivers meetings and I support them in their journeys which are filled with fear, loss, and hope.

In sickness, as in any battle, there are many uncertainties and losses. The pain, the changes in abilities, and the worries around the illness usually amplify the sense of loss experienced. These are not only felt by the person with the disease but by their partner – the caregiver. Among the most common feelings of loss are:

1. Loss of control. Suddenly the body and mind, rather than obeying you, has its own agenda and behaves any way it pleases. It's like driving a car on an icy highway. Suddenly your car hits an ice slick, and you are out of control. All you can do is hang on and hope for the best. It is a sickening, helpless feeling.
2. Loss of identity. Sick people become defined by their illness. Isn't it interesting that the woman in the story is not called by name. Simply, "A woman was there who had been subject to bleeding." The same is true today. We speak of certain people as: "He has cancer," "She suffers from manic depression" or "he has Parkinson's". Sick people lose their identity in their sickness and often become the illness. The same happens to us – the partner. We are no longer the husband, the wife, the daughter, the son – we become the "caregiver".
3. Loss of certainty. With a chronic illness everything becomes dependent on the condition. Vacations are reliant upon the body, or the mind set. Even getting up in the morning is stipulated by the sickness. What was once predictable is now conditional. Your daily routine, if you are lucky enough to have one, can turn on a dime because of that physical and emotional roller-coaster.
4. Loss of place in society. When sick, losses go beyond the body. Sickness often puts a strain on your relationships, your jobs, your hobbies, your families. You feel like a burden to others. You no longer fit in a healthy world. You often don't want others to know about your diagnosis which complicates things. People are confused because they know something is different, but they are uncertain what to do or say.

Parkinson's is not just a "shaking" disease, it has many other motor and non- motor symptoms. You may start with 1 or 2 symptoms, but more will show up as the disease progresses. No two Parkinson's people are the same. That is why I encouraged David to tell people about his Parkinson's symptoms. His were mainly non-motor. David was still David, but everything was done more slowly and anxiously.

5. Loss of resources. The scripture reading tells us that the woman "had spent all she had". She was financially bankrupt, emotionally spent, and physically weak. She reminds us that vast fortunes of time, energy, and money can be squandered in an effort to bring healing.

When someone is diagnosed with a chronic illness, we spend a lot of our time, energy, and money to ensure our loved ones can remain as independent as possible, for as long as possible. That they are safe and comfortable. We learn to adapt. Our home changes as the disease progresses. Furniture and carpets are relocated and replaced by grab polls, walkers, railings, and lifts. We may even have to move.

6. Loss of hope. Perhaps the most chilling aspect of this lady's life was that she had tried everything "yet instead of getting better she grew worse". She was beyond human help and hope. She was at her wit's end. As a last resort, she comes to Jesus hoping against hope that He could heal her. She, in one moment, displays both faith and fear – she touches Jesus' cloths.

Like her, the caregiver often feels alone, exhausted, at wits end which can drain any hope and becomes depressed – even suicidal – but who would take care of your loved one if you did.

Like their caregivers, people diagnosed with a chronic disease like Parkinson's don't have much hope – after all there is no cure! Yet they are often the ones who turn to their faith and take their fears, anxieties, and despair to God.

I truly believe that David was able to accept his many ups and downs, his fears, and his hopes because of his strong faith. Looking back - I never truly appreciated how strong and what a warrior David was until I saw how he handled his Parkinson's for six years before his body simply gave up. His spirit never faltered, neither did his sense of humour, but the machine simply could not do it anymore. He never complained and always tried to find something to be thankful for every day.

It is easy to pursue Jesus and never touch Him, not trusting Him. Seeking Him but not being found by Him. Coming close to Him but never actually touching Him. Coming near to Jesus doesn't bring healing or solves our problems. We must touch Him for ourselves. How do we do that? It is one thing for that woman long ago, but how can we touch Him today?

Well, maybe we need to:

1. Give God a chance. Talk to him! Let him know what your struggles are, whatever they may be. Tell Him about them — just as if He did not know a thing. It may be in prayer or simply writing in a journal like I did. Hold nothing back. Dare to be honest. It does help!
2. Believe that God will hear you. He heard the poor woman who only touched the hem of His garment, so you need to believe that He will hear you and care what happens to you.
3. Be willing to wait patiently. He doesn't answer every prayer on Sunday afternoon. You may have to wait until Friday. But wait you must! God is never in a hurry. The person who waits on God loses no time.
4. When He speaks to you, do what He tells you. He may not tell you audibly. You may not hear His voice, but generally through your own conscience or through trusted counsel of friends He will indicate a course of action.

When He lets you know what you must do, do it. The day I called the ambulance for David, I believed he was going to a nursing home where I knew he didn't want to be in. I wasn't ready to let him go! When our family doctor called the next day, saying he was with David and wanted to know what we were going to do – my answer was “put him comfortable and let him go”. Where did that come from? I don't know – but I listened to my heart.

The message today, is that one woman, at the end of her rope, had the courage to step out of normal procedures to find healing hope. She touched and connected with Jesus, and He stopped for her. He stopped for David and me. He will stop for you too. God didn't bring you this far to leave you – so, don't miss that miracle.

In closing I want to share a caregiver's prayer.

Lord, as this new day dawns, I rise with wonderings of how my day will be. Will it be good, or will it be filled with struggles that seek to drain my strength? I call on you to take control of my day and give me discernment to handle whatever comes my way. Give me peace in knowing that I cannot fix everything. Provide your words of comfort to me when I am running low on strength. Open my eyes to see all that is good when I can only see the pain and grief. Close my mouth when I need to just listen and give me words of encouragement to share when it is needed. Provide me relief when I grow tired.

Help me see your plan through all the fog of life. Remind me that caring for my loved one is a privilege. It is an honour, not a burden. I pray for the restoration of my soul. I pray for strength to make it through this day. You

said not to worry about tomorrow, so I won't. Lord, you are the healer, the Great Physician. Heal my heart when it's broken and heal the pain when my loved one hurts.

Always help me remember when I feel alone, I'm not. You are always there, going before me to prepare the way. I pray all these requests in the name of Jesus, Amen

Thank you for listening.