

One of the key promises of the Resurrection is the healing power of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in our daily lives. Wherever Jesus went during His ministry here on earth, He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, helped the lame walk again, drove out demons, raised the dead, opened the ears of the deaf, and gave meaning to life for those who were down and discouraged. This morning, let's look at one of the many stories in the Bible of Jesus touching the lives of people just like you and me, and changing them forever. I will be reading from the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, verses 21 through 43.

Read Mark 5:21-43

In this story, Jesus heals two people – the daughter of Jarius and a woman. While there are important lessons to be learned from both stories, I would like for us to focus on the healing of the woman this morning. This woman had suffered from a chronic bleeding for twelve years. She had searched for a cure as long as Jarius' daughter had been alive. The writings of the rabbis listed no less than eleven possible cures for her disease. Some were tonics and others were sheer superstitions such as carrying the ashes of an ostrich-egg in a linen rag in the summer and a cotton rag in the winter.

Mark tells us that the woman had gone to many doctors who used some of these drastic treatments, took all her money, and left her worse off than she was before. It is interesting to note that this information is left out of the account of this same story in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Many scholars believe that Luke was a doctor, and out of respect for his colleagues, he may have omitted this additional information from his version of the story. No doubt this poor woman had tried everything possible in search of a cure. Her illness had chained her to a life of pain and despair. Now some of us can identify with her, knowing what it means to be powerless in the face of illness or other misfortunes in life.

But there is more to this story than just this illness which took away her health and drained her both emotionally and financially. Under the Jewish law, because of her constant bleeding, she was declared unclean, and thus she could not worship God in the Temple or have fellowship with her family and friends because they too would be declared unclean. The law required anyone in her unclean condition to approach people from behind and to keep her distance. Thus, she was cut off from her God and her family. She was an outcast of society, basically at the lowest level of the social ladder. The fact that her name is not given in our text reflects her isolation.

With all hope of recovery gone and when she was on her last leg, someone must have told her about Jesus. In her desperation, she must have believed what she had heard about Jesus and thought to herself: "If only I could just touch the hem of His robe, then I might be healed." She

lost no time in finding Jesus. Easing her way through the crowd, she reached out and touched the edge of His robe. Immediately, the bleeding from which she had suffered for twelve long years stopped, and she was completely healed; made whole, just by touching the Master's robe.

Her initial plan was to quickly slip away unnoticed; however, Jesus was aware of the out flowing of His divine power when she touched Him. Jesus would not let her slip away; she had reached out and now she must encounter His true message and lesson. Had she gone away undetected, she might have assumed that her healing was due only to His robe and that it was all magic. Also Jesus did not want her to leave unnoticed because she would have missed out on a great blessing.

So, Jesus asked: "Who touched me?" Of course, He knew the answer, but He asked it anyway in order to bring her forward from the crowd. Peter and the other disciples thought that this was a silly question. After all they were in the middle of a crowd with people pressing them on all sides as they tried to make their way to Jarius' house. Why ask "Who touched me?" But there is a big difference between the touch of physical nearness and the touch of desperate faith. It is possible to be ever so near Jesus without trusting Him, but impossible to touch Him in faith without knowing it and without being made whole.

The woman came forward, in fear and trembling, not knowing what to expect; remember she had spent the past twelve years as an outcast of society and now despite her best efforts to be invisible she was at the center of attention. In addition, by touching Jesus, she had rendered Him unclean according to their religious law, not to mention all those who she had bumped into as she elbowed her way through the crowd. But it was not Jesus' desire to shame or condemn her. For you see, the Lord desires not only that we believe in our hearts, but that we also testify what He means to us. Romans 10:10 says: "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, but it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." The woman fell down at the feet of Jesus and told Him everything. The Scriptures say that she told Jesus the whole truth; she shared with Him her whole life story. In her desire to be healed and made whole, she didn't hold anything back from the Master.

All of us have a story to tell. It's the story of our trials, our disappointments, our pains, and our hopes. Jesus wants to hear our stories; He's always there ready and willing to listen to us. In a way, listening is a form of touching and can be referred to as healing conversation. Many of us long to be heard, and we seek out people and places where we can express our thoughts and feelings, to voice our heartfelt emotions that we normally keep hidden down deep under the surface. This is one of the many ways that Jesus comes to us and heals us. Complete honesty with the Lord is of great importance in our spiritual healing. Without it there can be little

spiritual growth in the Christian life. As we declare our dependence on and love for Jesus, He floods our souls with the full assurance of faith.

Something inspired this woman to reach out in faith and touch the robe of Jesus. Because of the restrictions of the law that I just discussed, she took a great risk by her bold actions. You could say that the woman's hope in Jesus was simple in that she acted more out of superstition than real faith, hoping that the touch of the Master's clothes would make her well. Despite this misconception and her limited knowledge of Jesus, He healed her and proclaimed that her faith had made her whole. Jesus told her: "Daughter, you took a risk trusting me, and now you're healed and whole. Live well, live blessed." Note that Jesus calls her "daughter." I wonder how long it had been since anyone was willing to see her as a person of worth and dignity, as a human being. But Jesus always sees the good in each of us and seeks to bring it out.

This woman came to Jesus as a last resort; having tried every other cure that the world had to offer, she finally reached out to the Lord. Don't we do the same thing; looking everywhere for solutions to our problems, and when we are at our wits' end, when we hit rock bottom, we finally go to the Lord in prayer as a last resort. Oh, the time, worry and effort we could save if we just get on our knees and go to Jesus first in prayer. I know that putting your trust in the promises of Jesus in the midst of the isolation of illness, the pain of death, the shock of betrayal, and the heartbreaks of life really requires a leap of faith for those who have experienced more than one broken promise and years of pain as this woman had. It is all too easy to crawl back into our shells and ignore, and even push away, the healing hand of God that longs to touch us. But the hand of the Master is always there, reaching out, ready to touch and make us whole, if we only reach back.

Now if we read this story too quickly, we might just miss one of its key points. From the moment that Jesus was face to face with this woman, there seemed to be nobody else there but Jesus and her. It happened in the middle of a crowd; but the crowd was forgotten and Jesus spoke to this woman as if she was the only person in the world. She was a poor, unimportant sufferer, with an illness that made her unclean to the religious authorities; yet to this outcast to society, Jesus gave all of Himself, and He's willing to do the same for you and for me; we just have to reach out for Him.

You know, we tend to attach labels to people and to treat them according to their relative importance or social status. But Jesus pays no attention to any of these man-made designations. To Him each person is simply a human soul in need of His loving touch. Love never thinks of a person in terms of their status in society. In the eyes of the Lord, each person is important and worthy of all His love and attention.

Touching played a major role in Jesus' ministry here on earth. Many a poor soul who felt lost in the crowd was healed, helped, and saved by the Master's touch. Of course, Jesus' touch is not restricted to physical illnesses. There's the touch that relieves fear as with the disciples during the storm on the Sea of Galilee. There's the touch of blessing of the children when their parents brought them to Jesus.

Touching has a healing power, and it is most powerful for those who feel untouchable. We humans require touch, it's in our nature. Alongside this need is another: our need to be touched by God. Saint Augustine once wrote: "Our hearts are restless unless they rest in God." In Michelangelo's famous painting, God reaches out to touch Adam across the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. It's the moment of creation. Creation and healing are much alike: one brings life, and the other gives new life. Each depends on the touch of the Master. Bill Gaither summed it up in the hymn that we will sing in a moment: "something happened, and now I know, He touched me and made me whole." We are changed forever when we are touched by the Lord. And the good news is that He desires to touch each and every one of us here this morning.

Almost everybody would have regarded the woman in the crowd as totally unimportant, and ignored her. But Jesus didn't. For Jesus, she was someone in need and therefore, He withdrew from the crowd and gave Himself to her. God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love. God reaches out to us each and every day. Are you willing to take the risk and reach back? As you come forward for communion, give the Lord your hurts, concerns, and needs. Feel the Master's touch, and then live well and live blessed. Amen