

## *Jesus and the Whole Truth*

### **Let's pray...**

For the last two weeks, I've been reading a collection of Advent sermons by a wonderful Episcopal preacher named Fleming Rutledge. And at many points, she comes back to this simple statement – that **"Advent begins in the dark"**.

And her sermons are helping me to not use **Advent** as just a *synonym* for **Christmastime**, but as the distinct season that *precedes Christmas* – at least according to those who've gone before us. A distinct season of *longing*, even *ache*, for the Coming, the Arrival, the **"Advent"** of God and God's Kingdom.

This is Advent.

And this is where **we live**. This is **the Time** in which we live – and not just *this month*, but **all of the time**. In truth, the whole of the Christian life is **lived in Advent** – in longing for the coming of Jesus and His Kingdom.

And so in Advent we are invited to pray, **"Come, Lord Jesus!"**

But as Rutledge reminds us,

**"This is certainly not** a prayer for Jesus to come again as a helpless baby; it is the longing cry of God's people for Jesus to return in power and glory, when 'every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord' (Phil 2:10-11)."

And under of His Lordship – all wrongs will be made right, all oppression undone, all injustice overturned, all sin and suffering left behind – and in its place, all of creation will be alive in the **Joy** of God... the **Peace** of God... the **Justice** of God... the

Grace of God... the **Shalom** of God – *God's wholeness and blessing in all and over*

*all...*

And so today, on this third Sunday in Advent, we come to another text in the gospel of Mark – another **Advent text** – the story of a woman who has suffered for 12 years with a soul-crushing condition.

If you have a Bible with you, or a Bible App, open it with me to **Mark 5:24-34**.

And as we'll notice right away, our text this morning is really one event *within a larger event*. As NT scholars call it, here we have a **Markan-sandwich**! Mark, the gospel writer, is known for doing this – telling a story within a story.

Which shouldn't just be discredited as **creative editing**. In truth, this is how life happens, doesn't it? Events in our lives **overlap** with other events. Our experiences **compound** and are **complicated** by other experiences. Each impacting the other **& us**.

And that's what's happening here in Mark 5. As Jesus stands on the shore of the lake, a crowd gathers to him – and out of the crowd emerges a man – a synagogue ruler – who is desperate to get to Jesus. Desperate for Jesus to come with him to his home because his daughter is dying. And in **v.24**, we read that *Jesus went with him*.

Next Sunday, Glen will take us into this larger story of Jesus, this father and his dying daughter.

But this morning we'll limit ourselves to the event that happens **on the way**. Our Advent text for today. **Mark 5:24f**. It begins...

"A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to **bleeding for twelve years.**"

*Those 6 words name a long journey of pain, don't they?*

In all likelihood, this woman was suffering from a condition where her monthly period, rather than being limited to a few days every cycle, was actually **never-ending**.

*For twelve years...*

Maybe at the outset of puberty, this began and never ended (and she'd suffered from this half her life). Or maybe it began later in life as a complication following the birth of a child. It's impossible to know, but what **we do know** is that this condition – this brokenness in her body – brought suffering into her life *far beyond the physical*.

And much of this because of the profound social implications of it all.

Not just because its awkward to talk openly about your period, but, as we've talked about previously, in the Jewish world of her day, this never-ending condition meant that she was considered **untouchable** – because she was *ritually-unclean*.

And not just according to the religious power-brokers of her day, but according to the law of God in **Leviticus 15**.

Which could make us **question the goodness of God**, particularly *toward women* – until we realize that the laws of Leviticus 15 are *surprisingly egalitarian* in their application to both women and men. It wasn't just women who were rendered unclean by their bodily discharge. Half the chapter is a list of restrictions for men.

But beyond this, particularly for women, these laws actually served – in the ancient world at least – to provide a measure of social relief, support and even protection for women during a vulnerable time.

As one scholar remarks, it's as though the God of the Universe knew about the reality and effects of hormones and body cycles before humans did! (no surprise there!)

But with this, maybe most importantly, rather than being a hint at God's disgust with all things sexual, these laws actually highlight the sacredness of sex, and **GUARD against the misuse of sex** – in contrast to the Fertility Cults in the days of ancient Israel and in the first century. *Simply put: because of the good laws of Israel's God, there was no place for Temple Prostitution in the life of Israel.* To which I'm sure many of us would say, *for God's glory and the good of all...*

But **in this moment** – in these **12 LONG YEARS** for this woman – the Levitical laws likely made her question God's heart toward her, right?

*Did God not want her close? Was she uniquely unacceptable in the sight of God? Was God UNWILLING to come near to her? Was God against her, even?*

And because of all this, her being ritually unclean for 12 years, this woman lived in **profound isolation**. Alienated from her friends and family, unable to participate in worship at the Temple... **Unable to be touched...**

Unable to come near to **anyone**, or to have others come near to her... for fear of being touched, *or touching something she touched!* For **12 YEARS!**

Because if they did, they'd become unclean too, unable to go about life or enter the Temple, until the day is over, or longer...

And as we've talked about a number of times before, for the devout religious leaders in Jesus' day, life was a never-ending endeavor to **guard ritual purity**.

Which forced people like this woman to the margins.

And maybe not just to the margins, but *into hiding*...

Because there was no cleansing for her. **Not until her bleeding stopped.**

And to **compound** her suffering, we read **in v.26,**

*"She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew **worse**."*

So, not only has she endured 12 years of physical, emotional, social and spiritual agony, but through it all, she has lost all that she has to doctors whose cures only made things worse.

Which not only left her utterly **impoverished**, but, I would think, also **profoundly distrusting** of others of anyone offering help...

Who knows, maybe she gave up hope **long ago**...

But then **something happened** – something *unexpected*.

Something that we read about in v.27. **Mark tells us,**

*"When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak ..."*

*"When she heard about Jesus"... I love that line.* Mark is so economical in his writing. It's the shortest of all the gospels because there are no extra words. No elaborate explanations. Just these short, but **loaded** statements. We encounter it constantly. **And this is one of those lines.**

***What had she heard of Jesus*** that gave her such **fierce hope?**

Because it did!

For a woman, plagued by a condition that made her ritual unclean, to even just **approach** Jesus – a respected holy rabbi – in the press of a crowd was... **Unthinkable!** **Insane! Something no one would ever do!** Provoking the **wrath** of the whole **community** – for the way she would be compromising and endangering everyone with her uncleanness. Not to mention the likely public condemnation of the rabbi himself...

But when she'd heard about Jesus, **she came near...**

*So, what did she hear about Jesus* – that rather than **sending her away**, sent her running **to Jesus** – with **determined faith?**

Well, we don't know the details, but as **WE'VE** heard in Mark's gospel, she likely heard stories about Jesus' **power and authority** – over seemingly **anything and everything**.

Over chaotic storms and demonic oppression, over sickness and Sabbath, over leprosy and all that is unclean (which was what she thought of herself, right!).

She heard about **a storm** so fierce that seasoned fisherman feared for their lives. **Until Jesus** commanded the wind and the waves to be still – **and it was still**. Like glass.

She heard about Jesus casting out **a Legion** – a **whole company** of demons from a man whom no-one could restrain – but now, because of the **authority** of Jesus, this man is sane, whole, set free, restored to himself and his community...

Story after story, account after account, **she'd heard** of the **power and authority** of Jesus – reversing the curse wherever He went.

And with this, she likely heard about **His heart** – for those that everyone else avoided or ran from... She heard about His care, His compassion for the suffering, for the broken, *even for the unclean*.

He never **turned away** coldly. He never avoided someone who needed him.

In fact, He seemed **to exist entirely for** those who were broken and oppressed, marginalized and at the end of their rope...

She heard that, though the demons called him "the Holy One of God", he had **no hesitation** coming near to **the unholy**... That he'd even touched an **untouchable** – a leper – and with His touch, declared the man clean...

Which might have been **the deal-maker** for her, right?

That *unlike seemingly everyone else*, Jesus didn't give a rip about the all-consuming **rules** concerning ceremonial purity. Time and again, Jesus cared more about *people-keeping* than *rule-keeping*...

He even broke the Sabbath to heal a man a few weeks back!

And so, in v.27f, we read,

*"When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.'"*

Now many read this and suggest that she did this out of **superstition** – believing that **the power was in his cloak** – but I can't read this account, knowing all we know about the complexity of her suffering, and not see in this act *an incredible expression of faith in Jesus*. At least for her. With all the risk this brought for her.

And maybe even kindness. Not wanting to complicate Jesus' life – or even just his day – by making a big event of encountering him explicitly, and what that might bring for him – *since she was unclean*.

So, she somehow slips through this crowd, hoping to just **touch the edge** of his garment – convinced that, *"If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed."*

And **"Immediately"**, we're told, *"her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering."*

What an experience that must have been – that moment when she felt it **all finally just STOP**.

To everyone else, what happened in this moment would have been imperceptible, but for her it was **all-consuming and undeniable**.

*"She felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering..."*

Like **the moment** that the Storm, the Furious Squall on the lake **just stopped...**

Or **the moment** that the man who'd been oppressed by **a Legion of demons** found himself completely **set free**, with only **his own thoughts** alive in his mind.

*"Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering."*

As she turned to slip away, you have to wonder how the gospel of Jesus overwhelmed her. Was she tempted to sing out her praise?

After all the doctors – likely, **ALL MEN** – who had demanded so much of her and given her nothing in return but poverty and pain, *here was a Man like no other...*

You wonder what went on in her heart as she turned to slip out of that crowd and away from Jesus... Or was she just frozen in her tracks – **stunned** by the healing she had just experienced – watching Jesus continue to move with the crowd.

**But then – in that breath – He stopped!**

v.30 reads – "At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?'

*"You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"*

There were **so many people** that the disciples assumed it was an impossible question to answer. **Hordes** of people were touching him – **AND HAD**.

And yet, in the midst of the many, **there was one woman who was now** **incredibly CONFLICTED**.

*This was exactly what she did NOT want to happen, right?*

*And it didn't even need to happen!*

We've already been told that *her bleeding stopped* – and *that she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering*.

*Jesus doesn't need to stop and speak with her.*

His authority and power has already healed her.

His grace has already reached out and touched her – and made her well.

He doesn't need to do this!

Or so we think.

**"But Jesus kept** *looking around to see who had done it."*

(v.33) **"Then the woman,** *knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth."*

*She came, fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him* **THE WHOLE TRUTH**.

We're not told what **THE WHOLE TRUTH** entailed.

Was it just the WHOLE TRUTH about the events of the last few moments? That she was the one who touched him? And that she felt she was healed?

Did she tell him about all the doctors she had gone to before (*maybe she did... maybe that's how we know about them*)?

Did she tell him more? Her Whole Story?

*Who knows?*

**Jesus does.**

And that's the thing here = **JESUS KNOWS**. Jesus knows the whole truth.

He knows the TRUTH of who touched him.

He knows **the Truth** of this woman's story and life. The WHOLE TRUTH about her.

Just as He **knows the WHOLE TRUTH about you** – and about me...  
**About everyone and everything.**

And maybe that's why Jesus stopped here and **invited her to speak up** (as scary as this was) and **to tell *the truth* – tell the whole truth – to tell "her truth"** (as we say these days).

Not so that **Jesus** would know, but so that **SHE would know** – and maybe others with her – that she didn't someone **skirt** the system, find a **loophole** and **steal** healing from Jesus. That she didn't somehow acquire something Jesus ***didn't want for her... that GOD didn't want for her...***

**No, Jesus healed her – restored her – in the full knowledge of her story... Her WHOLE story. The WHOLE truth.**

Honestly, with all the complications of her life, you have to wonder when was the last time anyone **invited** and **allowed** her to tell them the whole truth...?

When was the last time someone wanted to hear the truth of her story?

Even just a part of it?

**What a gift Jesus gave her.**

**More than she could understand in that moment.**

And yet, as she told Him the whole truth – we're told – **she trembled in fear.**

**Why?** Was this just the natural response of finding herself in the Presence of One so powerful that just the touch of his garment had restored a broken part of her?

**Maybe...** I think I'd tremble in fear if I found myself in the Presence of Jesus.

But you have to wonder, also, if her fear came from **a different place...**

**If she feared losing what she just gained.** That if Jesus knew the truth – her truth – the whole truth... the truth of her life and soul – maybe he'd want his power back. Maybe He'd take back what He'd given her...

Or even just regret having given it to her.

Right? Her pain wasn't just in her body. **It was in her soul.**

I don't know. I don't know the nature of her fear.

But I know that **WE** sometimes fear this, don't we?

We fear the truth getting out. The whole truth.

We fear confessing the whole truth to anyone – even God, even ourselves.

We run to Jesus was our pain and need, and then slip away hoping we can get away with as much as we can *before the whole story gets told.*

And maybe this is exactly why the Spirit led Mark, the gospel writer, to include this account in his gospel... So that **WE** could hear Jesus' invitation and His response to her *trembling confession – her fearful telling of the whole truth.*

(v.34) He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

**"Daughter."**

Just this word alone might have restored something in her soul.

You wonder what people had called her over the years. Or what names, terms, labels were being voiced in that very moment throughout the crowd as they realized they were shoulder to shoulder with an **untouchable.**

But here, from the lips from Jesus, she finds herself addressed as "Daughter".

Everyone in the crowd heard it.

She wasn't a **problem** to be solved, an **issue** to be avoided, a **woman** to be ignored, or a blight on the neighborhood.

She was a **daughter**. Family. Someone to be loved and honored. Someone Jesus wanted to be associated with... Bound to...

*"Daughter, your **faith** has healed you."*

Many make a big deal about Jesus' clarification that it was her **FAITH** that brought her into contact with the healing power of Jesus, not her **HAND**.

And I think this is important for us to hear – especially this side of the Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus, because, clearly, Jesus is not with us in the same way He was with her that day. ***We are not able to grab a hold of his garment.***

But, as Jesus himself tells us, **we don't have to**. Because it's not the reach of our hands that accesses the healing grace of Jesus, it's the gift of **faith**. Faith that sends us running to Jesus.

A faith that comes from hearing – like it did for this woman.

And faith not *in faith*, but faith *in Jesus*.

Faith that He is the One who is **WHOLE** – and that, in grace, He offers us **His WHOLENESS...**

*Which is exactly what Jesus does, and reveals, here.*

*"Daughter, your faith has **healed** you."*

Now, if we were reading this in the original language, koine Greek, this translation would surprise us – because the word translated here as "**healed**" is a Greek

word that is most often translated differently. Because it speaks of something **more than just healing**. It means to be **made well**. To be made **whole**.

Which is why its most often translated as "**saved**".

*"Daughter, your faith has **SAVED** you."*

The Greek word is **SOZO**. And it means **wholeness**... The restoration of more than just one part of a body, but a restoration of **wholeness**.

When she touched Jesus' cloak, we're told that *"her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that **she was healed of her disease**". She was healed.*

But here, having stood before Jesus and told him the whole truth, Jesus declares that she was now **not just healed** of her disease, but she was **SOZO**.

**Saved**. Made **well**.

Made **whole**...

By the **wholeness** of Jesus.

Which is what Jesus wanted for her all along.

This is **WHY JESUS** wouldn't let her just slip away, even though she was already **healed** – because Jesus has come to make us **whole**.

To restore us not just some part of us, but *to restore our whole being – that we would love GOD with ALL of our heart and soul, mind and strength, and love our neighbors as ourselves – as Jesus does!*

And so, not surprisingly, Jesus sends her off with these words: **"Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."**

**"Go in PEACE."**

Which in the Jewish imagination meant and means not just *the absence of conflict*, but the fullness of God's blessing...

The fullness of God's *abundance*... God's **WHOLENESS**.

The Wholeness – the Shalom – we encounter in Jesus...

A Wholeness He has come to restore in us – *as we come in faith to the One who knows the whole truth about us...*

And so this morning, as is often our practice, we are going to shape our response to Christ by coming to receive the Lord's Supper together – *to receive from the One who knows the whole truth about us – and who, in this knowledge – invites us to come and receive the grace that alone can make us whole.*

And as we do, I invite you to hear Jesus' question "Who touched my clothes?" as His invitation to **you** (to all of us) to step out from your hiding place and speak the truth about yourself that Jesus already knows – that you might be forgiven, healed, and made a bit more whole.

**Come Lord Jesus.**

Let's pray.