

Posture: Pain

Luke 8:40-48

(Valerie Wiebe)

On the other side of the lake the crowds welcomed Jesus, because they had been waiting for him. Then a man named Jairus, a leader of the local synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come home with him. His only daughter, who was about twelve years old, was dying.

As Jesus went with him, he was surrounded by the crowds. A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding, and she could find no cure. Coming up behind Jesus, she touched the fringe of his robe. Immediately, the bleeding stopped.

“Who touched me?” Jesus asked.

Everyone denied it, and Peter said, “Master, this whole crowd is pressing up against you.”

But Jesus said, “Someone deliberately touched me, for I felt healing power go out from me.”

When the woman realized that she could not stay hidden, she began to tremble and fell to her knees in front of him. The whole crowd heard her explain why she had touched him and that she had been immediately healed.

“Daughter,” he said to her, “your faith has made you well. Go in peace.”

The New Living Translation

Before we look at the specific story for this morning about this bleeding woman who touches Jesus' cloak, I want to consider the stories that come before this account and after this account. This can give us context and insight into what our story is really about. What is Jesus doing before he encounters this woman and after he encounters this woman?

I will tell you what he is doing. Jesus is thinking the unthinkable and doing the incredible. At the beginning of chapter 8, Jesus is preaching and teaching with parables; taking old ideas and giving them new life with imagination and story; bringing new meaning to the idea of the kingdom of God. Jesus is throwing away old ideas and replacing them with new ways of thinking. Thinking the unthinkable. Then Jesus begins to do the incredible: he calms the storm, like literally tells the wind and waves to "Cut it out! That's quite enough!" Just like a naughty child having a tantrum. And he follows this up with casting out demons, a whole legion of them, out of a tormented man. A legion in the Roman army was 6000 men. Unthinkable and incredible for sure.

Then Jesus finds himself in the press of the crowd. One translation says he is nearly crushed, the crowd is so pressing. It is a scene of chaos. Jarius, a synagogue leader, and remember that generally the religious leaders were skeptical of Jesus, if not downright hostile towards him. But this man's only child, a daughter is dying. Which is also A very Interesting detail. Daughters were not all that valuable in this culture. Jewish men regularly thanked God that they were not born a woman. But Jarius obviously values his child, loves his daughter, is desperate enough to publicly seek out Jesus' help. Both unthinkable and incredible.

Now let us skip ahead to after Jesus' encounter with the woman. What does he do next? Oh, just raises Jarius' daughter from the dead. No biggie. Unthinkable! Incredible!

Okay, back to our originally scheduled programming: Jesus and the bleeding woman. Isn't that interesting, how she is named. Or not named actually. A bleeding woman. Say that with disdain. Put a sneer into it. This is how she is defined by her culture, her society. And I believe, this is how she defines herself. How could she not, when all around her people scorn and malign her. She is just a woman, of no value really, and she has been bleeding for 12 years, and so is ritually unclean. We know what that means don't we. No one wants to be anywhere near her. She is a plague, a pariah.

But it isn't her fault, no matter what her society might say. It is her body that has failed her, as our bodies sometimes do. We are dust, remember? Like Ash Wednesday reminded us. Just dust!

Okay, now we are going to get real here. Real and messy, because that is the reality of life. I want you to all close your eyes and imagine you are this woman. You were young once. Full of promise and potential. You were 12 when you got your first period. And all seemed okay. You adjusted to this new rhythm of your life. Your mother and aunties helped you and provided guidance. You enjoyed spending time with other women and girls when you had your monthly bleeding. It wasn't a curse, but a blessing, a promise that you could create life. You got married. You had a child, a daughter. Your husband didn't beat you. Even if he didn't exactly love you. But after your daughter's birth, things

began to go wrong. The bleeding lasted longer and came more often. Your mother took you to doctors, but nothing helped. It only got worse. You began to smell, and people noticed. Your own father looked at you in horror. Your husband left you. Even your own mother and aunts began to look at you askance. You lost everything. There was something wrong with you. “What’s wrong with you?” They would ask. And you began to believe there really was something wrong with you. There must be something wrong with you. That was the only thing that made any sense right? Right?

If you don’t believe me, that her life was intolerable, go read Leviticus 15:19-33. These are the laws that proscribed her life. Everything she touched became an abomination. Everything she sat on or lay on was now filthy. She had no place to lay her head in peace. Not to mention the exhaustion that plagued her every step. You can’t lose that much blood and not feel completely drained. This was her life. I think it is absolutely astounding that she had lived with this affliction for 12 years. Somehow she managed to survive, that really says something about her character.

You can open your eyes. I wonder what changed in her? What opened her eyes. After 12 years of suffering, of believing she was broken, 12 years of blood pouring from her body, 12 years of smell, and mess and stench, 12 years of struggling to survive, waking up each morning feeling weak and defeated, what changed? How did she find the courage to think the unthinkable, to go out into a crowd, a crushing mass of people, knowing she would be reviled. How did she gather up enough daring to do the incredible, approach a holy teacher and touch him, knowing she would make him unclean in the process? How did she go from being immersed and defined by her pain, her suffering, to seeing the possibility of something else,

something more, something both unthinkable and incredible? What, or who, opened her eyes?

Jesus. I think she saw him. Like really saw him. Not just with her physical sight, but deep in her heart. That deep place where the Spirit resides in all of us. It is often deep deep suffering that awakens us to God's presence. And I believe this is what happened to her. She woke up. She began to hope. She began to catch the idea of something different, something new, something she had thought impossible, now began to wake within her. As the Franciscan sister and author Ilio Delia wrote , Jesus taught with imagination, wanted to in-still imagination in his followers so they could think the unthinkable and do the incredible. This bleeding woman began to understand the idea of the kingdom of heaven here on earth. She began to imagine a different identity, a different story for herself. Her posture changed from one of despair and suffering, turning inward, to reaching out, and seeing possibilities.

And what was Jesus response? First he acknowledged that something had changed for him as well. This woman changed him. Isn't that incredible? Jesus recognized the change. Jesus may have not known exactly who it was who created this change, but he recognized what kind of change it was. It was a transfer of power, of spirit, of transformation. And I think that he knew the importance of bringing that changed person out into the light, out of the darkness and despair that had shrouded her life for so long. And she came, and crouched at his feet, both full of so much joy that she could hardly contain it, but also fearful that perhaps this joy might be taken from her. Hope. I think she came with hope. Hope is what Jesus awoke in her.

Jesus looked down at her. I like to imagine that his eyes filled with tears of love and compassion. This was his answering posture. I like to imagine that Jesus took her hand and raised her to her feet. Reached out his hand, just as she had. God often responds to us in kind. Jesus smiled at her. She smiled back. He saw her, as she had begun to see him. Saw her not as just a woman, not as just a broken person, but as a daughter, beloved. Jesus offered her peace. He affirmed her faith and her worth with the words, “Your faith has made you well.” Jesus loved and valued her, just as Jarius did for his daughter. Just like Jesus did for the daughter of Jarius, Jesus brought this woman back to life. She, this beloved daughter of God, let go of her pain, so that she could hold onto the source of all life. And the source poured into her with restoration and healing of body, mind, spirit and heart. She changed her posture from this (inward posture) to this (reaching out.) And Jesus responded in kind. Now isn't that both unthinkable and incredible? Just imagine that.

Amen.