

**The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – Mark 5:21-43**  
**St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Sedona Arizona**

*“If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.”*

Have you ever been so desperate that you would seek the help of a stranger? Perhaps you were lost, or sick, or going through hard times. You tried everything you knew to improve your circumstances through connections with family, friends, or acquaintances, but nothing and no one could help. And just when you were at the brink of despair, you heard about a new possibility: a stranger was bringing hope and new life to everyone he encountered. Even if you thought that it might be too good to be true, that glimmer of hope gave you courage to go ahead and see for yourself. To risk everything for the promise of new life.

Jesus wasn't a complete stranger to the crowds that followed him along the shores of Galilee. Many people had seen him cast out demons, heal the sick, and cure those who were afflicted with various diseases. Some had been told about Jesus' miraculous powers even though Jesus asked that witnesses tell no one. Such a request was seemingly impossible to honor given that Jesus was attracting crowds of people wherever he went. Good thing they shared the good news rather than keep it to themselves, because people from all walks of life were in need of healing.

In today's Gospel reading we heard of two people desperately seeking Jesus' healing touch: Jairus, a father and synagogue leader, and an unnamed woman who apparently had no family. Jairus held a place of honor in the community, while the woman had become practically invisible even to this expectant crowd. Yet both Jairus and the woman were in dire need of Jesus' healing presence and power. Jairus used his privilege and agency to overtly connect with Jesus, yet he risked everything - his stature in the synagogue and his place of honor in the community -

by prostrating at Jesus' feet and begging that his daughter be made well and live.

The woman had very little agency or stature in the community, yet she appeared to draw on her dwindling inner resources to covertly reach out toward the possibility of relief. Relief from her physical ailment and relief from societal estrangement.

We don't know much about this woman's backstory except that she had been suffering from hemorrhaging for twelve years. Based on what we know about the cultural norms of the time, we can make some assumptions about her social condition. A bleeding woman, whether menstruating or hemorrhaging, would have been considered ritually unclean. Social norms would have required her to remain isolated until the blood flow stopped. Had this been a normal period, the woman would have, in due time, returned to normal social and religious life. But since this excessive bleeding flowed from weeks, to months, to years, the woman became estranged from, if not ostracized by her community, and possibly her own family. Had she been married, the hemorrhaging would have prevented her from having sexual relations with her husband, which in turn would have been grounds for divorce. However, it is conceivable that she was widowed because at one time she had a considerable amount of money to seek the help of several medical professionals. Yet, there was no mention of a male family member or friend to advocate for her. Clearly, the woman was left to fend for herself. Marginalized. Invisible. Lost. Forgotten.

Although the Gospel text makes it easy to compare and contrast the social status of Jairus and the woman, and to mentally triage the medical conditions of the two females in need of healing, both situations present images of unimaginable suffering. Naturally, we do not choose to be in situations of great pain, yet when we find ourselves or a loved one experiencing unimaginable suffering we desire that

comfort and healing be expedited without delay. But anyone who has even had a slight injury or sickness knows that the time between infirmity and wholeness invites patience and courage, for the journey toward wellness can always be thwarted by unexpected complications. Although we wait with hope for renewal, worry and anxiety can reveal the thin line between faith and fear.<sup>1</sup>

One late night five years ago, while I was living in the Bay Area, my daughter texted me a heart wrenching photo of my three-month old grandson. Ben was strapped into his car seat and being loaded into an ambulance because he was experiencing respiratory distress. That night Ben was transported not just to one hospital, but three – the last one being the Phoenix Children’s Hospital. I received updates throughout the night and photos of Ben with a pediatric oxygen cannula taped to his tiny little cheeks. Of course, I flew to Phoenix the next morning to be with my family. By then Ben’s condition had stabilized, but he was still being cared for by a pediatric ICU medical team. Over the next two days we sat and waited, and prayed and worried. Although our minds became fuzzy, and time seemed to stand still, we were focused on comforting this little human being who had stolen our hearts the moment we first laid eyes on him just a few short months ago.

At one point, I decided to take a walk to get some fresh air and sunshine. On my way through the hospital I thought of all the children who were patients there. I thought of the other family members who were scared and worried like me. I thought of all the medical care providers. And I prayed for all of us, that we would be healed by the power and presence of God’s love, knowing that some children

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-13-2/commentary-on-mark-521-43-6>

would go home with their families and some would not. There is a thin line between faith and fear.

That thin line was revealed when Jairus asked Jesus to heal his daughter. That thin line was revealed when the woman reached out to touch the hem of Jesus' cloak. That thin line is revealed whenever we hold in the balance our fears and anxieties along with enduring trust in Jesus' healing presence and touch. When we reach out toward Jesus, our faith is on the line. Everything is at risk when all we hope for is a healing encounter with Christ.

In the holy land, there is a chapel built on the first century port of Magdala that displays this painting by Daniel Cariola entitled, Encounter. [*Share photo*]<sup>2</sup> This mural captures the moment when the hemorrhaging woman reached through a crowd of followers to touch the hem of Jesus' cloak. Like Jairus, she had bent down to be close to Jesus' feet. But instead of speaking to Jesus, which would have been inappropriate for a woman, she remained in the inconspicuous role appointed to her by society. She approached Jesus with the hope that a brief encounter with him would bring wellness. Yet miraculously this innocent gesture not only initiated the healing of her body, but also her relationship with Jesus and her community.

[*Stop sharing photo*]

Encounters with Jesus are all at once physical and spiritual; individual and communal. This painting allows us to witness a supreme act of faith up close and personal, and invites us to consider the infinite ways that we encounter Jesus: in the marketplace and in community; in prayer and in the Eucharist; in forgiveness and reconciliation; in healing and renewal. The salvific power of God connects all of us through the thin line of faith, by overcoming fear with love.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.christian.art/daily-gospel-reading/105>

While I am immensely grateful that my grandson was healed and that I had the privilege of baptizing him a month later, I am aware that many children continue to suffer, and families continue to experience the unimaginable pain of losing a child. And yet, even in the midst of unimaginable tragedy and immense suffering of this world, we experience glimpses of God's grace breaking in. Each of us has witnessed the inbreaking of God's realm through the care and concern of others, through an unexpected healing, through acts of forgiveness large and small, and through the restoration of loving relationships. We trust that God is still here working in and through us to mend our hearts and heal our brokenness. For God so loved the world, that he risked the suffering and death of his own son to wipe away all tears, heal all wounds, swallow up death, and make all things new again.

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