

**... your faith has made you well**

Lamentations 3:22–33

Psalm 30

2 Corinthians 8:7–15

Mark 5:21–43

**Text: Mark 5:34**

He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’

**Introduction**

Pathos is a quality of an experience or story or work of art, that arouses feelings of pity, sympathy, tenderness, or sorrow. The Greek word pathos means "suffering," "experience," or "emotion." It was borrowed into English in the 16th century, and for English speakers, the term usually refers to the emotions produced by a depiction of tragedy.

Some time ago I came across a meditation on this story in Mark’s gospel of the healing of the woman who suffered from hemorrhages for 12 years. The meditation wonderfully depicted the pathos of Mark’s story; it put me in touch with her experience of suffering; I was struck by it sufficiently that I kept a copy thinking it would be good to share it with the congregation the next time we read this story. Today is the day. So, with apologies to the author for failing to have noted the publication information on my photocopy, I share it with you now.

1. God only knows how much she's suffered. She has lived with a bleeding uterus for 12 humiliating years. She has been labeled unclean by the rabbis and subjected to the Levitical prohibitions: unable to touch others or to be touched. Ostracized by the synagogue. Orphaned by society. And orphaned also by God, or so she thinks.

During that time, she was put out of the city's back door and shoved down its steps. Ever since, she has foraged in the side streets and alleyways for some scant leftovers of hope. Her eyes are downcast as you pass by. She is self-conscious, ashamed, and afraid. She fears the condescension in your eyes. She fears the indifference of your shoulder turned coldly against her. But most of all, she fears the gavel you bring down on her life. She fears the judgment that her illness is the direct result of some personal sin. And with a bleeding uterus, anyone could guess what kind of sin she had committed. You can imagine the innuendos.

And so, besides the shame of the constant bleeding, she bears the burden of its stigma. She carries the weight everywhere she goes. Trudging from doctor to doctor, she has tried to find a place to lay her burden down. The doctors have filled her mind with hopes and her body with folk remedies, but in the end, the only thing they have relieved her of was her money.

She is destitute now, and being out of money the doctors finally admit there is nothing they can do for her. Her life is ebbing away. The steady loss of blood over the years has taken its toll. She is anemic, pale, and tired. So very, very tired. She is tired of the shame. Tired of the stigma. Only God knows how much she's suffered.

Every illusion she had about life is shattered. Suffering has a way of doing that. And swept away with those illusions are her dreams. Suffering has a way of doing that, too. She no longer dreams of marriage and family; of combing the hair of a daughter or wiping the dirty face of a son; or bouncing a grandbaby on her knee; or of golden memories she can treasure. Her suffering whisks those dreams into little broken piles.

But stories of another physician reached down to pick up the pieces of those dreams. A physician who charges no fee. A physician who asks for nothing in return. Who has no hidden agenda beyond making a sick world well again. She has heard of this physician, this Jesus who comes not to the healthy but to the sick. Who comes not to the strong but to the downtrodden. Who comes not to those with well ordered lives but to those whose lives are filled with physical and moral chaos. And she has heard of Jesus' success among incurables: the curing of an uncontrollable demoniac, the raising of a widow's dead son, the healing of a leper.

A *leper*, she thinks. Another untouchable. Another orphan taken by the scruff of the neck and thrown from society's back door. Jesus simply touched the diseased man and he became clean and whole. Certainly, she thinks, if I can find this Jesus and but touch the fringe of his garment, I too will be cleansed and made whole. And so, with that thin thread of faith, this frail needle of a woman stitches her way through the crowd. Her tired frame is jostled by those clustered around Jesus. They are pressing him, brushing shoulders, and rubbing against him—the curious, the eager, and the desperate.

This desperate woman pushes her empty hand through a broken seam in the crowd and, for a fleeting moment, clutches the corner of his garment. Jesus is pulled back. Not by the grasp of her hands so much as by the grasp of her faith. Power leaves him to surge through the hemorrhaging woman, and immediately she feels the rush of her youthful health returning. In the flood of those feelings, she releases her grasp and is swept away by the crowd.

But Jesus doesn't let her get away. Although the crowd was pressing in on him, her touch was different. And that stopped him in his tracks. How ready Jesus is to respond to the hand of outstretched faith. In obedience to his summons she comes trembling, flushed with embarrassment, fearful. But she comes. And between the lines of her confession, punctuated haltingly by her tears, Jesus reads the whole sad story of the last 12 years. He sees the isolation. He sees the introspection. He sees the insecurity. God knows how much she suffered.

The crowd blurs in the watery edges of her eyes. For an intimate moment she sees only Jesus. And he sees only her. Face to face, physician and patient. And with the tender word “Daughter,” he gives this orphan a new home within the family of God. He gives her healing. And he gives her back her dreams.

2. Here is the line that jumped off the page for me; “How ready Jesus is to respond to the hand of outstretched faith.” Is there something you are carrying today such that your hand is outstretched to Jesus in faith? Or it may be that the witness of this woman who reaches out to Jesus encourages you to do the same. Jairus too has faith in Jesus and has reached out to him. Jesus is on his way with Jairus because his beloved twelve-year-old daughter is dying. A mission that

calls for urgency. Yet even in the midst of this emergency Jesus stops to address this unnamed woman who reached out in faith.

The pandemic losses of the past year and a quarter have touched all of us. The friendships diminished by isolation, the loss of common connections with family, the celebrations not attended, the grandchild not embraced, the sacrament not received, the silence of great church gatherings, the joy of a wedding, the comfort of a funeral service—everyone has lost something. I think of the medical attention and treatments that have been delayed adding to the continuation of suffering; the despair of the young in careers stalled or put on hold; the fear of infection that has given rise to fissures in families; the frustration of having a family member dying in hospital alone; the hopelessness that wonders is there any point in living. And I haven't addressed the economic issues that are highlighted in the growing disparity between the laptop crowd and the labourer whose work has to be done in-person. There is plenty of grief to go around.

In these stories of the healing part of Jesus' ministry, we are presented with two losses that are common to all of us as humans; the suffering of illness and the death of a loved one. A woman who has been suffering for 12 years and a young female who dies at 12 years of age. The healing of the woman with the hemorrhage on the way to the raising of Jairus' daughter are two miracles linked together in order to tell an important truth: that sickness and natural death are both subject to the power of God and neither spell the end for those in Christ. Whatever loss has been yours in this past year, these stories are told to encourage us to reach out to Jesus Christ in faith. Offer those losses to him in prayer. Call for his help.

About Jairus' daughter. When Jesus arrives at Jairus' house he says to the mourners, 'The child is not dead but sleeping.' Much has been made of this to the point of suggesting that the child had not actually died. This story is also in Matthew and Luke's gospel who make explicit what Mark's gospel implies—the girl had died. Keep in mind that the word 'sleep' was a euphemism for death that Jesus had used on other occasion. In John's gospel Jesus said this of Lazarus—"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep." The disciples misunderstood and Jesus clarified, "Lazarus is dead." (John 11:11, 14) When Jesus declared, "I am the resurrection and the life" he went on to say, "and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." Jesus means that believers are never lost to God. Jesus was stating that the child was not lost to God, as her parents, along with Peter, James, and John, will soon witness.

I can hear the question. "But I have prayed for Jesus' healing touch, I have asked for some condition of suffering to be relieved, and it is not. I am genuinely happy for this woman who reached out in faith and was miraculously healed by our Lord." But others are not; some suffering is not relieved. How are we to understand this? The Apostle Paul said he prayed three times for relief from a "thorn in the flesh" but was not relieved. (2 Corinthians 12:7-8) I have a couple of thorns in the flesh that I would be delighted to be rid of and have prayed as Paul, and like Paul I find they remain.

First, consider the rest of the lives of these two women. Indeed we are happy that the suffering from hemorrhages had ended and the woman afflicted for 12 years now lives free of this suffering. We can imagine that Jairus' daughter, now raised to life brought great joy to her family and likely went on to have a family of her own. As delighted as we are for their healing

and the continuation of their lives, at some point both die; some disease closes out their earthly existence. We have only touched down on a snippet of their total lives, a happy snippet indeed. But they didn't go from healing to healing or from one incident of raising to life to another as if they are still alive among us today. Approximately ten years before my wife Valerie succumbed to the cancer that closed out her earthly existence, she came very close to death as the result of a burst appendix. At that time we were rejoicing that our Lord had given us her life back. Friends, I point out, perhaps bluntly, nobody gets out of here alive.

The second point, and the point of the gospel story, is what this tells us about God. Jesus is the manifest face of God, according to the gospel. When God comes among us we see that God hates suffering and death. Every incident of healing in the gospel is a window onto, an advance sign of, that day that is coming for the believer when all suffering will come to an end. Every victory of Jesus over death we read in the gospel witnesses to the believer that her life will never be lost to God. All of this is a window into the heart of God and his redemptive purposes to bring us to that day when death will be no more, and when mourning and crying and pain will be no more.

And further to this point, when God comes among us in Jesus, entering our existence, he is not immune to suffering. He humbles himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. We recognize that when we reach out in faith to our Saviour about our suffering we do so to Jesus who is one with us in that suffering. He too prayed for his cup to pass from him. Yet his suffering was not the end of his story but the very avenue for his resurrected life. So, pray for healing, yes! Rejoice when it comes. But know that suffering is never the end of the believer's story in Christ Jesus. What these two miracles of Jesus point toward—the end of suffering and the conquering of death—are already ours by faith in him.

3. I want to circle back to that phrase I highlighted from the meditation I began with; “How ready Jesus is to respond to the hand of outstretched faith.” When Jesus calls for the identification of the person who touched his clothes the woman comes in fear and trembling. In addition to our Lord's warm and tender welcome of her into the family of God, addressing her as ‘daughter,’ Jesus wants her to know the significance of her faith in him. “Your faith has made you well.” Jesus then blesses her, “Go in peace.” Jesus thinks as a Hebrew and is blessing her with shalom—meaning God's blessing for the fullness of life, not merely the absence of conflict. In faith we find the fullness of life.

You notice as well that when Jesus and Jairus are on the way news comes that his daughter has died. “Why trouble the teacher any further?” asks the bearers of this tragic news. It was at this moment in the wake of the shock of this news that Jesus said, “Do not fear, only believe.” Jairus is encouraged to hold on to faith.

The woman told Jesus everything. You can hear her pouring out her sad story; I imagine her saying something like, “I was so desperate, and you were my last hope.” Jesus commends her faith. We too can pour out the whole truth about our story to him. Hold on to faith.

Jesus said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’