

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE BEHIND JESUS' BACK?

Mark 5 24-34.

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If you're honest you'll admit that at times you've had an urgent need, but you've been too embarrassed or too afraid to ask for help.

If you could only find a way to get the help you need without anyone noticing!

Women insist this is mostly a male problem.

Years ago a weary old Indian was found wandering aimlessly in the desert. A traveler asked him, 'Are you lost?' Proudly he answered, 'No. Not lost. Wigwam lost.'

The humorist Loretta La Roche, who clearly did not know much about the Bible, said 'Moses was lost in the desert for 40 years because he wouldn't ask directions. If he'd had a woman with him, they'd have been out of there in no time.'

To some degree all of us have been too proud or too bashful to let others know when we need help.

- In our text this morning Jesus was on his way to the home of Jairus whose 12-year-old daughter was dying. A woman who desperately needed help from Jesus was in the crowd, but she was too shy or too self-conscious to ask.

So she tried to get what she needed without being singled out.

She tried to get help from Jesus behind his back.

5:24 *So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him.*

5:25 *And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years.*

5:26 *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.*

5:27 *When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak,*

5:28 *because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed."*

5:29 *Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.*

5:30 *At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"*

5:31 *"You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"*

5:32 *But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it.*

5:33 *Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth.*

5:34 *He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."*

- When you feel desperate it may be hard to believe that Christ cares about someone like you.

You sense within your soul that Jesus is your only hope, but you're hesitant to admit that you need him.

This incident reported in Mark 5:24-34 teaches us helpful lessons about human suffering and the struggle to have faith in Jesus.

I. MOST PEOPLE ARE HIDING A HEAVY BURDEN Mark 5:24-26

Most people don't expose their problems publicly. They hide their suffering and burdens and heartaches quite well.

You and I don't know the emotional and spiritual load under which some people in this room are laboring.

Some of them feel as if they are furiously treading water just to keep their head above water. Fears weigh them down.

But they hide their struggles and anguish in silence.

As Henry David Thoreau wrote: *The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.* (Walden, 1854)

5:24 *So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him.*

5:25 *And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years.*

5:26 *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.*

- Mark doesn't tell us the exact nature of her illness. Most likely it was a uterine disease.

This woman had suffered with this illness for as many years as Jairus's daughter was old—12 years. (5:42).

She had done everything she could do but her condition grew steadily worse. Her medical problem probably left her anemic and physically frail.

- Not only was she suffering physically, people also shunned this woman. She was what they called a *zabah*. Because of her bleeding she was considered unclean and anyone who came into contact with her would be unclean.

According to Leviticus 15:25-27, anything this woman touched or her clothes touched became unclean. Her defilement was transmitted to her clothes.

If those around her knew of her condition, they would have tried to avoid contact with her.

- The disciples didn't know that this woman was there. She was just a nameless face in the crowd.

Later on the Latin tradition came up with a name for her—Veronica.

There are people like that among us—literally and spiritually. We don't know the people in every crowd who have desperate needs. They have come to the end of their resources. There is nowhere left to turn for help. They need Jesus.

It's good news to know that when people have come to the end of their material and emotional resources, Jesus is there.

But, of course, they don't have to wait until that happens to turn to Jesus for help.

II. MANY PEOPLE FEEL UNWORTHY OF CHRIST'S HELP Mark 5:27-28

A lot of people don't come to Christ for help because they're afraid he won't receive them.

A woman suffering from AIDS in Southern Africa said, *'I have been so bad in my lifetime that God could never forgive me—God will never forgive me.'*

There is no hint that this woman here in Mark 5 was suffering because of a sinful lifestyle.

But it was a common belief that suffering was punishment from God for sin.

It was the so-called law of the harvest: *You reap what you have sown.*

This woman must have sown a lot of wickedness to reap such suffering as punishment—that would have been the reasoning.

Even Jesus disciples asked Jesus who had sinned to cause a certain man to be born blind (John 9:2)

So if people considered suffering a punishment from God for sin, they didn't feel much compassion for the person.

5:27 *When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak,*

5:28 *because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed."*

She was too bashful to approach Jesus from the front, so she snuck up behind him.

She couldn't bring herself to ask Jesus, so she tried to "steal" a healing—to take it without anyone noticing.

And there are still lots of people like that. They feel weak and fearful and unworthy. They don't think they deserve Jesus' attention.

- This woman was not the only person to believe that she would be healed if she could just touch Jesus. In Mark 3:10 we read, *'For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him.'* Also in Mark 6:56 *'And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were cleansed.'*

This woman had heard of the power in the miracles he performed, so she thought the power of Jesus' person would be transmitted to his clothing. If she touched his clothes that power would touch and heal her too.

Instead of her uncleanness defiling Jesus, maybe Jesus' power would remove her defilement.

- Some superstition and belief in magic may have been mixed with her faith.

There are people like her today who believe Jesus can heal them, but they don't know much about Jesus. Their theology is imperfect. They don't have all their theological i's dotted and t's crossed.

They want help from Jesus, but they're afraid to face him.

In desperation they turn to Jesus. But they just want his help.

They're afraid to come to him completely—just as they are.

But that's the uniqueness of Christianity. It's a "come as you are" faith.

The best-known song that invites people to come to Jesus with all their conflicts and doubts and feelings of wretchedness is *'Just as I am, without one plea . . . I come.'*

III. ALL PEOPLE ARE IMPORTANT TO JESUS CHRIST Mark 5:29-32

Jesus responds to people who are timid and tentative in looking to him for help.

We see here how Jesus responds to those who think they don't deserve his attention.

5:29 *Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.*

5:30 *At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"*

5:31 *"You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"*

5:32 *But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it.*

The woman knew immediately that she had been healed. So did Jesus.

Jesus knows when someone has reached out to him in faith.

Even though this woman acted out of wild desperation rather than mature faith, Jesus responded.

- The disciples didn't understand. How could they? The power had not gone from them or through them. They hadn't felt a thing.

What did Jesus mean by *'Who touched my clothes?'* They had seen how many had jostled him.

But one touch was different. It was a touch of faith.

There's a vital lesson here about real faith in Jesus Christ. It must be sincere.

Expressing genuine faith in Jesus Christ is not a cool or casual action. It's not something you do just because it seems like a good idea at the time.

Jesus dealt with a wealthy man who thought it would be a good thing to have eternal life and he wanted to know how to get it. Jesus didn't tell him just to believe. Jesus told him he had to want it because he saw that he needed it more than anything in the world. (Mark 10:17-23)

- Others may not recognize it at first when someone has been in touch with Jesus.

Jesus knows when people reach out to him in faith, and people who have done that know it as well. When Christ's power comes into your life, you know it.

You've heard of drive-by shootings; this was a "glide-by healing."

This was a new kind of miracle performed by Jesus. It took place behind his back. He didn't even address the woman until after she was healed.

The woman wanted to let this pass by unnoticed by anyone, but Jesus was not willing.

- Normally Jesus tried to avoid publicity because of his miracles. He didn't want over-zealous people to hail him as a Messiah-figure before his time came to be the sacrifice for sin on the cross.

Jesus didn't keep this miracle a secret. He had to meet this woman, for her sake.

He asked *'who touched my clothes?'* not to rebuke her, but to make personal contact with her.

She needed to know that she had not been healed automatically just by touching a part of Jesus' clothing.

- This physical event is an illustration of a spiritual truth.

To receive help from Jesus you must meet Jesus.

Jesus Christ is not an impersonal source of help. He wants a relationship with those who look to him for help.

Some people feel that they need Jesus but they are afraid of him.

Christ is full of compassion. He wants to meet them. They are important to him. That's why he came.

- The disciples were acting like the managers of a celebrity, trying to get him through the crowd without being stopped. He had important engagement to get to at the home of a ruler of the synagogue. His 12-year-old daughter was deathly ill.

But it wasn't only the prominent synagogue ruler who was important to Jesus.

The people nobody else noticed in the crowd were equally important to him.

The things we may think need priority attention are not always the top priority for our Lord. There are other things that must be dealt with before he deals with what we think is most important.

At the home of Zacchaeus Jesus said that he had come to seek and to save what was lost (Luke 19:10).

Here a poor, nameless woman who had depleted all her resources trying to get help, was important to Jesus.

He has compassion for those who feel unworthy.

IV. WEAK PEOPLE CAN HAVE FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST Mark 5:33-34

You don't have to settle all your doubts and confusion before you can believe in Jesus.

We all live with some unanswered questions. Christian faith is faith in a person, Jesus Christ, God the Son.

Faith is not based on your ability to reason things through. Please understand that I am not saying faith is something unreasonable. Your mind must be engaged if your faith is real.

If it were, your faith would be based largely on your intelligence.

- Jesus validates the effectiveness of faith that is fragile—faith like a little seed.

In Luke 17:5, 6 *‘The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.’”*

- The disciples didn’t know what Jesus meant when he asked, *‘Who touched my clothes?’* but there was someone in the crowd who did.

5:33 *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 had to do what she had tried to avoid doing. She became the center of attention for a few moments—mostly the center of Jesus’ attention.

She was afraid because she was ceremonially unclean and she had touched Jesus’ cloak.

If she confessed that, the people would condemn her for making Jesus unclean. And what if Jesus became angry with her?

She knew a miracle had happened in her body. But she was terrified as she fell at Jesus’ feet and told him the whole truth.

5:34 *He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”*

Jesus explained to the woman that it was by faith she was healed, not by some magical power in his clothing.

There were probably others in the crowd who had physical needs and they brushed up against Jesus. They were clamoring for Jesus attention, trying to get Jesus to address their needs personally. But they didn’t have the kind of faith this woman had.

- The word “healed” here in v.34 is *sesóken* (‘saved’). This was more than just a physical healing.

Back in Mark 2 we read about Jesus healing a paralyzed man. As part of the healing Jesus said to him, *‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’* (2:5)

This woman who felt unclean, unworthy, and afraid had met Jesus and placed her trust in him. Her life would never be the same again.

It is a cherished value of Crossroads Church to be a community where people can come just as they are and not have to pretend to be okay for fear of being rejected.

This is a priority for your new pastor, James Peterson, as you heard him affirm it a couple of weeks ago.

Let us be a community where people who may be hurting and feeling ashamed will know that they can come here and not be rejected.

Let us help them to meet Jesus face to face and be cleansed and forgiven and then go on in peace and start a new life as Jesus told this woman to do—and find love and joy here with us.

This is the Purpose of Crossroads Church:

The purpose of Crossroads Church is to prayerfully introduce people to Jesus, grow them to be like Jesus, care for others, minister to others, and to glorify God

God has lavished his grace on us, let us be generous in giving it to others.

Are you tired of projecting an image that you’ve got it all together—life is just fine for you? Have you been denying the truth and deceiving yourself and others? You don’t have to spill all the details about your personal struggles. But please understand you are surrounded by hundreds of people just like you who also need to be honest before God.

Maybe you feel too unworthy to ask Christ to help you—to forgive you and help you start afresh.

Jesus was on his way to an emergency involving the innocent little daughter of a prominent leader in the community. But he stopped to meet a “nobody.” She wasn’t a nobody to Jesus. He had to meet her because she had reached out to him.

Okay, so your faith isn’t strong. You’re still confused about a lot of things. So was the woman. There was probably some confusion in her fragile faith. But she reached out to Jesus and he reached out to her. He’ll do that if you reach out to him in your confusion and desperation. Then God’s holy word, the gospel, will answer your most important questions.