

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

June 27, 2021, The Fifth Sunday of Pentecost/The 12th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Psalm 130, Mark 5:21-43

REACH (A First-Person Sermon)

This morning I invite you to journey with me to the Galilee region to listen to a story told by a woman who met Jesus:

I have a story to tell you this morning, a story about the teacher and Messiah Jesus, who passed through our town several times as he made his way throughout Galilee.

By now you have probably heard how, in the third year of his teaching and healing, he went to Jerusalem one last time,

he was betrayed there, by one of his 12 closest disciples,
he was crucified on a cross on a Friday.

Then three days later, on a Sunday morning he rose from death and left his grave empty, showing us that he truly is the Son of God.

40 days after that he ascended into heaven.

What he left behind were people like me, who have told the stories of how he changed our lives; often it was a simple act, or a few words he spoke, and life was never the same again.

It has been surprising to me that anyone wanted to hear my story because it was tangled up in the story of someone much more important than me.

Jairus was one of the important leaders in our synagogue,

a very wealthy man, a respected leader in our community.

Everyone knew who he was; and no one knew who I was,

except that I lived on the far edges of their lives.

The Rabbi Jairus's daughter was so sick that he thought she was dying. So, he came to Jesus and threw himself at Jesus' feet, begging him to come and lay his hand on his daughter, so she could live.

As always there was a large crowd following Jesus that day. And as always, I was at the far edges of the crowd.

That way no one ran the risk of bumping into me, or brushing against me.

You see I was a woman who had been sick for 12 years. For 12 long years I had had a flow of blood that never ended. So I was unclean.

The laws of God are clearly given in our Book of Leviticus, the 15th Chapter. Think of my life as you hear these words from our Holy Book: ¹⁹When a woman has her monthly period, she remains unclean for seven days, and if you touch her, you must take a bath, but you remain unclean until evening. ²⁰⁻²³Anything that she rests on or sits on is also unclean, and if you touch either of these, you must wash your clothes and take a bath, but you still remain unclean until evening. ²⁵Any woman who has a flow of blood outside her regular monthly period is unclean until it stops, just as she is during her monthly period. ²⁶Anything that she rests on or sits on during this time is also unclean, just as it would be during her period. ²⁷If you touch either of these, you must wash your clothes and take a bath, but you still remain unclean until evening. ³¹When any of you are unclean, you must stay away from the rest of the community of Israel.

For 12 years my body had betrayed me and kept me impure and unclean. So, I was kept from contact with anyone.

If they touched me, or sat where I sat, or even brushed against me they became unclean by the laws of our faith.

Once you are unclean you can't worship in the Synagogue in your village,
or in the Temple in Jerusalem.

And not only are you never allowed into God's house,
you can't go to visit anyone in their homes,
and they will never want to come and visit you.

I was a person that no one ever touched:

never a hug,
never a reassuring hand grabbing onto my hand,
never an arm around my shoulder,
never someone just resting their hand on my arm to let me know that I was not alone.

I was an outcast in my own town and in my own home.

I was a shadow woman whose family and friends wanted nothing to do with her.

In all of Israel the most important part of life was belonging to the community of God's faithful people.

If you didn't belong to the community, you were invisible.

But I was invisible in plain sight.

I was like someone who was dead, but still alive, I was living a walking death.

And I was walking symbol of all that is unclean, and not Godly in life.

I had become someone feared by children and despised by the people who once called me sister,
daughter, wife, mother, friend.

And as the years went by, I spent more and more money at the doctors.

I kept hoping that one of them would finally find a cure for me.

But the years went by and no answers were found.

Eventually I could no longer go to the physicians because I had no money left.

I was a woman alone, living in poverty, and living at the far edges of the life that swarmed around me.

It would have been better to be dead than to be condemned to the living, walking, death that I endured day by day.

So, you can see how I was the opposite of the synagogue leader Jairus, with all his money, his community standing and connections, and his undeniable importance to the religious life of our town.

And yet we were the same, his 12-year-old daughter was sick and dying,
and I was sick and dying,

and both of us knew that Jesus, was the only hope we had left, if only we could get close enough to him.

But we took different approaches. Jairus threw himself at Jesus' feet in front of the whole crowd, begging for Jesus to come and see his daughter. She was only 12 years old and she was near death. He begged Jesus to come and lay his healing hands on her and make her well.

I knew I couldn't go right up to Jesus like that. His disciples and the religious leaders would have stopped me because I was unclean, I was incurable, I was a nobody.

And yet I had faith.
 I had faith that Jesus had been sent from God.
 I believed that the stories of him healing people all over Israel were true
 I had faith that he could heal me too.

And so, I did something I hadn't done in 12 years, I pushed my way into that crowd;
 I didn't care who I touched;
 I touched people without thought for my uncleanness, or theirs,
 because all I wanted to do was get close enough to touch the hem of Jesus' robe.

I wasn't like Jairus, who had the boldness to go right up to Jesus. I didn't need Jesus to hear me, or see me, or talk to me. I just needed to touch his robe and I knew that he was so filled up with the power of God that I would be healed. I would be freed from the prison that my own body had become.

And I was right; as soon as I touched the hem of his robe, I could feel the change in my body. I knew that my 12 years of disease,
 my 12 years of separation from my God and my life,
 my 12 years of living death had ended.
 I knew that I was cured.

And surprisingly Jesus knew it too. The power of God was so strong in him, that he felt the change when I touched the hem of his robe.

So, he asked his disciples: "Who touched my clothes?"

And they answered, "Lord, who didn't touch you is the real question! We are surrounded by a crowd, so of course people have been bumping into you and touching your clothes. "

And then Jesus stopped. He just stopped right there in the middle of the road. He just stopped, when he should have continued rushing to Jairus's home to cure his daughter. But Jesus acted as if the person who had touched the hem of his robe, me, the unclean nobody who came close to him, was just as important as the synagogue leader. And maybe even a little more important than him, because he was putting me first.

And when I saw that he'd stopped I knew I had to tell him that it was me, me who had tried to get close enough to the power of God that it cured me.

I was so afraid as I stepped toward him,
 I wondered if he could hear the pounding of my heart.
 It was all that I could hear.

And then like Jairus before me, I threw myself down at his feet and told him the whole story. And as I looked down at the ground he reached for my hand and helped me to stand up, and I looked into his face and he said to me: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

And you know, when he called me daughter that was part of my healing too.
 He called me daughter and I knew that I was once more part of God's family.
 I was a woman of faith who could worship in the synagogue;
 I was a woman of faith who could hug my family and friends again.
 I was God's daughter again, instead of a diseased outcast.

And Jesus wasn't afraid to take my hand, or to talk to me, or to give me back my life.

And I wasn't the only one given the gift of life that day. I had suffered for 12 years and Jairus's daughter had lived 12 years and both of us were given hope and healing, and new life.

For even though Jairus's daughter was dead, when Jesus arrived at the house, Jesus brought her back to life.

And Jesus took her hand too and said to her: "Little girl, get up!"

And she got up and was alive,
and not just alive but hungry.

So, Jesus told her family that they shouldn't tell anyone about what he had done and they should feed the child.

But how could they not tell the story, and how could I not tell the story, because Jesus had brought the power of God into our lives.

Jesus had looked into our faces with love and power and healing,
and said we were God's children, God's daughters.

We had reached out to Jesus,

and he reached out to us and called us his family,
and healed us and sent us back into our lives with peace.

Jesus didn't care if we were just children, or an outcast woman filled with disease.

Jesus didn't care if I was poor and Jairus was rich.

Jesus didn't care who we were in the rest of our community.

What mattered to Jesus was that we had reached out, with just the little faith we had.

And Jesus saw our reaching out and said "yes! "

"Yes, you are God's children,

Yes, you deserve to be well and live,

Yes, your faith is enough, all you had to do was reach."

Reach...

You can do it too, reach out to the love and the healing of God that is for you, from Jesus,

Reach.