

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27; Mark 5:21-43

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

As they so generously did a few years back, my in-laws are taking our extended family on a cruise this summer. It's the ideal way for them to gather us in one place for a vacation together, while providing us all with a diverse list of activities. The last time we went on a cruise together, we noted how our particular cruise line, desperate to achieve a better reputation regarding its cleanliness and sanitary practices, made a point of having waiters pass out those antiseptic hand wipes to all ship guests as they entered the dining rooms. I've seen tv shows recently showing cruise ship employees spraying disinfectant from spray bottles onto guests' hands as they board the ship or head to the dining rooms. Of course, it used to be simply the dreaded Norwalk Virus that the cruise lines wanted to keep at bay. Now the Swine Flu is adding an additional layer of anxiety. I can only imagine how our cruise ship will tackle that threat this time around—maybe before I enter the dining room on board I'll have to slide down a huge tube slide, like at those water parks, with liquid disinfectant spraying me from all sides, swirling around me as I zip into that 5-course mealtime.

Okay—so I doubt it would be that extreme, but I'm certain there will be a level of cleanliness attempted by way of wipes or sprays. And I'll remind my kids not to touch the handrails unless needed. We'll wash our hands frequently. We'll hope for the best.

What's interesting is that these practices by the cruise lines are not only intended to protect me from getting sick. These practices are also intended to keep me from making others sick, to protect **others** from **me**. And if in fact I do become sick, the cruise ship will quarantine me.

The woman in our Gospel lesson—the one who has been bleeding unchecked for 12 long years—is considered unclean. Others need to be protected from her. You see, the Jewish laws of purity, noted in Old Testament scripture and held by long tradition, have rendered her unclean. Anything—or anyone—considered unclean (and believe me, there was a rather extensive list of those things and persons) could potentially defile the holy people of God. This woman, by all rights, should have been quarantined. Should have known better than to enter the pressing crowd, and dare to touch Jesus. Why, she might jostle someone, thus making them unclean. Certainly Jesus, an observant Jew, would become unclean at her touch. Well, she probably did know better. But knowing doesn't necessarily translate into doing, when a person is desperate for help, for healing, for life. Until this woman's bleeding ended, until the priests in the temple declared her clean, she had no part in community life without putting others at risk. So she has no life, does she?

She also had no right to interrupt Jesus and where he was going and what he needed to be doing. The daughter of an important man, Jairus, was gravely ill. Jairus, a leader in the synagogue—a clean Jewish man who knew Jewish law—well, he had a need for Jesus, to heal his daughter. Wasn't that more important than a woman whom no one else had been able to help—an unclean woman who had no status whatsoever? After all, Jairus got there first, made

his request first, asked and didn't just touch. We who are rule-followers and fair-minded can understand that. You don't jump line in the movie theater. Lady, take a number and go to the back, and for heaven's sake, don't touch anything. Besides, Jesus needed to get to Jairus' daughter double-quick. If she died, a corpse would be considered unclean, and Jairus and his household would have to deal with the regimen of making themselves ritually clean again. They'd be quarantined for awhile. So Jesus needed to get to the girl. Then he could attend to others' needs. Or not. The woman's been bleeding 12 years; what's a few more minutes? In fact, survey the crowd, and they'd probably say, "Who really cares?"

Mark brings together two incredible stories of healing for us. They seem to be complete contrasts: The unclean woman sneaking through the crowd, who had baffled every physician and who garnered no sympathy. The sick daughter of a noteworthy religious leader whose illness grieved her family and friends.

But they also hold some things in common. As the story unfolds, it's clear the woman and the girl (and her family) are desperate—every one of them. There is nothing left in the realm of human wisdom and ability and progress to offer them in the midst of their sickness. The woman continues in unending misery. The girl is on the brink of death. So who should take a number and get to the back of the line? Their suffering, their need, is equally great. And for both of them, Jesus is their only hope.

And that's another commonality. The bleeding woman and Jairus both believe Jesus is the key to life. They might not understand it—or him—but somehow they know Jesus is the one they need. They both have faith Jesus can fulfill their hope.

By the story's end, both sufferers have been healed. One more common linkage here is that both rejoin community. The little girl rejoins her family to eat a meal with them. The woman will discover that she can indeed go in peace, because she can walk among her neighbors once again. She can worship in the synagogue once again. Jesus' healing is not just in the physical sense, though that does indeed occur here. Note how the healing is in the fullest sense possible—a wholistic healing that takes into account the entire person and the wholeness of life they need and desire. Jesus' presence in their lives made it all possible.

And not just his presence in the same room or general area, but in his touch. Jesus dared to touch and be touched by the unclean, the despairing, the hopeless, the outcast. God, in the person of Jesus, shows us he is not afraid or unwilling or unable to touch those parts of our lives that make us hide, or isolate ourselves from others, the parts of our lives that wear us down with worry, or break our hearts with grief, or frighten us with the uncertainty of the future. Unlike the cruise ship worker who gingerly held out that antiseptic hand wipe to me—making certain our hands actually never touched—God is more than willing to touch any part of our life in order to make us whole. To forgive, to comfort, to change us. That's what Mark is telling us in his book of Good News. That's what Jesus shows us with his life...and his death.

And you know what else Mark is telling us? The One who is bound and determined to reach out to us and make us whole does not say, "Take a number and go to the back of the line." We are never an interruption for God. As we seek God's help for the daily challenges each of us must face, he will always be there to respond with the strength and power we need. *Do not fear,*

only believe. **AMEN.**

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