



First Christian Church of Orange (Disciples of Christ)

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SERMON: Welcome Interruption

Question: "Who touched my clothes?"

SCRIPTURE: Mark 5:24-34

By Pastor Dayna Kinkade

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years.²⁶ She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."²⁹ Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" ³¹ And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" ³² He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Imagine with me this scene: Jesus is near the Sea of Galilee and he is surrounded by people pressing in on him. The crowd is moving because Jesus is on his way to the house of Jairus, the leader of the synagogue. The situation is urgent. Upon seeing Jesus, Jairus runs up to Jesus and falls at his feet, begging him to heal his dying daughter. Now, Jesus cannot move fast enough for Jairus. But the crowd is pressing in.

Then it all comes to a screeching halt when Jesus suddenly stops. Looking around he asks a question that completely mystifies his disciples. "Who touched my clothes?" The disciples think the question is utterly ridiculous. They look at the crowd and they look at Jesus and basically say, "Seriously? That's the question you are stopping this whole procession to ask?" It's like a Hollywood star stepping out of her car into a sea of paparazzi and asking, "Who took my picture?"

Meanwhile, time is wasting. There is no time for ridiculous questions. "Come on, Jesus! We have to go!" "My daughter!" Jairus pleads. But there they stand with Jesus looking around trying to figure out who touched his clothes. To everyone's surprise, an unnamed woman steps forward and falls at his feet. She's the one. She did it. She touched his robe at the hem.

The disciples can't figure it out. Why, when so many people were touching him, did one touch in particular cause him to stop? And why, out of all the people who likely touched him, did this woman step forward?

We know something they don't know. We have the back story. We know why this woman was in the crowd and we know why her touch was different. We know why she was compelled to step forward and confess – though she could have snuck away. It was actually very brave of her to step forward – because she was a woman – because she was unclean – and because her little stunt just stopped an entourage from going to save a girl's life.

This woman has been bleeding for twelve years. Whatever money she had, she spent on doctors who did nothing for her but make things worse. Because of her condition, she is unclean and possibly separated from her family and support system. Unclean, she is shut out of the synagogue. Jairus, as the leader of the synagogue, has names for people like her. She was so desperate she decided to try Jesus – and because she is unclean and a woman – she knew she could not approach Jesus like Jairus. If she could just touch his clothes, she thought to herself, she would be healed. So, she pushes through the crowd and reached out to touch Jesus' robe. Her fingers brush the hem of his robe and that very moment two things happened. Jesus felt power going out of him. She felt that power coming into her body, causing her bleeding to cease, putting an end to her suffering. When Jesus stopped, and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" how could she sneak away?

Frightened, she fell at his feet and told him the truth. Jesus wasn't angry or impatient. He didn't even seem to be in much of a hurry. He took the time to say to this woman, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

As Jesus was speaking, some people came from Jairus' house and said the girl is dead. "Why trouble Jesus any further?" It almost sounds like sarcasm – because – really – Jesus hadn't done anything except walk a few steps in the direction of Jairus' home before he stopped to take care of nameless woman. Jesus dismisses their sober announcement and tells Jairus, "Do not fear, but believe." Jesus told the crowd not to follow. He took with him, Peter, James, and John, and when they came to the house, Jesus asked the girl's parents to join him in the room where the girl was laid. He said to the little girl, "Talitha cum," which means "little girl, get up." And she does. Mark tells us she is twelve years old.

The way Mark tells this story, the story of the hemorrhaging woman interrupts the story of the healing of Jairus' daughter. The woman has been sick and suffering for twelve years. The daughter is twelve years old. The woman is nameless and powerless and approaches Jesus from behind, daring to reach out and touch his robe. Jairus walks right up to Jesus and falls at his feet. The woman known by her affliction gets a new name, "Daughter," as Jesus is on his way to heal Jairus' daughter.

I suppose you could say that what you have here are two healing stories and call it a day. Yeah, Jesus! But there is another story here. It is the story of Jesus stopping in his tracks to raise up an anonymous woman. In the press to go heal an important person's daughter – he takes the time to recognize the determination and faith of an unimportant woman. He welcomes her back into the family by calling her daughter. In his eyes, she was just as precious and valuable as Jairus' daughter.

It is interesting to me that she is healed twice. The first healing comes when she touched his clothes. It says very clearly, she was healed in that moment. It was private and secret while her second healing was public...that is the healing where Jesus restores her place in the family of God. It was as much for the community as it was for the woman.

It is easy to get all caught up in the healings of this story and miss Mark's point, subtlety made by Mark's weaving together of two stories. Jesus stops for this woman. Much to the dismay of those around him, he makes time for this woman. On the way to raise Jairus' daughter – Jesus stops to raise up another daughter. Both are beloved.

So, this story, set in the context of a larger story, is a healing story, and a story about the worth of a woman treated as worthless. But wait! There's more! There is yet another layer of meaning to this story when you realize that the number twelve is significant. The number twelve is a symbolic number for Israel and the twelve tribes of Israel.

The urgent concern of the people for whom this gospel was originally written is that Israel is near death. The gospel of Mark is believed to be written about the same time as a Jewish revolt provoked Emperor Nero to send troops to restore order. Eventually the troops reached Jerusalem, ransacked the city, killed many, and destroyed the temple. So, the sense of urgency is justified and the threat is real. Is this the end for Israel?

Along comes Jesus and the interruption of the hemorrhaging woman. He stops to raise her up. And the message is this – until Israel gets to the point where both daughters matter the sickness of the nation will be unto death.

Now I don't know about you – but I think that will preach.

For a nation to survive – it must recognize the value of the least of these and make their well-being a priority.

So "Who touched my clothes?" isn't such a dumb question after all. Because the answer points us to the person upon whom our survival depends.

God is in the business of healing – and raising up those who have been pressed down by affliction. With God's help and Jesus as our guide - we are in the business of healing. We are a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. And at the very same time we are being healed of the attitudes that cause us to diminish God's children.

It's a brilliant story in any age. Amen.