

Old Testament Lesson—Leviticus 15:19-31

When a woman has a discharge of blood that is her regular discharge from her body, she shall be in her impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening. Everything upon which she lies during her impurity shall be unclean; everything also upon which she sits shall be unclean. Whoever touches her bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. Whoever touches anything upon which she sits shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening; whether it is the bed or anything upon which she sits, when he touches it he shall be unclean until the evening. If any man lies with her, and her impurity falls on him, he shall be unclean seven days; and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean. If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness; as in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean. Every bed on which she lies during all the days of her discharge shall be treated as the bed of her impurity; and everything on which she sits shall be unclean, as in the uncleanness of her impurity. Whoever touches these things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. If she is cleansed of her discharge, she shall count seven days, and after that she shall be clean. On the eighth day she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons and bring them to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting. The priest shall offer one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering; and the priest shall make atonement on her behalf before the Lord for her unclean discharge. Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, so that they do not die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst.

New Testament Lesson—Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

First of all, my apologies if our text from Leviticus was a little too much for ten something in the morning. I agree: It's a bit cringe—kind of hard to hear.

It's part of the reason Leviticus is often skipped over—not taken seriously—and terribly underrated. But I thought it necessary to consider because I wanted you to have a better picture of the common worldview of Jesus's day.

Those ancient purity laws give us some really important context for the miracle story from Mark's gospel—bloody good context, if you ask me...

According to Mark, Jesus is interrupted while on his way to heal a sick child. He's interrupted by, in my view, one of the most courageous people in the whole Bible.

Jesus gets interrupted by a woman with a terrible illness—a woman who's run out of options—who's exhausted every source of hope.

You see: The situation was already stressful way before this woman appeared on the scene. Despite all his efforts to not stir up these raucous crowds, Jesus and his disciples again find themselves in the midst of an enormous throng of people.

No matter how times he tells people to keep things to themselves, you know they're not listening. Too many sick people who need healing, after all. Word's gonna get around. People are gonna know. People are gonna come. And they do.

No sooner does Jesus catch his breath after exiting their boat and stepping on to the beach that a man falls before him—begging Jesus to come to his home where his daughter's on Death's doorstep. She doesn't have much time left.

I can imagine Jairus, the desperate father, waiting on the sand for Jesus's boat to come ashore—waiting (perhaps) since that boat was a dot on the horizon—waiting with a kind of nervous, cautious, optimism.

Let's be real: there would definitely be others trying to get to Jesus when he arrived. Jairus had to be the first—probably would've camped out there for days if he had to.

If you take away the life and death stakes of it all, it reminds me of waiting for a midnight release of some book or movie or product. You ever camped out for something so you'd be near the front of the line (or at least guaranteed a spot)?

Except, you know, this is waiting for a chance to see Jesus—so, probably way cooler than staying up all night to try and get one of the new PlayStations...

Actually, I wonder how long people would be willing to camp out to see Jesus today? How long would the line be? First hundred people guaranteed to meet the Christ! Would you wait at the front for weeks? Months? Years?

At any rate, much to Jairus's relief, Jesus agrees to go with him—agrees to see his daughter and make her well. By the way, Christ doesn't seem to have any issues about going to the home of a synagogue leader like Jairus. Remember: those in his position will be critical in the coming conspiracy against Jesus.

So it's remarkable that someone like Jairus so openly asks for Jesus's help and begs him to come over.

But, unfortunately for Jairus, things don't go as planned. Because, you know, life always does. In fact, the worst thing imaginable happens. His daughter dies before Jesus even has a chance to see her.

She dies because something else comes up. Now that really does sound like life, doesn't it? I kid you not—I was literally just on my way to do that and...I...well...it didn't happen.

While making their way to Jairus's home, Jesus gets interrupted. His "convoy" (if you will) is stopped by (what we know) is a woman a million miles past her wits end.

Mark tells us a lot about her (except her name, of course). We know she's been sick for twelve years—suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years! She's seen every doctor—every spiritualist—ever healer there is. No relief to be found anywhere...

She's spent all her money—and all it bought was even more pain—even greater suffering. Perhaps you or someone you love knows what it's like to live with chronic pain. Perhaps, then, you can relate to her condition—that visceral kind of desperation that cries out, "I am willing to do absolutely anything to ease this pain"...and you really mean it...

So she does. She takes matters into her own hands. She knows that, "If I can just touch him—even his clothes—I'll finally be free. I'll be healed—made whole."

She knows this to be true—believes it to the core. She's just got to get to him...

Our lesson from Leviticus this morning tells us how strict Jewish law was concerning women in her condition. She's not supposed to be in the middle of a big crowd, bumping up against all these men—contaminating this entourage from the synagogue.

But if she wants a life worth living, what other choice does she have? I can only imagine how sick and tired she is of being sick and tired—how tired she is of being told, "I'm sorry, there's nothing we can do to help you. I'm sorry, you're on your own."

And so, with great courage, she takes action for herself. Knowing she's going to bring impurity upon all these people including the leader of the synagogue and those with him, she decides her life is worth—that she is worth all of it.

With freedom just a few yards away, she fumbles through the dense, sweaty crowd. People are yelling at Jesus, trying to get his attention. Some are yelling at her to get out of their way. She's worried if someone's seen the red streaks running down her legs.

She has to tune it all out because he's now in reach! Stumbling down behind him, she stretches out her hand and just brushes against the tattered fringe of his cloak...

I don't think she expected it to happen so fast—the relief—the weightlessness of freedom from suffering. She'd become a new person in an instant. She notices her own breathing for the first time in twelve years.

All of a sudden, it's like this wasn't a big enough crowd! Where are all the people? We need more witnesses to what this teacher can do! Everyone needs to know!

Lost in her own sense of awe and wonder and gratitude, she hears it—even above the noisy mob—not because the voice was loud, but because she knew the question was meant for her: "Who touched my clothes? Who touched me?"

The disciples have no clue: could've been anybody, Jesus! Have you seen this crowd? No way to tell! Everyone's bumping into each other all over the place.

At this point in the story, I'm amazed that the woman still has courage left in the tank. Again, she demonstrates this exceptional boldness of faith...

But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

I want to close with some good news I see in this woman's interaction with Jesus. I've been mulling over this part of the story all week. And, to warn you, it's a bit thorny.

If I'm not mistaken, this is the only miracle—the only healing Jesus didn't agree to. In other words, Jesus doesn't give his consent. Instead, as Mark puts, Jesus immediately felt "...that power had gone forth from him." Absolutely remarkable...

Now, the concept of consent may not have been a big issue for Mark or something he intended to emphasize here. But, in our society today, it is something fundamentally important. It is a requirement of a just and peaceful world.

Jesus didn't give his consent—didn't agree to relinquish his power. This was a forced healing, if you like.

But, equally remarkable (perhaps), is the woman's admission of the whole thing—in front of everybody—especially since she probably could've left and gotten away with it!

Instead, she makes a public confession: I did it. I touched you. I knew I would be healed if I could just touch you.

And, in front of everyone, Jesus praises her faith—vindicated, affirmed, and rewarded.

That is Jesus's response to her taking the power. Public praise for all to see! Not, How dare you touch me? Not, How dare you take what is mine? Not, How dare you contaminate me with impurity? Not, How dare you hold me up—I've got better places to be!

I won't pretend to be able to read Jesus's mind and heart. But, I think we should set this story within the context of Christ's overall ministry and interactions with women.

Christ wasn't one to let the status quo stop him from doing the right thing—never shy about overturning conventional wisdom. And let's be honest: In that culture, for millennia, there wasn't much women could give their consent to.

With very few exceptions, women were largely property with no power for themselves. But that isn't how Jesus treated women. I can't say if Mark would've used the word "feminist," but the gospels, time and again, show Jesus interacting with women in ways that just weren't common. Jesus wasn't afraid of being emasculated or looking "feminine."

"She's divorced, yes, but never useless! She committed adultery, yes—so go ahead and stone her if you haven't sinned. That poor widow is richer than all of you. That woman with seven demons will be my most faithful disciple. I don't care if she's Samaritan or Canaanite, she's worth our time. I have risen from the grave: be the first preacher of the Resurrection."

Bold and courageous woman of faith, my power is yours.

From where I'm standing, Christ's full-throated approval of her actions speaks volumes.

You need no one's permission to stand up for yourself—to raise your voice in protest—to protect your own body—to love yourself—to be safe and secure and healthy—to upset a world that doesn't see you as fully capable. Your agency is holy.

You need only know that I love you. I'm with you.

And I'm proud of you for taking your power. *Talitha cum!*

You go girl!

Amen.