



Jesus accepts and heals

Mark 5:25-34

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."

In this passage, it seems as though the woman had an unceasing menstrual period that made her unclean under the law of Leviticus (15:25-28) and anyone who came in contact with her would be considered ceremonially unclean in Jewish tradition. This woman was not only dealing with a physical issue but also a social and religious problem.

Sometimes this condition starts after puberty, if that was true in her case, given a common ancient life expectancy of about forty years and the "twelve years" that she had been ill, she may have spent even half or all her adult life marginalized by people in her society.

It is likely that she was either never married or divorced. If she could not bear children in this state, and Jewish men often divorced women who were incapable of bearing children (cf., e.g., Pseudo-Philo, Biblical Antiquities 42:1), this woman probably had never married or (if the sickness began after marriage) had been divorced. She may have been isolated most of her life in pain and discomfort. In a society where single, celibate women could not easily earn much income, the illness affected virtually every area of her life.

Later, Jewish tradition made this danger even more serious than Leviticus had (e.g., Mishnah Toharot 5:8), so many teachers avoided touching women (other than their wives) altogether,

lest they become accidentally contaminated. Thus, she could not touch or be touched, was probably now divorced or had never married, and was marginalized in Jewish society.

I can only imagine how this woman felt from being in isolation for so many years. She risked ridicule and death by venturing out to meet Jesus. It is likely that most of the town knew who she was. It is hard to avoid being known as the woman who has been bleeding for 12 years. She likely had to hide herself to be able to get close enough and walk through the crowd to touch Jesus. For 12 years this woman had gone to physicians to try and heal her condition, but her issue was only made worse. She had spent all she had to get healed, but her condition continued.

The woman knew the power that Jesus had within him. She had faith to believe that all she needed to do was touch his clothes. For she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." This woman must have heard about the miraculous healing that Jesus was doing. Jesus knew that she touched him when he felt power come out of his body. So, he addressed the crowd of people forcing themselves on him and asks, "Who touched me?" His disciples, being unaware that Jesus was talking about healing power, reminds Jesus that he is around a large crowd. After hearing Jesus, the woman became afraid that she and her condition would be revealed, and she would be shunned.

Jesus made this woman feel safe enough to come forward and reveal her embarrassing condition in front of the crowd. Women in Jewish society were rarely acknowledged like this. Jesus, through this story and many others, reveals the place women have in society and the Kingdom of God. Jesus restores the woman by not only healing her but by calling her daughter. "He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.'

While the scripture reveals how faith can heal, Jesus was also addressing the mistreatment of women in society.

Through this story, we see how the historical treatment of women can still be seen today in how women are marginalized across the world. We could conclude that this issue still exists. Often women who are marginalized are victims of violence, rape or neglect.

Reflection

What surprises you about this story?

How can we serve those who are marginalized based on their gender?

What are some ways our society can help heal marginalized women?

Prayer

God help us to love and accept one another as you have loved us.

Additional resources from Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, III, Trinity UCC, Chicago

I Have Nothing to Lose Part 1: The Courage to Be (Mark 5:24-34)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOwG6lAg1kQ>