

June 27, 2021

"Reach Out and Hold On"

Scripture Readings

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!
If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.
I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
 more than those who watch for the morning,
 more than those who watch for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the Lord!
 For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
 and with him is great power to redeem.
It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Mark 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."

Sermon**"Reach Out and Hold On!"**

We all know someone like this woman in the gospel story, that has been sapped of her health and left broke by a major illness. We all know people who can't find the answers they need from our healthcare system and each time they try it leaves them closer to the poor house. Maybe we are that person. It would be easy and understandable to give up, but the woman in this story shows us a whole different way.

One commentator said that he would no longer be calling this woman "the bleeding woman" because this was not a woman defined by her illness. He chose instead to call her a "woman of incredible faith".

This woman is marginalized in her society because at that time women who were bleeding were called "unclean", an "untouchable," but she didn't give up hope, she didn't let that beat her down or make her stay home and hide.

Now I have a problem with people saying that if you just pray hard enough God can intervene to cure an illness, because it begs the questions why doesn't God do it for our precious little ones that die who have countless people praying for them?

It begs the question, why do horrible things happen to wonderful, prayerful people who add so much goodness and love to the world. But what I do believe and know to be true is that we CAN draw strength, we CAN draw energy, and be made new again by God.

I know that it is our faith that makes us whole whether we succumb to a disease or not. It is our faith that heals our soul. That is the part of us that God is most interested in, the eternal part of us that is not limited by the finitude of our bodies, that is the part that makes God stop and tend to us. But here's the thing-- we have to reach out.

We have to have the courage, the tenacity, the belief to press through the crowd and reach out and then we will know that we aren't alone, that our suffering is not endless, that we have the love of God. That knowledge, that knowledge can give us back our joy, that knowledge can give us back our peace and make us new again!

Jesus also models for us here of what to do when we encounter suffering. What those who profess to follow him are called to do. Jesus encounters this woman's suffering and does not ignore it, he encounters her suffering and doesn't run away, or say "ah, she is always sick with something or another."

What does Jesus do? He stops, he attends to her, he blesses her. That encounter, that moment when this man pays attention to this unclean, poor, outcast of a woman, who is alone in this world, that is a moment of complete transformation for her, she is made new again by that simple act. That simple act of reaching out. The scriptures say that she was filled with fear and trembling, but that didn't stop her, she still reached out.

Also, once again Jesus, counter to his culture, proves that the poor have worth! Counter to his culture he shows that women have worth, that outcasts have worth, that the sick have worth! He doesn't ask her if she has insurance or how much she made last year, he does everything in his power to heal her right then and there.

Our Christian story is always about this, about transformations, about being renewed, reborn and resurrected by our faith in God. That kind of transformation, that exchange of God's spirit with our own is available to each and every one of us but we have to reach out to God. If you lack the courage then pray for it. If you lack the faith, then pray for it and it will come. I promise it will come.

Reach out or cry out to God like the Psalmist did "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord, hear my voice! God will stop and listen.

Now this particular story is about a medical need. It was stories like this that led people to come to understand God better, that God does indeed care about our suffering. This led so many faithful people to create places to ease suffering, hospitals, hospices, orphanages, homeless shelters, food pantries.

Knowing this as a fact of our religious identity is in your bones as a church, in your history and part of your continued story. But knowing it for others and knowing it for yourselves are two different things.

This story isn't just about physical suffering, it is about all suffering. Suffering in our mind, suffering in our relationships, suffering from loneliness, heartbreak or grief. God is interested in all of it and is on standby for each and everyone of us all the time. Ready to help, ready to stop, to listen, to tend to us and make us new.

But also sometimes you have to reach out to God's people too, to say out loud what you need. To not be stoic or reply "doing fine, couldn't be better" when someone really wants to know how you are and you are indeed suffering.

That isn't easy, to trust that God has put people in your life that try and follow Jesus, to pay attention to your suffering, to be a non-judgmental presence that will companion you when life has brought you low.

It's not the same as reaching out to God, but it can be God's answer to your reaching out, in answer to your prayer God can move people to surround you, to lift you up, to love you and make you new again. Now I have a fierce independent streak so I know it's not easy, I have a fear of people seeing beyond my bravado and I can tell you the times I have asked for help I have done it with a whole lot of fear and trembling.

But when I have, when I have, I've been richly blessed. And those people that I trusted with my quivering heart, we became closer, our relationship got deeper and even more meaningful and richer than ever before. Because we let God in, we let God move in between us.

And so it will be with your relationship with God, it will grow deeper, and more richer, just have faith, just reach out. I can tell you that God is within your reach, God is within your grasp and when you outstretch that hand and open this heart God will stop and will love you and make you new. Amen

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