

2 Samuel 1: 1, 17-27 (Psalm 77: 1-2, 11-20); 2 Corinthians 8: 7-15; Mark 5: 21-43

I try not to do it too often, because I try to live in and appreciate the value of the moment, but does anyone else reflect back on where they may have been a year ago, two years ago, 5 or 10 or more years ago? I know I do, and maybe that's just part of human nature. To think of where we've been and what we've done, for better or for worse. Yesterday for me, for example was the anniversary of when I graduated high school, and although I didn't think I would have ended up where I have now, whenever June 26<sup>th</sup> rolls around every year, I tend to think back to that, and what's happened in the time since. There are many days in the year that hold significance to us, some joyful, and some challenging.

As today is the last Sunday in June, I can't help but think of our outdoor service, the parish barbecue, and all the fun that entails, just before summer really feels like it begins. On this Sunday 2 years ago, we were outside for this service, followed up by a barbecue and fun and games. And I miss that kind of thing. But, in fairness, this time last year we weren't yet worshipping in the building again, though we had vibrant drive-in services each week. So maybe we're in better shape now, in some ways, than we were a year ago, and that's something to celebrate. Maybe by this time next year, we'll be able to go back to an outdoor service and barbecue, without many of the things that hold us back right now, and we'll be reflecting back to now, and what life was like. Humans do tend to reflect back on things quite a bit.

I wonder if the woman in our gospel reading today, who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years by the time she encounters Jesus, reflected back on her life often, and what things were like before. Twelve years is a long time to suffer. Now, if I'm being honest, the woman in this story has rubbed me the wrong way for a long time. She comes across as pretty forceful and demanding in this story, kind of like a squeaky wheel. And, like the squeaky wheel, she gets her grease, receiving healing from Jesus because she actively takes it. I tend to be pretty frustrated by squeaky wheels. In my experience, they are often people who are experiencing similar problems to others, but because they are loud about it, they receive treatment while others continue to suffer. I think I would feel differently if the squeaky wheels were advocating for others in the process, and didn't stop just because they received what they wanted. Instead, the squeaky wheels often seek what they want for themselves, and once they receive it, they become quiet again, feeling satisfied despite others still suffering. In this passage, I can't help but think of the others that may have been in the crowd, also wanting to be healed, but who didn't dare to touch Jesus. This woman reached out and took what she wanted, whether or not Jesus agreed to heal her, and she got her way. It really has frustrated me just about every time I've read it.

And yet, as I read this passage again this time, I can't help but see it as an example of someone with very little power who interrupts the status quo, of those in power receiving what's best for them. After all, we heard at the beginning of today's reading that Jesus was en route to heal the daughter of Jairus, who was "one of the leaders of the synagogue", meaning he would have held power, certainly more than the woman would have. He may have been better able to get Jesus' attention because of that power and status. The woman, on the other hand, had been suffering for many years, and was now – we can assume – poor because of this suffering; we're told she "spent all that she had" to seek treatment, with no luck. In fact, she got worse instead of better. And she had been doing this for twelve years. Just imagine that! We're told Jairus' daughter was twelve years old – not a coincidence, I'm sure – and I can't help but wonder: if this were Jairus' daughter who had been suffering in the same way, or for the same length of time, would she have received better treatment, and perhaps even been healed? Instead, this woman suffered, lost all that she had, and likely was alienated from others, as blood was considered very unclean in Jewish society, and a person who was bleeding could not be touched without the person who touched them becoming unclean themselves. The setup of the society at the time was such that she likely would have had little chance to be healed, if she didn't take matters into her own hands.

And so, she does. Quite literally, in fact, reaching her hands out to touch Jesus' cloak, a rather bold move. Jesus senses it, and immediately asks "Who touched my clothes?", a question that seems ridiculous to the disciples, because there were so many around him that it would have been impossible to pick out just one person. But this touch was more than just a regular brushing against his clothing, an accident or a nudge or something. It was

full of intention. This woman reached out in faith, reaching toward Jesus with the belief that if she could just touch his clothes, she would be healed.

Now, to me, this feels a bit superstitious, or like trying to make a deal with God. After all, I'm sure many of us have prayed something along the lines of "God, if you could just make – insert your own prayer request here – happen, I'll stop – insert your own less than desirable behaviour here." Maybe that thing happened, and maybe you did give up the behaviour in return. But, a lot of times, it may not happen, and that can cause people to lose their faith in God, and God's abilities. Yet God isn't simply a magic being in the sky, that if we say the right words – or make the right deal – God will wave a magic wand in the sky and make all our hopes and dreams come true. That can be a dangerous thing to believe. God does want what's best for us, but sometimes we may not understand what that may be in the same way that God does. It's not about bargaining or striking a deal with God, so that we get our way.

I think that's why I struggle with the woman's request in today's gospel passage. Maybe it would sit better with me if she added in an "if it's your will, God" onto her request. But, maybe that's what was in her heart, and it just wasn't captured in the writing of the gospel. Maybe that's what stopped Jesus in his tracks, to find out who it was that had such a strong faith in their heart that it compelled them to act. He wanted to know who it was that had such courage, and even though it may have been an overwhelming thing to do, the woman steps up "in fear and trembling" to tell him the whole truth. And Jesus sends her off, saying that her faith has healed her. He doesn't reprimand her for her actions, but praises her for her faith in reaching out to him. Maybe this story is not about a squeaky wheel after all, but about encouraging us to reach out to Jesus, with faith in our hearts, when we need help. There's also a beauty in this story and the story of Jairus' daughter being healed being shared together. We're reminded that Jesus ministered to all, the marginalized and the privileged, when they have faith. And that continues to be the case today. Through faith, all things are possible.

When was the last time you reached out your hands, in faith, to Jesus? Knowing that he wants what is best for you, but that you need only ask? When was the last time you asked humbly yet courageously, like the woman did, believing that something as simple as touching Jesus' cloak – or whatever the equivalent of that would be today – would be enough? In some ways, it seems like we've lost that bold conviction today. And yet, Jesus is here for all of us, each and every one. All we have to do is reach out a hand in faith, knowing that Jesus knows our hearts and minds and wants what's best for us. Thanks be to God!

(Alleluia/Amen)