

Beautifully and Wonderfully Made – Joy Wahnefried

Raleigh Mennonite Church

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Mark 5:21-43

21 Jesus got into the boat again and went back to the other side of the lake, where a large crowd gathered around him on the shore. 22 Then a leader of the local synagogue, whose name was Jairus, arrived. When he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet, 23 pleading fervently with him. “My little daughter is dying,” he said. “Please come and lay your hands on her; heal her so she can live.”

24 Jesus went with him, and all the people followed, crowding around him. 25 A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding. 26 She had suffered a great deal from many doctors, and over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse. 27 She had heard about Jesus, so she came up behind him through the crowd and touched his robe. 28 For she thought to herself, “If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed.” 29 Immediately the bleeding stopped, and she could feel in her body that she had been healed of her terrible condition.

30 Jesus realized at once that healing power had gone out from him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my robe?”

31 His disciples said to him, “Look at this crowd pressing around you. How can you ask, ‘Who touched me?’”

32 But he kept on looking around to see who had done it. 33 Then the frightened woman, trembling at the realization of what had happened to her, came and fell to her knees in front of him and told him everything. 34 And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over.”

35 While he was still speaking to her, messengers arrived from the home of Jairus, the leader of the synagogue. They told him, “Your daughter is dead. There’s no use troubling the Teacher now.”

36 But Jesus overheard[d] them and said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid. Just have faith.”

37 Then Jesus stopped the crowd and wouldn’t let anyone go with him except Peter, James, and John (the brother of James). 38 When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw much commotion and weeping and wailing. 39 He went inside and asked, “Why all this commotion and weeping? The child isn’t dead; she’s only asleep.”

40 The crowd laughed at him. But he made them all leave, and he took the girl’s father and mother and his three disciples into the room where the girl was lying. 41 Holding her hand, he said to her, “Talitha koum,” which means “Little girl, get up!” 42 And the girl, who was twelve years old, immediately stood up and walked around! They were overwhelmed and totally amazed. 43 Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone what had happened, and then he told them to give her something to eat.

Here ends the reading.

Twelve years she waited. She went to doctors and waited. Hoped and prayed and waited. Clean up the mess and waited. Counted the days and waited. Hope and prayed and waited. Made dinner and waited. Cleaned the dishes and waited. Asked for advice, took the advice and waited. Then she hoped and prayed some more and waited. Saw a new doctor and waited. Got some tests done and waited. Begged God for help and waited. Saw her sister give birth to many beautiful sons and daughters while she waited. Cried alone in her bed at night and waited for morning hoping that this time joy would really come with the morning.

But it didn't happen.

She tried to carry on with her life as best as she could while she waited but the entire time she knew that she was waiting for the day that the blood stopped flowing. Waited for the day she could sit next to someone one again. Waited for the day her husband and her could share their bed again.

You see none of that was allowed as long as she was menstruating.

Menstruating is not a word we often used in fact I can't ever remember hearing anyone say it in church much less from a pulpit. And I just said it...TWICE! But honestly that isn't odd I never heard it used in church growing up, we as a culture avoid saying it we have a thousand different ways to talk about menstruating without ever actually having to say the word. They rang from the descriptive such as "My uterus is ringing it's self out today" or "Sorry sweetie, but it's Leak Week" to the more common but still just as imaginative "Code Red," "My Aunt Flow, Fanny, or Ruby is here for a visit" or maybe "I have the girl flu today." And that is not to mention the more direct, "I'm on my period", "It's that time of the month," or "Does anyone have any Midol?"

Yes we have seemingly endless ways to avoid talking about the issue. Perhaps that is why I went for most of my life hearing this story but never knowing quite what in the world it was about. As a small child I imagined some strange injury rather than a "womanly issue" because to be honest I wasn't sure what a "womanly issue" was.

It's funny to me that with all of our uncomfortableness about this subject the gospels and Jesus go out of their way to make sure that we know that this woman had spent the last 12 years menstruating.

She spent the last 12 years far from God. You see according to the law she couldn't enter the temple while she was menstruating. Debates rage if at this historical moment she could have entered a synagogue or even been allowed to pray while menstruating.

We do know that no one could sit where she sat or lay on her bed without becoming ritually unclean. So even though she probably lived with her husband or with her parents she must have felt profoundly lonely.

Not only that but she had to tell everyone she met about her condition lest they accidentally sit where they shouldn't and incur uncleanness. She never got to have a day where she could just pretend that her body was healthy.

You know over these last few months of health struggles I've had many days where I choose to ignore the fact that I'm still waiting on healing and pretend just for a moment that everything is okay. I didn't tell many of the people in my life that I was in the middle of a health scare because I didn't feel like talking about it all the time. I wanted a group of people that could ask me how I was doing without ever meaning, "How are you coping with the waiting to find out what's wrong with you?" Or "On a scale of one to ten how is your pain today?" I chose to not tell them because the moments that I got to pretend I was fine were precious to me. They were moments of normalcy in the mist of a strange and scary time.

So when I read this woman's story I can't help but think, "I wonder how she coped." I wonder how she coped with the constant reminders that she was not made whole yet. I wonder how she coped with hearing the psalm song that declared that people were beautifully and wonderfully made when she didn't feel like she was beautifully or wonderfully made. I wonder how she coped with feeling like perhaps God made a mistake when the Holy One formed her, after all this body didn't seem to work so well.

How do you live for twelve years in skin that doesn't feel like home? In a body that doesn't seem good enough. How do you live with the constant reminders that your hopes and dreams for the future might not happen because this fragile body that you inhabit doesn't seem to be able to make it happen? How do you live knowing that this blood was supposed to be healthy was supposed to be holy? Was supposed to make room for new life to be a possibility. Was supposed to signal not only an end but a new beginning, now it seems to only signal the death of your dreams and your hopes to be a mother. To be the one thing you've always wanted to be. How do you keep believing that your body is good when it doesn't seem like this body will ever be good for anything.

Perhaps you have had some of those questions too. Perhaps your body isn't what you wish it was. Perhaps you struggle with depression or a chronic illness. Or maybe it isn't you may it's someone you love and you wonder why they are going through this. Wonder how you can help when you don't understand why this is happening or even what is happening.

It's hard to live in this body made of flesh and blood.

It's hard to live in this skin and believe that it is good that this body was formed by a loving God when your body aches and doesn't act right. When your body can't do what it used to do, it's hard to remember that there is still hope and goodness to be had. It's hard to believe that you are beautifully and wonderfully made when you know something in your body has gone haywire.

Perhaps that's what has always struck me about this story. After 12 years of pain and suffering this woman still believes in the goodness of life, in the goodness of God, in the goodness of the frail flesh she is inhabiting enough to get out of bed. To find the Teacher to press through the crowd. She has enough faith in the goodness of the Creator to risk getting kicked and pushed, and smashed as she bends down to touch the Rabbi's robe, believing that their might be healing for her too.

That is some remarkable faith. It is faith that I often don't feel, don't have and am not sure I even want. It sounds like it takes too much energy. It seems too risky after all aren't all of these people touching Jesus? Are any of them shouting for joy that they are healed?

No.

All of them are shouting *to be healed* as the leader of the Synagogue practically pulls Jesus down the road to heal his daughter.

And it's good and right that he does that after all this is a twelve year old girl. A girl with all her hopes and dreams ahead of her. A girl who has just started to menstruate and dream of the new life she will bring into the world. This little girl has just begun to dream of the new life that her body will produce. While the woman in our story today is nearly past the point of bearing children. Why should she bother the Teacher? After all she's already been a bother to everyone else in her life why add one more person to the list of people that can't help her?

Somehow she presses through those voices and touches him anyway. And she is instantly healed. And after well *a lot* of prompting she comes and tells Jesus **everything**. She tells him what these 12 years have been like. Tells him all the times she doubted. Tells him how she almost didn't risk it. Tells him this isn't the healing that she thought she would get that she prayed for but it's still amazing and that she is grateful. Tells him how she doesn't know how she is going to explain this to her friends and family who had long ago given up hope.

The crowd looks at her and Jesus like *why are you stopping to listen to this woman. Why are you taking the time to listen to her when I'm right here asking for your healing too, Jesus?!*

Jarius nervously tugs on Christ's shoulder muttering about the boat being slow and Jesus being easily distracted. But this is her moment, a moment she has waited for a moment that she will cherish for the years to come.

I'd like to tell you that I am her. That I have faith that God will make me well. That God will make you well. But to be honest I feel more like the person in the crowd looking on wondering what is going on. Why is it taking so long for Jesus to look at me to heal me?

And what irks me is that we don't know if those people that were pressing on Jesus were healed. Every gospel writer needs to tell us about this woman and her faith but most days I don't think I have that much faith. Most days it's a miracle I'm even in the crowd hoping that it is going to happen.

And I wonder if that's okay too. If those people didn't have just as much faith as she did. Didn't exert just as much patience as she did for all of those years to when they watched her dreams come true and waited for theirs to come true too.

Maybe it's just enough to be on the road asking for Jesus to make us whole. Maybe in walking that road with him in ways we don't understand, couldn't imagine, wouldn't have asked for, and definitely definitely didn't wish for we will be made the people we need to be and receive the healing we need even if it's not the type of healing we wanted.

The Great Physician doesn't always do what we'd like God to do. Doesn't always restore our bodies to the ones we wanted, but it seems to me God always restores the person.

Did you catch what Jesus called this woman healed on the road? "Daughter, your faith has made you well." He calls her daughter. Restores her to an intimate relationship with the Holy. Jesus doesn't answer her questions about the years she's waited, but he does care that she knows the Holy One intimately. And perhaps that is the healing she needed most desperately.