

Can You Feel the Power?
Matthew 9:9-13; 18-26
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Do you have some days that are very busy AND you get a great deal accomplished? Sometimes, the busier I am, the less I get done. But not so with Jesus on this particular day: he was very busy and accomplished a great deal. He recruits Matthew to be a Disciple. He settles dispute about fasting. He heals a woman who has been bleeding for 12 years and for the coup de grace: He resurrects a little girl. It could have all been before noon. The scripture doesn't say what time of day it is that Jesus is strolling along. We don't know if Jesus had purposely set out that morning to find Matthew, or maybe any tax collector for that matter, we don't even know if it was April 15. The Scripture just says that Jesus was walking along and came upon the tax booth with Matthew in it and spontaneously decided that Matthew had what it took to be a disciple. Or maybe Matthew didn't show any promise at all at that particular time and Jesus decided to take on a challenge. We don't know. And I suppose if I were going to preach on this aspect of this scripture it would be around this question: Does God call people to become Disciples because of the great potential they show? Or does the act of responding to God's call to become a Disciple create an environment for God's empowerment. Good question. But that's another sermon for another day.

You may have noticed that the lectionary skips verses 14-17—and that's just fine with me because those verses deal with the question about fasting that was posed to Jesus. I'm glad that I don't have to preach on fasting, thus avoiding the adage to "practice what you preach!" Evidently while Jesus was engaged in what must have been a scintillating conversation with John's disciples about why his own disciples didn't fast, Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, burst into the room, telling Jesus that his 12 year old daughter had just died and if Jesus would just go and lay hands on her, surely she would be resurrected. So Jesus and his disciples got up and followed him. I expect there was some sense of urgency if not from all at least on the part of Jairus, the girl's father. They were out in the street going to Jairus' home—evidently the streets were very crowded. I imagine it was sort of like week-ends at the Alaska state fair. Or another image that comes to mind if from the days I lived in Ann Arbor, MI. When Michigan was playing at home, and especially if they were playing Ohio State, if you were within ½ mile of the stadium, you were swept along with the crowd. Lots of pushing and shoving. You get the picture. It was crowded. All of a sudden, this woman who has been bleeding for twelve years, comes up behind Jesus and touches the fringe of his cloak in the hope that just that much contact with Jesus will heal her.

Jesus is her last resort. She has spent all her money on physicians and instead of getting better, she is worse. Can you relate? I know several of you who have had very frustrating experiences trying to find a correct diagnosis and then an effective treatment. Or maybe you are in a position I will be in a couple of year: trying to find a doctor who will accept new patients on Medicare. We talk to ourselves and to anyone who will listen. That's what this woman was doing. She was saying to herself: "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus hadn't

been around for the past 12 years—his ministry had just begun. And word of his healing power had spread like wildfire. It was like learning of a miracle drug. She had to take a chance. Sure enough—Jesus turns to her and says, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” The deed is done, the woman is healed and Jesus goes on to the home of Jairus to resurrect his daughter.

First he sends away the professional mourners. The minimum amount of mourners that the law calls for are two flute players and one wailing woman. You could tell how wealthy a person was by the number of professional mourners at the wake. In our world, a person has really made it when on the occasion of their death Elton John either writes, or rewrites “Candle in the Wind.” In those days it was two flautists and one wailing women.

Sarah, maybe you can find another flautist, and I can join you and we can go into business! I can’t play the flute, but Baby, I can wail! But I digress. After sending the mourners and the rest of the doubting crowd outside, Jesus does what he was called to do: He brought life back to the girl. That would make a good sermon—about how a relationship with Jesus can take persons who are dead—who have no life in them—physically, emotionally, or spiritually, and with his touch, bring them back to life. But again, that’s another sermon for another day.

Today, I want to focus on the woman from the crowd and see what we can learn from her experience. But first a little aside—this is extra; you don’t have to pay more. You may have noticed that in the retelling of the scripture that was read, I included several pieces of information that weren’t in the Matthew scripture. Did I just make those things up?

Sometimes I do, but this time I was drawing from the other two synoptic gospels, Mark and Luke who also recorded this story in their gospels. If you already know this stuff, now would be the time for you to plan your menus for the week.

But if you don’t know, if this is new information, now would be the time for you to think about taking Disciple or some other Bible Study. Here’s the extra: Mark was the first gospel written and not until about 30 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Up until then, all the stories and teachings were part of the oral tradition.

The Bible is not a video. Stories were collected and told and retold.

Because they believed that Jesus was soon to return, there was no sense of urgency or motivation to write anything down.

After awhile, when it looked like the generation that knew Jesus was getting older—and maybe forgetful—not that any of us who are getting older are also forgetful—they decided to record the life and teachings of Jesus. Mark was first and Matthew and Luke came a little later—maybe 15 or 20 years and they used not only Mark as a resource but others as well. A person can find many of the same stories recorded in these three gospels—sometimes slightly different and sometimes considerably different. I like to read the stories in all three gospels if possible to get a more complete picture of what may have happened. There are two easy ways to do this if you are interested and if you’re not I’m going to tell you anyway. Some Bibles have the references on the same page as the text. In the Bible I usually use, there is a column in the middle. In the Good News Bible, the other references are under each title. Or the second way would be to use a Gospel Parallels which lines the actual scriptures side by side by side.

Now, back to the story. Let me read this account from Mark 5:25-34.

This is one of the stories we will hear in Vacation Bible School this summer. The positive characteristic of this woman that is lifted up is her boldness.

Now, in our world, it may not seem all that bold to seek out a healer and try to be cured of an illness. But in that time and that culture what she did was way beyond the pale. First, she had been bleeding for 12 years. In the Torah—Leviticus 15:19-30 specifically, there are definite rules about the impurity of a menstruating or bleeding woman. She is forbidden to touch anyone for if she does then she renders them ritually unclean as well and they cannot be purified until evening. One can imagine that she was known in her community—perhaps as “that unclean woman who can’t be healed from bleeding”.

There could have been inferences about her illness being the result of her sinfulness. So to go out into public put her in danger of rejection, humiliation, and even being chastised by the religious leaders. It also put Jesus at risk of becoming ritually unclean and therefore unable to go about his mission of healing the little girl. It must have taken a great deal of bold courage for her to touch the fringe on Jesus’ prayer shawl. All devout male Jews wore these prayer shawls called talliths. The fringes are called tzitzits. This was what she touched. It wasn’t that the shawl or the fringe had special powers, like a magic lantern or Dumbo’s feather. It was that it belonged to Jesus—as did the power.

And indeed, even in that crowd who were likely jostling and shoving and pushing up against one another, Jesus felt that touch—the hopeful petition for healing.

And he felt that healing power go to another person. The scripture says that when Jesus asked who had touched him, “the woman came in fear and trembling, fell down before him and told him the whole truth.” Her illness had been debilitating. Her illness had been embarrassing. Her illness had been impoverishing. And her illness had been discouraging. She came to Jesus as a last resort. She was boldly courageous to seek healing from him. She sought his healing power. Jesus stopped what he was doing. Remember—he was on his way to effect a resurrection. But he took time to restore not only her physical health, but her emotional and spiritual health as well. She heard these words, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

I wonder if she heard anything beyond the address, “daughter.” Daughter! This one who had been an outcast from her community because of her illness was addressed as a member of the family of Jesus. Jesus didn’t ask questions or require her to fill out some forms. Jesus just acknowledged that because she had believed that he had the power to heal her made it so. She was healed and could go in peace. We can imagine that she hadn’t had any peace for twelve years. She was recognized as a member of the family of God. She was healed and whole. She could live in peace. Jesus didn’t say to her: “run along now—I’ve healed you.” He said “your FAITH has made your well.” Jesus had the power to heal, but there needed to be a faithful, believing environment in order for the healing to happen.

Have you availed yourself of the healing power of Jesus? Have you cultivated a faithful, believing environment in your life so that Jesus can heal those places of brokenness in your life? I invite you to boldly reach out in faith for the healing power of Jesus, so that you can personally experience these words: “Daughter, Son, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”