Reaching out for Jesus

First in a Nov. 2017 series, “Humble Prayers for Thanksgiving”

# Scripture: Luke 8:40-56

# Key thought: We would do well to learn from the example of the woman who reached out to touch Jesus’ garment.

# Intro:

Cultivating our spiritual lives in the midst of everyday activities is always difficult. Most of us would agree that if we just had more time, we certainly would be better at connecting with God. But the press of life, the busyness of earning a living, and being in relationships with so many people seems to conspire against quiet time and spiritual focus. So it is all the more helpful when we look in Scripture and find a person who in the midst of the scramble of life shows us an excellent example. Such is the case with the woman in our story today. The incident in today’s story happens while Jesus is on the road and being followed/accompanied by a multitude so big that he is almost being crushed by the crowd. The woman’s story is related in all three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. So we actually have three accounts of this story to compare, with each adding a detail or two to help us. She provides for us an example of someone who made an excellent spiritual response in the difficult busy press of everyday life. Let’s dig in and see if we can discover some helpful hints that will benefit us in our coming to Jesus. For we constantly have in mind Jesus’ enticement,

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Matt 5:6 NIV

# She knew she had a desperate need for Jesus.

One of the first things we notice about the woman is how desperately she needed a touch from Jesus. And not only did she need it desperately, she was aware of how desperately she needed a touch from Jesus. In this she is ahead of us. Often we need God’s touch but are not aware of how much we need it. She was desperate for a touch from God.

## She had sought healing from others for 12 years

She had been sick with this very personal and debilitating illness for 12 years. The gospel of Mark details how fruitless her search for healing had been.

“She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse.” (Mark 5:26)

Not only was she suffering physically, she was also suffering, as many in our world today do, from financial consequences of long-term illness. Her resources had been drained by the struggle to find renewed health. In many ways, she was frantic for a solution. The reputation of Jesus as a healer had, no doubt, preceded him and it brought her hope. She had an acute need to come to Jesus.

## Our lack of need

One of our problems in our culture today is that there is a lack of a sense of need to come to Jesus. We think of ourselves as not needing anything. But our estimate of our position before God is completely wrong. We are like the church in Laodicea to whom God spoke sharply through the apostle John;

You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. Rev 3:17 NIV

We are smug in our own self-righteousness, like the Pharisees to whom Jesus spoke sharply himself. After healing the blind man who had testified of Jesus before the spiritual leaders, Jesus said to the leaders;

 “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”
Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”
Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. John 9:39-41 NIV

Jesus was bluntly telling them that the biggest problem was that they thought they were okay when they were not. That’s us too. The trouble in our day is that we are very much like the Pharisees, fairly content that we are spiritually okay but in God’s eyes we are completely blind to our own rebellion against God. If only we were aware of our desperate need of God like the woman was, then the stage might be set for us to come to God. But instead, in our culture today year-by-year, average church attendance declines. Year-by-year, the number of people who claim no religious affiliation increases. Year-by-year the number of weeks on which that those who do attend services regularly actually attend during the year also decreases. Special services for prayer or revival are either nonexistent or extremely sparsely attended. It is true! We are just not desperate to come to Jesus. That is the beginning of the reason for the low state of Christian spirituality in our country.

## Renewal begins with repentance

This is one of the key reasons why the first step in any revival a religion is repentance. It is because people must have a new sense from the Holy Spirit that they have a need to come to Jesus. In the woman’s case, the immediate cause of her awareness of need was her physical condition. In our case, the underlying reason that drives us back to Jesus could be any one of a number of things. It might be the heartbreak of a broken relationship. It might be the burden of the consciousness of sins’ in our life. It might be grief from the loss of a loved one, or the loss of a business, or from sustained difficult circumstances. Anyone of these things might drive us back to Christ in desperation seeking healing for our spiritual, emotional or physical needs.

# She sought Jesus with humility.

One of the subtle lessons that comes to us from the woman in this story is the manner in which she came to Jesus. It was as if she did not want anyone to know. She just worked her way through the crowd to touch him. She did not want to attract attention. She only sought to touch the edge of his garment. Gospel of Mark tells us that she came up from behind (Mark 5:27). Maybe it was because she was a woman in a male dominated society; maybe it was the nature of her illness that she did not want to talk about it and came so inconspicuously.

The Greek word may refer to the borders or fringes of Jesus’ garment. They could be on the outer upper garment or on the lower one. The Jews were instructed to have tassels on the edges of their garments as a reminder of the commandments (Numbers 15:38). (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible Vol 3 p 119) So the woman may have actually been reaching for tassels that were near the ground as she is often pictured in artwork.

There is one other record of this type of incident. But it occurred later in Jesus’ ministry.

34 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him 36 and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed. Matt. 14:34-36

But the point for us is this: This woman came humbly.

A quick contrast is provided by Naaman the Syrian who came to the prophet Elisha for healing. He was desperate enough, because he had leprosy. But he was very proud. He came to Elisha with a retinue of horses and chariots. But when Elisha did not even come out, but instead sent a messenger to tell him to go and dip in the Jordan River seven times, Naaman became enraged. He fumed that there were cleaner rivers in Syria that he could have used and went off in a huff until his servants persuaded him that was not the wisest move. Finally, when he humbled himself and did as the Elisha had instructed, he was healed.

God still requires that we come to him in humility.

As James wrote,

 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. James 4:10

(see also 1 Peter 5:6)

Or as Jesus said,

For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Matt 23:12 NIV

In Scripture, God has a problem with ostentatious devotion, with religious practices that are meant to draw attention to the worshiper. On the other hand, God has no problem hearing and rewarding private prayers. In fact, Jesus said,

When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Matt 6:6 NIV

The woman in the story gives us a good example of coming to Jesus without in any way making a show of it.

# She sought Jesus in faith.

The wording in the Gospel of Matthew makes it very clear the attitude of faith that the woman possessed. The Bible records,

“She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.” (Matthew 9:21).

She was entirely confident, that if she could just touch the hem of his cloak, she would be completely healed.

After the woman is healed, Jesus said to her,

Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace. (Luke 8:48)

It is faith that is the focus of this passage in all three of the Gospels. It is always good to ask in the gospel records, “Why is this story recorded for us?” The answer here is obvious. It happened in the middle of the events surrounding the raising of Jairus’ daughter and the focus of that account is also faith. When Jairus came to Jesus, his daughter was still alive. But while Jesus was dealing with the woman, messengers came to tell Jairus that his daughter had died. Luke records Jesus’ reaction.

Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.” (Luke 8:50)

Jesus proceeded to Jairus’ home and raised his daughter from the dead. The lesson of the chapter is the power of faith in coming to Jesus Christ for that which we need. We are admonished about this by the apostle James.

When you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. James 1:6, 7

We need to be like the father who was desperate for Jesus to heal his son and pleaded with Jesus,

 Jesus said to him, "If you are able! — All things can be done for the one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" Mark 9:23, 24 NRSV

# Her seeking required effort and determination.

## The woman

I note also that it took determination and effort for the woman to get to Jesus. Remember that the accounts tell us that there was a crowd so big that Jesus was almost crushed by the press of the crowd. So it would not have been easy for the woman to work her way up to touch Jesus’ garment. Jesus and the crowd were moving and she was following from behind, making the process of reaching Jesus a little more difficult. But she was determined.

## Today

Today we want everything to be easy. We want our church service at the most convenient time. We want the temperature at church at the most comfortable setting. We want to say one prayer and have the answer quickly. Unfortunately, our culture’s drive toward convenience and comfort subtly affects the way we want to come to God.

But learning to pray, takes time.

In Gethsemane, Jesus said to the three disciples, “Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour?” (Mark 14:37 NRSV).

# Conclusion: Her seeking was rewarded.

Jesus did not let the incident go unnoticed. He asked, “Who touched me?” (Luke 9:45). His disciples were incredulous about the question as the crowd was pressing in from every side. But Jesus sensed that healing power had gone out from him and apparently he did not want to let that event go unnoticed (Luke 9:46).

So the woman felt compelled to come trembling and fall at his feet. Maybe she wasn’t quite sure about what she had done. After all, in those days, Rabbi’s paid attention to the men. Synagogues were for men. But Jesus apparently wanted to drive away her fears and affirm her.

He assured her of her healing. The text in Mark adds these words from Jesus

He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.” Mark 5:34

She had received the answer to her prayer and more; she had received words of blessing from Jesus. This Thanksgiving season is a time for us also to reach out to Jesus, not just with thanksgiving but also with humble prayer for that which we need.

## Our seeking will also be rewarded

Close with the story of Chrissy’s healing pp 200-203 in Fresh Faith by Jim Cymbala