

# Growing Connected in Faith

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This morning I'd like you to all do an ancient practice that involves putting yourself into the Biblical text...and identifying as much as possible with the woman in this story.

Identifying with a character in the scripture, trying to imagine yourself in his or her skin is something that has been a practice in spiritual communities since ancient times..

Obviously you are not all women; but this story is not just a female story...it is a *human story* that I believe has three main points for us all...men or women...and I want you to know I felt led to speak on this story today...I heard too many people tell me this past week they wanted to give up...that life was too hard...and I think somebody out there today needs to hear what I am going to say...

This is a sermon on community, on growing in community together but the first point is one that involves the individual...

For those of you who are tempted to despair today...Courage! Cause point one of this story is...

**Never Give Up** (There is always hope, there is always a way out...never give up)

I want you to imagine today, as with this woman

That you have been ill, for twelve years...pick an illness...I don't care what it is

And you have had this thing just depleting you for what seems like forever

I know some of you are feeling depleted today...so you know exactly how this women felt

Twelve years you have been seeking medical attention,

*(Actually, the supposed cures for this woman's ailment were extremely painful and brutal involving leaches, and blood letting and other brutalities I wont even get into here)*

The point? Twelve years of agony....trying to get better with no hope on the horizon... twelve years of going through indignities and being shamed

On top of this, you are destitute financially because you have spent all that you have on doctors...

Those medical bills just keep stacking higher and higher and you can't pay them...

You've tried EVERYTHING ...and you have no financial resources left to try anything else

You have nowhere to turn

You are at the end of your rope

Where is God? You had asked so many times

Why doesn't he do something?

Why has he abandoned me?  
What have I done wrong...am I being punished?  
Twelve years of crying for relief to the heavens, and nothing has happened to bring you relief....

Not only that, your illness makes you unclean according to the law...that means you can't go anywhere without being shunned  
You have to go it alone...you are stuck at home

No Sharks games, no dinners out with friends, no golf, no arts and crafts at Boutique, no youth group, or even being on a sports team...you are alone...  
Long days, long nights...by yourself  
Watching sunrise turn to day, to twilight, to darkness, alone...And alone again as the sun peeks over the hills the next day...

Why live? It would be so easy to give up...It would be easy and simple to say forget it...this life is not worth living...God has not shown me favor  
I've done everything I can, I am trying so hard and its still not working

Is there a situation in you own life, or in the life of someone you love that is painful, desperate, depleting with seemingly no escape? You've been praying about it for years with no relief...  
Have you ever wanted to give up?  
Not try anymore?

The inspiring thing about this woman, despite her desperate state, is that she doesn't give up. That's why she's in here...in the scripture...in the inspired book called the Bible...that's why 2,000 plus years from this event we read her story today...

If you've ever seen the movie "Gladiator", it reminds me of that fight scene at the end where our hero is mortally wounded, but he doesn't stop fighting.  
With the last energy left in him, the Gladiator seeks justice, and manages to kill off the evil emporer...

The same with this woman...she keeps on keeping on, even though it seems so futile...so without purpose  
And then comes the day when she overhears someone talking about Jesus – that he is coming to her town...where she lives

Its quite poignant how  
With the last bit of energy left in her, after twelve years of pain and isolation, this woman decides to try again...weak as she might be...and lift herself from her mat where she has been lying doubled up in pain...  
battle the crowds surging around this prophet/rabbi and reach out one more time...

She is tenacious in her frailty  
Valiant in her weakness  
Determined against all odds to find a way out of her seemingly no way out situation

And she's spunky and a bit of a rebel because she isn't supposed to go out into the crowds...it violated Jewish law cause everyone she jostled against in that surging mass of people...she made them unclean too...

Ever do something you wouldn't normally do just because your desperate? That's what's going on here with this woman...

Perhaps she hadn't expected such a forceful mob, but she has nothing to lose  
See yourself in this wave of people - all of them are trying to get closer to this Rabbi Jesus...

Imagine yourself like this woman frail, and small, without much strength because of your illness, trying to make some headway

It is not easy, and Jesus is still a ways away from you

"If I can just touch him," you think

If I can just touch the hem, or the tassel of his garment

If I can just reach out far enough and grab it for one second

I might find a way out...I might get healed...I might find hope again

As people pull at her, and push her back...

She still manages to work her way forward, she refuses to give up...she works her way toward Jesus...she can see him now...And with the last bit of strength stil in her she thrusts her arm forward as far as

she can, and her fingers grasp the tassel at the edge of Jesus' robe...(back then rabbis wore robes with tassles at the hem)

And as soon as she touches it... life springs into her....

All those years of pain and questioning, all those years of depletion and depression dissolve in that moment...when her stretched out hand meets the robe...the tassle...the fringe of Jesus' garment...

An energy she hasn't felt in years pours through her

What a miracle!

And yet there is a greater miracle still to come...don't miss it

We always focus on the physical healing...but if it was just the physical healing that mattered Jesus would never have stopped

He never would have stopped in that thronging mass of people surging around him and utter the seemingly most ridiculous obvious thing..."someone just touched me".

His disciples look askance...What's he talking about...everyone is stepping on everyone else...everyone is jamming, cramming, elbowing, jostling...**What do you mean someone touched you Jesus?**

Ever been in a crowd where there was wall to wall people? I was at the University of Michigan game in the big house a few weeks ago...and I was so crammed in I couldn't move. People above me, below me...and not just in the bleachers but in the place where your feet are supposed to go...there were people there too. Of course Jonathan

my son got me into the student section where it was really wild and crazy...I stood ontop of the bleacher for the whole time...people everywhere...118,000. And I couldn't move. I couldn't sit down...I couldn't leave to go to the bathroom or get a soda...If I said to Jonathan...Jon someone just touched me...he'd look at me...well...yeah...

Jesus in a similar crowd said it again...**"Someone touched me because I felt power going out from me."**

You see he never would have stopped and said that if the physical healing was the end all. It wasn't.

If the first point of this narrative is never to give up...the second point of this account is that we need to allow others to see us for who we are. In order to build an authentic community and grow in authenticity together, we must in order to do this, tell our story to one another.

## **II. Tell Your Story**

It doesn't matter if it is a good story or a bad story.

It doesn't matter if we have figured it all out or not, cause most of us haven't.

What matters is that we grow together in community by being vulnerable with one another, and letting others see us as we are.

Letting others in on the story of our lives...

What Jesus wants to do for this woman is not simply heal her body.

He wants to break her isolation.

He wants her to come forward and testify to what has happened to her in front of the very people who might shame her.

Why would they shame her?

Because she has violated the religious law. Remember? She is not supposed to go out in public with her illness, because it would make everyone she jostled against unclean.

Every time we share authentically with one another, we risk having people judge us, look down on us, or reject us, right?

Being authentic is not always easy.

But friends, in the church, with Jesus at the center, there should be no condemnation, and it is only in being authentic and sharing our stories with each other that we are able to build trust together, and move forward together in meaningful ways...

This woman had been isolated for so long I don't even know if she remembered what it was like to share her story with anyone..or even be in a relationship at all.

I think she may have thought she could grab her healing and slip away unnoticed.

Jesus says, "No way".

You need community. You need these people that you are afraid will judge you and condemn you...you need them, and they need you...tell your story.

That is why she comes trembling before everyone...she is scared stiff...

What if this rabbi would have her stoned?

Jesus is firm

***You are going to have to be seen for who you are.....come forward***

***No one is meant to go through this life alone***

Show yourself...

For once in your life, you are going to be noticed....and she comes forward and she stands there before him, shaking like a leaf...

And her words spill out of her mouth with tears, as she explains her story

The story of her pain

And of a desperate hope that led her to do what she did

And how now she knows that she has been healed

She tells her story even though its hard...even though she risks a stoning or expulsion from the synagogue

She risks others not understanding...judging

We as a church can be perceived as a judgmental community

Its bizarre because that great verse many of us know **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son; that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life...continues with...for God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him."** I wish we quoted that whole thing all the time!!

Friends as a church we are known by the stories we tell

We can't be a community together unless we share what's going on; and in taking the risk to let others in, we learn to trust one another. Unless we risk together in being vulnerable and transparent in our brokenness and weariness in our struggles and in our victories.

We can't grow together as the body of Christ.

Finally the last point is this.

### **III. Connect**

Connection...our vision statement is all about connection, with God, with one another and with the community.

If you have been in church recently you've heard me reiterate this new vision statement for WVPC many times...

Only Jesus however can make authentic connection possible.

The woman has just spilled out her story with tears, trembling before him

The she stops. There is nothing more to say...

The crowd is stone silent. What is Jesus' first word?

It is daughter...

**Daughter**....he says

*Daughter? Why is he calling her daughter?*

That is a word loaded with affection and kinship

His words are gracious, deep and resonate in her soul...

**"Your faith has healed you. Go in peace."**

Notice how Jesus doesn't take the credit for her healing.

***He gave the credit to her for believing in him.***

This is the way God is – he has tremendous respect for people...I call it the Divine Courtesy

Jesus honors the woman in front of all the people

For trusting him enough to battle the crowds to get to him...for not giving up hope for twelve years of pain and isolation...

For reaching out one more time and telling her story

And in affirming her and honoring her he lifts her up, so that all the people will see and understand that they too need to honor her

**The real miracle?** Why Jesus stopped to ask who touched me?

**He wanted to put the woman back into community...because no one should go through life alone**

1. Friends, never give up. If you are crying to God day and night he will come through for you.

2. Take the risk to tell your story – for better or worse. Don't be afraid to be authentic. We are a hospital for sinners here at WVPC not a fraternity or sorority for saints..

3. Connect in community. That's why the church exists – that's why God made it...that's why Jesus stopped...- because no one should ever go through life alone.

To get started with telling our stories, Victoria is here. She is relatively new to WVPC and this is a very personal story. She has the guts to get up here and share that story with you today.

She is risking that perhaps you will think she is crazy...but believe me she isn't. She is here today at WVPC because Jesus is real, Jesus is alive, and Jesus has put her back into community with his people, after a very long journey.

Please listen, and listen well....