

Encounters With Jesus: *The Power of Community*
The Woman With The Flow Of Blood
Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann
West Valley Presbyterian Church

Today as we anticipate the church picnic after the service and celebrate together 60 years of fellowship and community here at WVPC, I wanted to speak to you this morning about the power of community. And ultimately about the power of the church.

Just last weekend we celebrated our nations freedom on the 4th of July. And I came across something that happened on the 4th of July weekend in the year 2007 at Fenway Park that illustrates poignantly for me what that kind of power is like.

In this year, July 3rd 2007, Fenway Park in Boston had a Disabilities Awareness Day and there were many present at the game who had severe physical and mental challenges.

One of these individuals had been selected to sing the National Anthem. He did okay at the beginning, but as he continued to sing he became very nervous and had trouble holding it together. Watch what happens...

WATCH VIDEO HERE: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhcZRFcjbhw>

So what happened? He starts to flounder, gets very nervous, and suddenly everyone comes alongside.

They start singing too, right along with him. He isn't flying solo anymore. He has this entire stadium of people surrounding him, cheering for him, and getting him through.

And I don't know if you noticed but that young man regained his composure and was able to finish the song well.

That's the power of community. When we falter, others come alongside to help. That's what God had in mind when he thought up the community we call the church.

God had this great idea. He knew we were created for community. No one was meant to go it alone. We weren't made for isolation. We need one another.

Studies have been done that say that people who live in community with one another and eat Twinkies (unhealthy), live longer than those who live in isolation who eat broccoli (healthy). In other words even our physical health is linked to having a community around us that supports us.

I recall a very a wealthy woman who was a widow – she lived on an estate and had a big mansion.

Her name was Carol – she was a widow and she lived alone. Down below her was a little house where her servant Gracie lived.

And on the weekends Gracie's family would come and visit.

Gracie had a large extended family. And one Friday morning Gracie was getting ready for the family visit, and all of a sudden she looked up and there was her boss, Carol – the owner of the entire estate – standing there by her door.

And Gracie is shocked because Carol had never come there before and she thought perhaps she had done something wrong.

Carol says to Gracie – “Gracie – I am sorry to intrude but I just wanted to ask if you would mind if I sat outside in the evenings where you can see me over there on the patio so that I could watch your nieces and nephews playing, and hear some of your conversation and the laughter. It does my soul good – often my house gets very lonely.”

You can have it all...and if you don't have community, people around you who care about you and who will love you through the hard times, you don't have anything. There's power just in secular community.

How much more power is there when the people of God gather and pray and commit to being the hands and feet of Jesus for one another?

If you don't have people who will pray for you, and remind you that God loves you in the valleys and in the turmoil of this life, you will grow old too quickly.

Let me show you how this is operative in the text that Rosalie read to us.

This woman that we learn about in scripture has been isolated for years. Why?

Because her illness, that flow of blood, **made her ritually unclean** for the Jews.

Anyone who came in touch with her was made unclean as well, and had to go through a cleansing process to be made clean again and able to participate in the rites of the synagogue.

This woman wasn't even supposed to go into that crowd.

That was against the religious laws because everyone who jostled against her in that mob of people surrounding Jesus was defiled.

She does it anyway. She is so desperate.

Did you hear what the scripture said?

She has tried everything.

She's been to every doctor in the area.

She'd been to the Kaiser's and Palo Alto Medical Clinics, and the walk in clinics of the day. She's had horrible treatments done to her- involving leaches, and painful procedures because at that time what you did for this kind of thing was pretty barbaric.

The medical bills have piled up - she can't pay them. She's out of money.

She's had this thing for 16 years??? Nothing has worked. Despite all of her pain and effort and money - she spent all that she had - nothing to show for it.

But **she still has enough spunk in her to try one more thing.**

She thinks...no one will know. Know one will find out - no one even knows who I am - I have been isolated for so long .

I will hide in the crowd and just reach out and grab Jesus' hem.

Maybe I will receive healing.

Now Jesus might have been wearing the kind of a robe that rabbis sometimes wore at that time that actually had tassels on the bottom. So she might have grabbed a tassel.

We aren't sure. But what we do know is that she grabbed a part of the bottom hem of Jesus robe. And she is instantly healed.

Now...she has been pretty sneaky.

Sometimes I'm pretty sneaky too. When I am on vacation...

I just want to sneak into the back of a church, get what I can from the service, and dart out as fast as I can.

And sometimes that happens, we do that...but that's not church...that's not community. In order go to church...and be the church...we have to stay and meet people, and get involved, and share our lives, and invest in what is here.

What is here are the people of God...what is here are the stories of God's faithfulness...what is here is the love of Jesus demonstrated in community...and we need that so badly

I want you to understand that Jesus doesn't only heal this woman's issue of blood – her physical condition.

He heals her isolation.

He stops, right in the middle of everything and says "Someone touched me"

Now this is bizarre because *everyone* was touching him

He's in a crowd...a packed crowd and people are banging against him, pushing, shoving, trying to get as close to Jesus as they can.

And Jesus said, "Someone touched me". No wonder the disciples were like "HUH?"

What do you think the woman is thinking, back there hiding in the crowd, when Jesus stops, and knows that she has touched him.

She is thinking, "Uh oh. I have just broken a religious law. I went into a crowd unclean. I am not hidden. I am exposed."

So that is why she comes ***trembling forward*** to share her story.

Jesus insists that she share her story publicly with everyone.

Does he condemn her? No.

Does he say, "Boy, was I on today...even my robe heals people."

No.

He affirms her in front of everyone, and honors her faith, and calls her "daughter".

"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

By saying that, and by validating her, he puts her back into community. Her isolation is broken, people know her story, they identify with her pain, and they rejoice in her healing

The color is back in her cheeks, her eyes have a new sparkle to them
And from then on *in that village people knew her as the one who was healed by Jesus.*

Jesus puts her back in community

Now some of us today would rather stay hidden than come forward
Sometimes we think of church as a place where we have to put on a certain face, act a certain way in order "to fit in"

Sometimes the erroneous assumption is made that in order to "be a good Christian" we can't share what is really going on in our lives

We stay isolated by sneaking into church, getting what we can, and leaving quickly

Or by not being authentic with one another – when we aren't authentic it's like the real us never showed up at church at all

And we stay isolated, even when we are with people cause, we aren't being our real selves – we're being our church selves – whatever that is

We are scared to show others that maybe we don't have it all together
Sometimes we are even afraid to talk about what the Lord has done in our lives because people might think we are weird

But the truth is friends... ***We don't want to be a church where you just come once a week and look at the back of somebody's head.***

We want to be a face to face church.

We want to be in actual community with one another

getting to know each other, entering into real relationships, and not pretending.

Some of you know that kind of face to face community that we have here at WVPC. You've experienced it.

But many more of you haven't.

This was driven home to me last week when we had our Tuesdays Together time.

We have classes and Tim and I taught the 5 love languages class and it was great...we had 26 people there and you can still join us in two weeks if you want...

But there was also a Bible Study for women and one for men. And in one of the Bible Studies the whole concept of community came up

And people shared in that study how hard it was to come to church and let people see the real them...especially when they were not doing okay.

It was a revelation to some of them to learn that not everyone in the church is just doing great all the time

That we all have our warts, wrinkles and issues and times of trial

Yet its only when we allow others to see our pain that healing can happen;

And I know that we all need *safe people* to share with, but there are a lot of safe people in this church, and as the pastor I testify to it, people who have a gift for caring and for prayer

There are people who are here to help – if you need it

There are people who are ready to hear your story about God's faithfulness in your life if you are ready to share it

There are people here who will not judge you...but simply pray for you

But no one can help if they don't know, and you won't tell them

The church is meant to be a spiritual family; a place where we can share everything and anything together in community

Did you know that every Tuesday morning our staff meets together for prayer?

Did you know that we as a staff share our prayer needs and concerns together every week, and then pray for each other?
We have struggles too that need prayer...and they change from week to week
At one point we stopped doing this in order to save time, and do you know what happened?
We began to fragment, get mad at each other, and stuff started unraveling.

But as we started to pray together again for each other, and be authentic with one another, we put ourselves back into community with Christ at the center...and things began to get back in shape

I want to challenge all of you today who know what I am talking about when I talk about Christian community

I want to challenge you to look around

There are people in this church I guarantee you, that you don't know
Did it ever occur to you that maybe they might be longing for the kind of Christian community that you have already?

They might be seeking out a spiritual family, and wanting to be a part of this church thing...or simply make a Christian friend ...but they don't know how to break in?

It is incumbent upon those of us who know Christian community to invite people in, talk to them, make new friends...not just foster old relationships

I met with the Outreach Committee Team on Thursday and they said that I could share this with you...so this comes from them

They said, "We think WV should have two new rules. These rules are as follows:

- 1. No one talks to anyone they know for the first 10 minutes after church**
- 2. If you are going to lunch with your friends from church already, always ask someone new to join you**

Talk to Outreach if you disagree s...not me...

I have to tell you, I am in parish ministry today because I love the church
The idea that God had to create the church was a phenomenal one..

See if a community at baseball field on a Saturday afternoon at Fenway
Park can have that kind of power...just think what the community of the
church can do for other empowered by the Holy Spirit

Dr. B was a professor at Fuller Seminary and he had that same passion
for the church...he loved it...and he used to say with a French accent...
sounding just like that inspector Clousseau from those old pink panther
movies...(and I am not going to try to impersonate him – not my gift)

Students, do you know, do you understand?

***Once there was a time when the Holy Spirit fell upon a group
of men and women,
ordinary men and women, men and women just like you, with
so much power that old barriers that had
tormented the human race forever... It was like they didn't
exist, and people were together like one family
across racial divides and ethnic divides, Jew and Gentile, male
and female, slave and free.***

***Do you understand that once the Holy Spirit came on a
community of ordinary men and women with such
power that people who had money, people who had resources,
just got freed up? They said, 'I'll sell this.***

***There's somebody in need; I'll give this.' There had never been
a community like this before students.***

They put a towel over their arm and just said, 'I'll just serve.'

***And students...The people in that first Biblical church took off
their***

masks. They stopped trying to pretend they were any better than they were, and they just talked honestly and openly about their temptations and their sins, their struggles and their worries.

And students...it changed the world.

From all over, people would look at this little community and say, 'I want to be a part of that.'

***Then he'd say...Students, has the Holy Spirit lost his power?
Can
God not do that again?***

Friends for the past 60 years, I believe God has been creating that kind of community here at WVPC because the Holy Spirit is at work in our midst.

I want to share with you a story in closing today that happened right here at this church. It's the story of someone who came in the doors of WV for the first time about two years ago. This person had no friends. He came because he thought he should.

He had a need for God in his life, and was finishing up some graduate work, and just felt he needed a church.

But this person had a past that made him a bit different from others. It was a past laced with isolation and rejection from his family.

So he had adapted. He had learned to go it alone, all of his life.

Life as a loner was his experience and he knew it well and was comfortable with it.

In fact isolation was so familiar to him that when he was invited to lunch from some folks here he often said no.

But these WV folks didn't give up. They kept persisting. They kept

inviting.

Just this past year he came to me and said, “Pastor Kim, for the first time ever I can tell you that I have found friendship here at WV. I’ve never had friends before. And for the first time I know what it means when we sing “What A Friend We Have In Jesus.”

That’s the power of the community of the church. Sixty years from now may we look back and say we were faithful to be the authentic, inviting, prayerful and powerful community of the church of Jesus Christ.