

## **Holding the Hem** **Luke 8:40-56**

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Christian George preached this sermon upon receiving the James Earl Massey Homiletic Award at Beeson Divinity School on 1 May 2007.

Who do you say that Jesus is? Was he just a Jewish carpenter who was nailed to a piece of wood? Was he just a local magician, casting spells on nature? Or, perhaps he was a good teacher who taught his disciples the different between right and wrong, good and bad, life and death? Who do you say that Jesus is?

This was the question on the tip of the disciple's tongues. In verse 22 of Luke 8, Jesus gets in the boat with his disciples. A storm arises on the lake, but Jesus is sleeping beneath the bow. The water is white with foam, and the disciples are white with fear. Yet Jesus rebukes the wind and drops an Alka-Seltzer in the waves. And the disciples wonder, "Who is this man, that even the wind and the waves obey him?"

In verse 26, Jesus encounters a demon-possessed man. He was a man who lived among the tombs, a Satanic Superman—too strong to be chained, too powerful to be subdued. Yet, Jesus rebukes the demons and drives them into a herd of kamikaze swine. And the disciples wonder, "Who is this man, that even the demons obey him?"

And now, in verse 40, we read that the crowd was expecting Jesus. Of course they were. Here you have a man who nature obeyed and demons answered to. Here you have a man who healed the sick and touched the lame. Here you have a man who looked down at the water he was walking on and saw H<sub>2</sub>O—two humble hydrogens and one obedient oxygen. And the crowds wonder, "Who is this man, who acts more like a God than a man?"

Jairus' daughter is dying. She's a girl of about twelve, the daughter of a well-respected ruler of the synagogue. You see, Jairus was the chapel coordinator. He was the one who told people when to enter and when to exit, when to bow down and when to stand up. It was a very dignified position—a position of power and authority. But today, Jairus is the one on his hands and knees, begging Jesus to heal his little girl.

And as Jesus was on his way, a woman who has been bleeding for twelve years was in the crowd. We don't know what kind of bleeding disorder she had, but we do know that according to Leviticus 15, her constant bleeding rendered her ceremonially unclean. That means she had not been to church in 576 weeks. She had not felt the touch of a man for well over a decade. She could not even go shopping with her girlfriends because society considered her an outcast.

Mark tells us that she had spent all her money trying to get well, but only got worse. There was no blue cross blue shield for this girl. There was no premium insurance to cover her pre-existing condition. Just imagine the smell—the blood, the odor, the filth and the flies. Just look at the embarrassment—the scabbing and the scarring, the guilt and the shame of going to the bathroom twenty or thirty times a day? You see, there was no band-aid to bind her wound. There was no tampon to hide her blood. All the pills and prescriptions and potions could not prevent her suffering. She was a nobody—the crowds thought so, the disciples thought so, even she, herself, knew it to be true.

But look at what Jesus says in verse 46.

“Someone touched me!”

“But Lord,” Simon Peter interrupts, “everybody's touching you!”

"No, Simon, Jesus said, "somebody touched me."

Jesus called a nobody, a somebody.

Jesus has a way of stopping for the nobodies. You remember that he was on his way to raise Jairus' daughter from the dead. The doctor was about to cure a terminal patient, but instead, he hesitates to heal a chronic illness. Today, we'd call that malpractice. But Jesus stopped for the nobody because he wanted to show his disciples that he is sovereign over nature, he is sovereign over demons, he is sovereign over sickness, and he is sovereign over death. And what seems like an interruption to us was really an opportunity for Jesus to display his greatness.

The woman in our text had a superstitious faith. In that day, it was thought that healing came from touching. We find this tradition in Mark 3 when the crowds touched Christ and in Acts 19 when people came in contact with the handkerchiefs and the aprons of the apostles. It was a faith that foreshadowed a medieval era when pilgrims traveled miles to touched icons and relics. We even see it today on television. “Send us twenty dollars, and we'll send you a prayer handkerchief that guarantees your instant healing.” Superstition!

Nevertheless, the woman in our text whispers to herself, “At last, here is a man who can heal me. I know I am unclean, unrespected, and unworthy, but if I can just snatch his sleeve I know I will be healed.” And suddenly, a nobody reaches out of nowhere and touches the hem of the garment of God. And twelve long years of bleeding stopped in a heartbeat and Jesus said, “Daughter, your faith has healed you, go in peace.” This is

the only place in the New Testament where Jesus calls a woman *daughter*, and she goes from being a nobody, to being a somebody, to being a *child of God*.

In his commentary on the gospels, John Calvin posited that while this woman was walking towards Christ, Christ was pulling her to himself. Now, I don't know where God's pulling starts and our pushing ends. I don't know where God's reeling begins and our swimming concludes. But I do know one thing. There is a salvific synergism at play in our passage, and the God who pulls us to himself, joins us for the journey. It is not your grasp on God that saves you, but rather, it is God's grasp on you. And so fixed are you within those fingers that not a hand from the pit of hell can reach up and pull you into the flames. Because in the beginning, God reached into the blackness of time, grabbed hold of nothing, decided it should become something, altered absolutely everything so that one day he could bless it with anything. And Jesus Christ, the One who curls constellations with his biceps, the One who swirls galaxies with his triceps, the One who throws Saturns like Frisbees across the Universe, bends down to our level, adopts us a children of a heavenly home, and accommodates himself to our imperfect, superstitious, faulty, fragile, faith.

It was seven years ago. Like most freshman in college, I was enjoying life in the fast lane—living on my own, playing ping pong until the wee hours of the morning, and waiting for the girl of my dreams to fall into my arms. It was the beginning of a bright and sunny season in my life, little did I see the shadows hovering on the horizon.

“You have an incurable bleeding disorder,” the doctor said. “It's called ulcerative colitis. We don't know why some people get it, what triggers it, or how to prevent it. All we know is that your chances of colon cancer are doubled, and most people with your illness face a premature death.”

I left the doctor's office that day feeling lower than I have ever felt in all my life. It was a difficult diagnosis to accept, a valley deeper than I wanted to crawl through. You see, ulcerative colitis is a disease that inflames the colon. So everything I ate sliced the edges of my digestive tract like razor blades through a watermelon. For months I woke up two hours earlier just to bleed in the bathroom. I walked these Beeson halls with fresh blood inside me. Oh, I sang the words, “Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come, why should my heart feel lonely, and long for heaven and home. When Jesus is my portion, my constant friend is he. His eye is on the sparrow and I know he watches me.” But many times I didn't feel that God was watching. All I felt were those early morning hours, when I longed to reach out my hand that I might hold the healing garment of God.

Maybe you're sitting here today, and you know what its like to bleed with this woman. When your dreams are gone and your hope is gone. When your faith is dry and your love is scarce. When your grief has grown and your friends have gone. When your pain has peaked and your tears have flowed. Maybe life has hit you the hardest, cut you the deepest, and hurt you the most. Maybe it was a car accident, or a kidney stone. Maybe it was a miscarriage, a suicide, or maybe a homicide. Whatever your bleeding disorder,

I would like to offer you a word of encouragement this morning—attached to every thorn of pain, there is a rose of purpose, and God’s grace is always sufficient for our sicknesses. Last year a new medicine called Remicade was released in America, and so far it has put my bleeding disorder into remission. But let me suggest to you that God uses suffering to draw us into his presence. It is often far better to be held by God than to be healed by him. And it is only in the darkness, it is only in the valley, it is only in the hospital moments of our lives that Jesus Christ shines the brightest.

You do know that Jesus himself suffered from a bleeding disorder. Oh yes, make no mistake about it, it was a gory gospel when God crushed his little boy for your sin. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Father bent down to the son, much like he did at his baptism, only instead of a descending dove, there was a whip in his hand. And great drops of sweat became great drops of blood. And Jesus Christ was bruised and beaten. He was mocked and ridiculed. They hit him in the face and kicked him to the ground. They nailed him to a cross and laid him in the tomb.

But on the third day, Jesus arose from the dead. On the third day, the Father said, “Arise my love.” On the third day, God said to Jesus what Jesus said to Jairus’ daughter, “Honey, it’s time to get up out of that grave.” And Jesus Christ was raised to life, and death was laid to rest. And that is why you and I place all our eggs in the Easter basket. That is why you and I can finish the song, “I sing because I’m happy, I sing because I’m free, his eye is on the sparrow, and I know he’s watching me!” That is why you and I can sing, “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the *blood* of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the *blood* of Jesus. Oh precious is that flow that makes me white as snow, no other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus.” And God made him who knew no sin to *become* sin so that we might become the righteousness of God.

Oh, I know what Karl Marx said, that religion is just a crutch for the weak, but let me suggest to you today that Jesus Christ is more than just our crutch; he is our very life support. Without him we would die, without him we would perish, without him we would be but grass for the mower.

So who do you say that Jesus is? He is a prophet, but he is more than a prophet—He is the very Word of God. He is a priest, but he is more than a priest—He is the Lamb that was slain. He is a king, but he is more than a king—he is the King of all Kings and at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. He is Lord over nature, He is Lord over demons, He is Lord over sickness, and He is Lord over death. He is the alpha and the omega. The first and the last. The beginning and the end. He sits in the engine room and the caboose, traveling before us and behind us on this journey of life.

So be encouraged this morning, dear friends, Jesus Christ exchanges his purity for our contamination. He takes our grime and gives us grace. He takes our filth and gives us faith. The God who justifies us in verse 44, will glorify us in verse 54. And the God who heals our disease in verse 44, will raise us from the dead in verse 54. And on that day,

every tear will be wiped from every eye, and every sickness from every saint. And we will hold not only the hem of the garment of God, but with hands outstretched we will be embraced by the everlasting arms of the Almighty.

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