

The Touch of Faith
by Rev. Jeremy A. McKeen

Knowing what our church is currently going through, I have chosen a story from the gospels that I believe will speak to all of us. It's a very famous story—even if you're not a Christian you've probably heard of it. But from my experience, it's a story that's seldom preached on, because frankly it's an uncomfortable story. It's a story about someone's very personal and private wounds. It's about a woman who was struggling with deep internal pain. But thankfully Jesus is not scared off by the difficult and uncomfortable cases. No, Jesus stops and welcomes them. He welcomes the hurting, the outcasts, and the awkward cases. And he does way more than that—he heals, he comforts, and he restores....and all we need to do is to come to him with just a touch of faith.

Read Text: Luke 8:42-48

Jesus can take the deepest wounds of our lives and make us whole—and all of us have them. Jesus can heal the unhealable. Jesus can cure the incurable. Jesus knows the marks of pain and shame that each one of us bears and this story tells us that he cares. Whether it's the marks of betrayal, loss, injustice, misfortune, abuse, or grievous sin—whether we have been sinned against or have sinned against others, Jesus stands ready to administer justice and healing. But let me say a couple things before we get into this story.

First, if we're going to see the relevance of this story for us today, it's critical to understand that this physical healing is a picture of the deeper spiritual healing that's for us today. Now—don't get me wrong—yes, Jesus literally and physically healed this woman, and he physically heals people today. But one of the main purposes of these miraculous encounters that we find in the gospels is to be a picture of the spiritual and emotional healing that Jesus brings to our hearts. This is why at the very end of the story the emphasis is on the woman's heart of faith and the blessing of assurance and peace that she is given. You see, if we were to look at this story as only about the physical, or even mainly about the physical, then we could easily draw the wrong conclusion that we should never visit a physician or go to the doctor when we're sick because, after all, it didn't work out for her—we should just pray and trust Jesus. But that can't be the point of the story, because who's telling us the story? Luke, the physician! And Luke wasn't trying to write himself out of a job. Luke is wanting us to see the compassionate and compelling character of Jesus and to know how the wounds of our hearts can be healed by him today.

Lastly, before we get into this, you and I should be confident in the truthfulness of this story, not only because it's recorded in three of the four gospels, but get this – Eusebius, who was a noted historian writing in the fourth century, actually claimed that he had seen this woman's house. He had been to her house and had seen a great statue commemorating this scene that had been erected for hundreds of years in her memory. This happened! But there's another reason why we should trust the truthfulness of this account. And it's because of our personal experience. There are many people here in this room that know this story has to be true because, in a way, this is what has happened to you. At a time of great need you reached for Jesus and were healed and changed by him. You see, this woman in different ways, and to different degrees, is me. It's all of us who need the healing touch of Jesus. All of us have deep and personal wounds that only Jesus can heal. And to see how her story is really your story, or how her story can be your story, I want to look at three aspects of her story: her pain, her faith, and her healing. How can her story be your story? Let's look at her pain, her faith, and her healing.

The first thing we come to in verse 43 is her pain.

And the first thing that we see is that her pain was personal and physical and had been going on for 12 years. Now, think about that for a moment—that's all of high school, all of college, and then four years after that. So, this was hard and long and devastating pain. We're actually told in the other gospels that the physical pain grew worse and worse. And because of the nature of this womanly condition we can know that there was a time when this pain didn't mark her life. It's not like she can't remember any different. No, she knows what's it's like to not live with this condition. And so, in a way, that only made the pain worse.

And then because of the nature of the condition her pain was also relational and social. We learn in Leviticus 15, and in other places, that a woman with this condition was considered ceremonially unclean. So, if she was married there was to be no intimacy with her husband. There was to be no contact with other people. Moreover, she was not allowed to attend the synagogue or the temple. I can't imagine the type of loneliness and isolation that this woman must have felt. Most likely she was known in her family and social circles as "the woman with the issue." It was like she was perpetually living on the outside looking in. And so, it's no wonder that we find out in the end of verse 43 that she had spent all her money on trying to find a cure.

That means her pain was also financial, but it's even more than that. As I was looking more into this story, I discovered that many of these physicians weren't like the physicians today. They were more like traveling frauds who would claim to have some magical remedy or potion that would take away certain diseases—"And you can have one of these magic elixirs too"...if you paid them enough money. They would exploit people's needs and take advantage of them. And that's why I think in Matthew and Mark's account it says that she, "suffered under many physicians." And so most likely this woman had been exploited. She had been taken advantage of. She was a victim of injustice, and she was left poor and destitute and living with this chronic comprehensive pain.

But we must never forget that for all of us it is always the context of pain and need that drives us to Jesus. And yet, at the very same time, it's what supposedly keeps many people away from Jesus. I can't tell you how many times I have heard someone say to me, "I don't need Christianity. That's just a crutch for weak people." And I want to say to them, "Yeah but when you recognize that you're weak a crutch is quite handy." But Christ is so much more than a crutch. Christ is a cure. Christ is a resurrection. Christ is a living restorative power in our lives. But the first step to experiencing his healing power is confessing our need for him. That he is not optional. He's essential. It's recognizing that there are real wounds that only he can heal. Real shame that only he can cover. Real problems only he can solve. And real sin that only he can forgive. And I don't know what your pain is, but he does. And just like this woman, our pain is meant to be the platform that puts us in contact with Jesus. And this is exactly what we see her doing. She doesn't bury her pain. She takes her pain by faith to Jesus.

Second, let's look at her faith:

We're told at the very end of the story that this woman is a picture of faith. She's a picture of what real genuine faith looks like. What is faith? Well, the first thing that we can draw out from her story of faith is that...(a) *Christian faith always comes from hearing about Jesus.* It's not here in Luke's account, but in the same story in Mark 5:27, we're told that she had heard the reports about Jesus and then decided to go to him. That's important! See—she wasn't just driven by her need, she was drawn by what she had heard. Most likely she had heard, "This might be the One! This might be the Messiah." She had probably heard, "Jesus welcomes the unfortunates, touches the lepers, takes in the outcasts, and brings justice to the oppressed."

And so, the reports about Jesus became the basis of her faith—the word that she had heard about Jesus. And this is the basis for all Christian faith. Our faith is not a blind leap into the dark. It's not wishful thinking. It's hearing the credible reports about Jesus that we find in the Bible and then taking God at his word. And so, what do people need? They need to hear about Jesus! And that hearing must come with faith. Hearing is essential for faith, but it's never enough. Hearing doesn't replace our faith. There's a lot of you here today who have heard about Jesus but you have yet to hear him with a heart of faith. And how can you tell? You've never taken any personal and public action towards Jesus. But this is always the second mark of genuine faith.

(b) Christian faith will always move us to personal courageous action. Faith comes from hearing about Jesus and that faith is seen by taking a personal step towards Jesus. That's what we see in this woman and it's what you see in Hebrews 11 as well. It says, "By Faith Abel did this. By Faith Noah did this." You see, real faith always leads to real personal action. Now, why do I say public or courageous? Well, it's because technically this woman wasn't allowed to touch anybody in public. Technically, when she walked into a public place she was to declare, "Unclean, unclean, unclean!" But it's like she thinks to herself, "I don't care. If Jesus is the Messiah, then he's the One who binds up the brokenhearted. He's the One who has come with healing in his wings. And if I can just get to Jesus somehow I know everything will be fine." And because she believed in the person and power of Jesus she thought, "I'm going to do it." This is like the four-year-old getting ready to jump off a diving board for the first time. It's like... "Okay I'm gonna do it!" You see, where does courage come from? Courage comes from caring about something more than the immediate threat to you. You have the courage to call someone out on something because you care more about their welfare than your own feelings. You have courage to speak up for the truth because even though you'll get ridiculed, the truth is more important. And so here she is and she's thinking, "I don't care if I get caught. I don't care what people think. I don't care what it may cost me. All I care about is getting to Jesus." Do you have a faith like this? Where is your faith leading you to personal and courageous action? Is your faith personal? Is there any type of risk or cost that comes because of your faith in Jesus? It took courageous faith to make this move... But... that doesn't mean it took a great amount of faith. And that's because...

(c) Christian faith will always focus on the Greatness of Jesus. This woman is a picture of faith but she's not a picture of great faith. In verse 44, we see this woman using the crowd for cover and almost sneaking up on Jesus from behind. She had to have been crawling on the ground to get low enough to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. This isn't big faith, but that's the big point. She didn't need to have great faith because she was coming to a great Jesus. Her faith wasn't in her faith; her faith was in the greatness of Jesus. See—what would you rather have? Huge faith in an unreliable object or a little faith in a reliable one? She thought, "Jesus is so great. He's so wonderful. He is so powerful that if I could even touch the hem of his garment I know I'll be healed."

And do you know what that hem or the fringe of this garment was? She wasn't just grabbing for the closest piece of cloak she could find. No, this was very specific. This was extremely meaningful. The word could literally be translated 'tassels.' Scholars are convinced that this was one of the tassels that were required to be on the tallit or the corners of every man's cloak. You can actually read about this requirement in Numbers 15:38 – And you know what they stood for? They stood as a reminder that we are to walk in the presence of God. And they came to stand for the authority, rank, and protection of that person. That's why when David cut off the hem or the tassels of Saul's garment he was afraid because it stood for Saul's authority. And remember Ruth? She covered herself with the hem of Boaz's garment. What was she doing? It was symbolic for coming under his authority and protection. And get this – in Ezekiel 16 the Lord covers his bride with the corners of his garment. You see what this woman believed?

By grabbing the tassels of Jesus, by grabbing the corner of his garment, it was like she was saying, “I see your greatness and believe that you have the authority and power to heal me! I’m trusting your authority. Jesus, I’m coming under your authority and protection!” You see all she needed was just a touch of faith, but that touch of faith meant so much. This was the touch of faith that immediately healed her and stopped Jesus in his tracks.

And this is what we’ve got to do as well—we’ve got to see the greatness of Jesus and then bring all our problems, and all our pain, and all our shame and bring it under his authority of love. Bring it to him. Take it to him today and say, “Jesus, I see your greatness and I’m trusting you with this! I’m coming under your authority!” And that’s what she did and then Jesus stopped and he asked, “Who touched me?”

Now why would he ask that? Obviously, we learn all throughout the gospels that Jesus knows the future from the past. He knows us all the way down to the depths. So, he knew who had touched her. It wasn’t like he was surprised by this like, “Woah, woah...what just happened to me? I’m losing power!” So, why does he ask this question? I believe it’s because he wanted his disciples to know—and he wants us to know—that there is a marked difference between hanging around Jesus and getting in touch with Jesus. There’s a big difference between touching Jesus as a fan and touching Jesus by faith. See—this was no ordinary touch. This was the touch of faith and Jesus wanted people to know that he knows the difference. You see, this wasn’t just the tug of a hand. This was the tug of a heart—and not just any heart. This was a broken heart. This was a needy heart. But this was a heart that believed in the authority, love, and power of Jesus. Do you?

All this woman had was a touch of faith and that’s all you need as well. Jesus isn’t looking for big faith. He’s looking for just a touch of faith. He’s looking for the person who says, “Jesus, I’ve tried everything else and nothing else will work. I’m coming to you. I’m coming just as I am.” He’s looking for the person who says, “I can’t go on anymore without you.” He’s looking for the person who says, “I’ve got secrets and shame that no one will understand but I believe that you will.” My friend he’s looking for you! Go to him. Trust in him. Talk to him. It doesn’t have to be some long drawn out prayer. You just need to lay hold of his authority by faith and you’ll be healed. And this is what happened for this woman. And so, let’s look at this...

Third and finally, let’s consider her healing:

Now clearly her healing was physical, and that was critical for her, but that’s not the only type of healing—or even the main type of healing—that she needed. And Jesus knew that. That’s why he wasn’t about to let her leave with half a healing. He knew that...

(a) She also needed the healing of love: What does love do? Love stops and notices their beloved. Love will pick you out in a crowd every time. I believe we’re meant to see the Lord’s personal love for the individual here. Let me explain. Back in Jesus’ day they didn’t have colored highlighters to emphasize things. They didn’t have bold, underline, and italics. So how did they highlight the things that they really wanted you to see? They would put it in the center of the story. It’s called chiasmic structure. It’s when the different parts of the first half are parallel with the parts of the second half, leading you to focus on the center of the story. So, get this—the story starts with a woman in *turmoil*, it ends with the woman at *peace*. We’re told in the beginning that for *twelve years* she couldn’t be healed by anyone. In the end she’s *immediately* healed by Jesus. In the beginning we see her coming up *behind* him. In the end we see her coming up *before* him. In the beginning she’s *hidden*. In the end she’s *not hidden*. And then as we get closer to the center, we have Jesus saying, “*Who touched me?*” And on the other side of that, “*Someone touched me.*” And so, what’s in the very middle? It’s Peter saying, “Master the crowds surround you.”

Now why would Peter's emphasis on the crowds be the center of the story? Well, we can't say for sure, but I believe that Luke wants us to see that Jesus is not in love with the crowds, he is in love with his people. All throughout Luke's gospel he shows us Jesus' love for the individual—the one lost sheep, the lost son, Zacchaeus, the thief of the cross. Over and over, Luke is showing us that Jesus has a personal love for the individual.

We hear a lot of leaders today making a huge deal about the size of the crowds around them—It's all about the crowds! Not for Jesus. Jesus wants you to know that you are not a nameless face among the masses. You're not just another number in the thronging processional. That's why he's calling out this woman. He's letting her know—he's letting you know—"I see you. I know you. I notice you. I care for you." It's the healing of love. It's the healing that comes from knowing that we are personally and deeply loved.

(b) But she also needed the healing of peace: Remember for twelve years she would have been barred from the synagogue and cut off from the temple—the main meeting place between God and man. And so, she must have felt abandoned by God, forsaken by God, and separated from God. That was until the final temple had come. See—all of those laws and elements of the temple, they all pointed to the holiness and purity of Jesus who would become the new and final temple of God—the final meeting place between God and man. You see, because Jesus would be the sacrifice on the cross for her sins and all our sins, because he is the high priest who cleanses all our sins, because he *is* our cleansing rites, now we have a temple that's not defiled by the unclean but cleanses the defiled. Now in Jesus, everything that the law and the cleansing rights pointed to has been fulfilled in him, so that anyone who comes to him just as they are with just a touch of faith will walk away cleansed and healed and at peace with God. This is what he gave her—he gave her the temple blessing—the benediction of peace. "Woman, you have come to the true and final temple of God. Go in peace!" And this is the peace that we need as well. We need to know that in Christ we are personally loved by God and at peace with God. To know that whatever we have experienced, whatever we have gone through that in Christ God is on our side and our Father forever.

And that's the last thing I want to leave you with. Did you notice that this story is sandwiched between another story? It's right in between the story of another father who cares for his dying daughter who we learn is about...twelve years old. In our story we have a woman who has been suffering for how long? Twelve years. And what does Jesus call her in the end? He calls her "daughter." You see, on his way to heal Jairus' daughter, Jesus stopped to heal his! And because of his great love and her touch of faith, "the woman with the issue" was sent home as the beloved, faith-filled daughter of God. And what happened for her, can happen for you. This can become your story. You too can go home with the healing of love, and the healing of peace, and the assurance that you are a child of God. And what do you need? What do you need? Just a touch of faith.