



THE BLEEDING WOMAN | MARK 5, LUKE 8

Before reading this story, read the Scripture passage. Keep in mind that this is a loose retelling and liberties have been taken to capture our imaginations and help us understand the context of the story and the power of the gospel.

I was sitting alone and isolated on the dusty street amidst the ever growing crowd when I heard the news. Picking up pieces of gossip here and there from passersby I was able to put together that the man who heals people was making his way through this very town and was now only a mere few yards down the road from me. I didn't know much about him. Really everything I knew I gathered from rumors I heard on the street from people who passed me by without a glance. Rumors of miracles, healings, and teachings spoken with great authority. But that's all they were - rumors. Some speculated the truth of it all, scoffing, and saying they would believe it when they saw it. Others, I heard, claimed with confidence they knew someone who was healed by his very hands. But, whether they believed the rumors or not, all wanted to see him for themselves. Which is why when I heard hustle and bustle of him coming near I knew I had to go to him.

As I made my way through the crowd my thoughts flashed back to the last 12 years of my life and the sickness that has led to so much shame. You see, for 12 years I have been bleeding and for 12 years my condition has cost me so much more than my poor health. Due to our ancient Levitical law a woman is considered unclean during the time of her menstrual period. This can cause isolation from family, because anyone she touches is also considered unclean, and separation from community, because her uncleanliness does not allow her to take part in any aspect of worship. I have now spent a good part of my life having been deemed ceremonially unclean forcing me into isolation, separated from my family and community, with no opportunity to approach God in worship. Where I come from, who you belong to is everything. So not only did my uncleanliness cause me to feel great shame, but now having been ostracized by my very own family, this shame has been placed upon me as a label, as a negative public rating. And I feel it every day as I sit alone on the busy street. Not only have I lost my dignity, but my identity as well. During these 12 years I spent everything I have ever earned on doctors who tried to fix my condition, but nothing ever seemed to work. In fact, it continued to get worse leaving me

in complete poverty. I am an outcast, tossed aside, looked down upon and deemed unworthy of any kind of relationship.

Now here he was walking through the growing crowd, this man, Jesus, whom I'd heard so much about. Surrounded by so many, but seen by no one, I had the sudden realization that this was my last chance, my last hope of becoming clean again. So I followed him, pushing through the crowd. I, of course, was aware of the possible consequences to approaching a man like this in my condition, but what did I have to lose? Absolutely nothing. And there was something deep inside of me that told me the rumors were true, that this man was so powerful I needed only to touch his robe and he could heal me. As I pushed forward I could feel the stares of those around me, but I never took my eyes off of him, focusing on every step, one at a time, taking me closer and closer to healing. Finally he was right in front of me, the gap between us quickly closing. A flicker of fear ran through me, but I quickly pushed it down. I had to do this. I had no other choice. Taking a deep breath I reached out and touched the fringe of his robe and in an instant I felt something inside of me change. I immediately stood frozen in place as the truth set in. I was healed. I could feel it deep inside of me, my illness was no more.

Still standing stunned, I fought to wrap my mind around what had just taken place when I heard the man ask the crowd "who touched my robe?" Sudden panic set in as my mind raced on what to do next. Should I run? I had just intentionally touched a very powerful man in my condition, surely this was a punishable offense. Should I slowly fade back into the crowd? I had become pretty good at being invisible and hadn't so many other people in the crowd also touched him? Through my racing thoughts and the noise of the crowd I suddenly heard the man say "Someone deliberately touched me, I felt healing power go out from me." And it was right then that I knew I could not stay hidden. I had been healed. I had experienced something miraculous, something I had prayed to God for for 12 years and he had finally answered. My fear was no longer from a place of guilt or shame, but rather re-oriented in great awe at the truth of who this man was. With my whole body trembling, I took a deep breath and walked toward him. As I approached him I immediately fell to my knees and with a shaky voice began to tell my story of suffer-

ing. 12 years of bleeding. 12 years of isolation and poverty. 12 years of shame and feeling unworthy of human connection. 12 years of separation from God. I knew the people in the crowd were listening to every word I was saying, but it didn't matter anymore. I was healed and I was kneeling before this man who was staring straight at me, with eyes full of understanding and acceptance.

And then he spoke a word I hadn't heard since my illness began. He called me "daughter." Daughter. This powerful man with kind eyes who had just heard how incredibly broken and alone I was called me "daughter." He didn't seem to mind that I had been unclean for 12 years or that I was an embarrassment to my family. It didn't seem to matter to him that I had been living in poverty, overlooked by anyone I crossed paths with. In fact, for the first time in 12 years, I knew I was seen.

"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." It was then I understood. I approached Jesus with the hope that he would heal my physical suffering, but I received so much more. Here, in the middle of the dusty road in front of dozens upon dozens of disapproving eyes he called me his daughter. With one word he healed my emotional and spiritual shame that came from years of rejection, isolation, and being told I was not good enough to worship my creator. With one word he communicated that he knew the very depths of my pain. With one word he restored my honor by restoring my identity. And it was this truth that allowed me to walk away in peace and confidence because no matter how many years of brokenness and shame I had endured I now knew I belonged to the one who set me free from it all.