

How Faith Begins

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time, June 26, 1994. Scripture Lessons: 2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

What if the woman healed from the flow of blood was with us this morning?

What kind of testimony would she give?

I believe she'd say something like this.

"I'm almost too embarrassed to talk about my problem.

"For twelve years

I never once had a normal monthly menstrual cycle.

I suffered with discharges of blood for many days at

a time, many times a month.

I felt physically drained,

fatigued,

worn out

due to the loss of so much blood.

"For twelve years I suffered depression,

anxiety,

headaches,

pains in my back,

in my thighs,

in my abdomen.

Do you have any idea what it's like to be plagued with constant physical

suffering for years,
with no respite?

“And then there was the social isolation.

According to the Law of God in the book of Leviticus I was spiritually
unclean.

The Law of God forbade me to touch anyone.

For twelve years, whatever I touched became unclean.

For twelve years I was an untouchable.

For twelve years I was never once hugged.

For twelve years I was never caressed.

Do you have any idea what that feels like?

- never to be touched,

never to be kissed,

never to be patted on the back or hugged?

I should not have even been in that crowd.

I was actually breaking the Law of God by being there.

I was infecting the crowd with my uncleanness.

“But worse than the physical and social suffering was the spiritual suffering.

For twelve years I felt cut off from God.

For twelve years I actually was cut off from God.

For twelve years I was not allowed by God’s law to worship with God’s
people.

I was unclean.

Unclean in God's sight.

Unclean in the sight of God's people.

"And then I heard about Jesus.

I only heard about Jesus.

I had never seen him.

I had never actually heard him preach.

I had no idea who he was.

I certainly didn't understand, at that time, that Jesus is the Son of God.

I didn't realize that he had come to die for my sins.

I had only just heard about him.

I had heard about how he healed people.

"I must confess that I wasn't really all that interested in Jesus - in him.

I didn't care who he was.

I wasn't interested in meeting him.

I wasn't interested in getting to know Jesus.

All I cared about was getting healed.

"That's why I came up behind him in the crowd to touch him.

I had such a magical, superstitious view of healing.

I thought if I could just touch his clothes I'd be healed.

"And then I touched him and he made me whole.

I knew instantly I was healed.

I could feel the flow of blood dry up.

I felt freedom.

I felt a new lease on life.

After twelve years my suffering was at an end.

I faded back into the crowd intending to return home.

“But Jesus said, ‘Who touched me?’

“He looked around into the eyes of the crowd.

His eyes came to rest on me.

His eyes were like flames of fire.

His looked penetrated to my heart.

“I came forward trembling.

I fell, terrified, at his feet and told him the whole truth.

I confessed that I had no idea who he was.

I confessed that I had not been interested in meeting him.

I confessed I just wanted to get healed.

“And he answered, “Daughter, your faith has saved you.”

My faith -

so uninformed,

so superstitious,

so inadequate.

I knew so little about him.

I understood so little.

I wanted so little.

I only wanted healing.

But Jesus wanted me.

He accepted my faith as saving faith.”

My friends, this woman really is with us this morning.

She’s within us.

She’s within you and me.

Who of us understands Jesus as we should?

Who of us understands as we ought who he is?

Who of us feels as we should the burden of our sins?

Who of us has *not* come, primarily, to get something from Jesus

Who of us has come for no other reason than

to worship him

to thank him

to praise him

for who he is and

what he’s done for us?

Many of us can identify with this woman.

So often, we’re physically drained.

We feel the aches and pains of the years.

Our daily work takes its physical toll.

And some of us know that, physically, our best years are behind us.

And many of us feel socially isolated -

longing for someone

who will understand us

who will listen to us

who will touch us

who will accept us - especially when we fail.

And so many of us feel spiritually bankrupt -

we sometimes feel so far from God;

we wonder what God has to do with our everyday lives;

we feel that we know so little about God;

we understand so little of the Bible when we try to read it.

we sometimes go for weeks getting nothing out of the worship service.

Yet we're here.

Perhaps we hope for something magical to happen -

some religious experience -

some miraculous healing.

Hopefully, we want to touch this Jesus whom we've heard about

from mom and dad,

from Sunday School teachers and ministers,

and from friends.

And Jesus *is* present with us this morning.

He says to us, "Your faith has saved you."

"You may have come

to make superficial contact with me -

to get something from me and leave -

to go through the service -

to repeat the confession of sin and the creed;

to listen to Scripture;

to hear a sermon,

to sing hymns,

to meet friends

to make superficial contact with me

and, then, go home."

"But I do not want you to leave with just superficial contact with me -

without meeting me;

without looking into my eyes;

without hearing my word of forgiveness;

without receiving my peace"

"I want you to know that,

whatever *you* want,

I want to have a personal relationship with you.

I want you to know that I accept your faith.

I accept you.

I see you as God's son,
God's daughter."

"I want you know that
whenever I notice even a trace of hunger
and thirst
and longing for me,
I'm there - totally and without reservation."

"Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Let us pray: Gracious God, wherever we are in our relationship to you, enable us to know, in a profound way, who you are. If we have come merely to make superficial contact with Christ, encounter us by your grace, mercy and love. Speak to us your healing word. Enable us to know you better, to follow you more closely, and to go forth into the world in peace; to be of good courage; to hold fast to that which is good; to render to no one evil for evil; to support the weak; to help the afflicted; to honor all persons; to love and serve you, our Lord; rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit, and your blessings, the blessings of almighty God. Abide with us and remain within us both now and forevermore. Amen.