

**SERMON AT NORTH MIDLANDS 26/6/94: Gelorup and Brnswick 2023 and Diocese  
of Bunbury 2024 OS 13b: GEOFF CHADWICK:  
"THE WOMAN WITH THE HAEMORRHAGE"**

Today I wish to focus on the woman with the haemorrhage. This is because she has an important story to be told, and a story which is often missed. There is more to this story than just a simple healing.

Firstly, the woman was an outcast. Under the Hebrew Law in Jesus' day, a woman suffering from menstrual bleeding was considered unclean. The Law can be found in Leviticus 15:19-30. Of particular interest to this woman are verses 25-27:

"If a woman has a prolonged discharge of blood outside the period, or if the period is prolonged, during the time this discharge lasts she will be in the same state of uncleanness as during her monthly periods. Any bed she lies on during the time this discharge lasts will be polluted in the same way the bed she lies on during her monthly periods. Anything she sits on will be unclean as during her monthly periods. Anyone who touches it will be unclean and must wash clothing and body and will be unclean until evening" (Lev 15:25-27, NJB).

So you see, this woman had two problems. Firstly the physical bleeding problem: unable to be cured after twelve years. This surely is a matter of great distress, yet I believe that her second problem was the greatest - she was an outcast. She had spent twelve years as an outcast. She would have been perpetually unclean, everyone would have known this, and the keepers of the law would have avoided her lest they touch her and become unclean themselves. Most probably this woman would have remained marginalised by, and in, society. She would have been left alone, left in loneliness and isolation simply because she had a disease over which she had no control. The woman was a outcast.

Are there not people in our society today who are in the same situation? Is it not the case that we have modern day "women and men with a haemorrhage"? It doesn't take much thought to make up a list:

People with AIDS/HIV.

People with a mental illness.

People who are disfigured.

People of a different race or culture from our own.

People who have been shamed by some incident that others won't forget.

Juveniles who have committed an offence.

I'm sure you can think of others. Outcasts do exist in our society. In many instances we are working to break down many of the artificial fears and rejections that there are between mainstream society and its outcasts, nevertheless there will always be outcasts because there will always be people whom we won't like or choose to fear. Our role as Christians is to recognise those dislikes and fears for what they are and to be like Jesus - to risk being touched by the outcast that healing may come.

Secondly, she had found no joy in other healers - she was desperate. The woman (in Mk's Gospel) had sought treatment over many years but had found no cure. She had tried everything, spent all her money, and finally, out of desperation, she sought out Jesus. In the gospel reading it says that she "came up through the crowd and touched his cloak from behind" (Mk 5:28, NJB). The woman had reached the point where she broke out of all the social norms of the time. She went through the crowd - thus making them unclean (if they knew her condition and had touched her). She touched Jesus thinking that that would make him unclean, and she did it from behind hoping to remain anonymous.

In approaching Jesus, the woman allowed her desperation and courage to over-ride any sense of what was proper according to the laws of the day. The crowd would have

thought ill of her. They would have feared her uncleanness and would have reviled her, lest she made Jesus unclean.

Her actions though socially unacceptable, actually bring about her healing. We too as Christians, may from time to time be challenged to behave in a socially unacceptable way in order to bring about healing to a situation. Wilburforce and others were ridiculed for opposing the slave trade; Florence Nightingale was ridiculed for going out to the battle fields - even accused of being a loose woman; Mother Theresa has shocked many Indians for her work with the untouchables. These are just some examples where good has come when some unhelpful shackles of social custom have been broken.

What unhelpful social customs should we be breaking?

Where are we called to go against the crowd and bring about the healing power of Jesus?

Two questions for us to ponder...

Thirdly, after the healing she was "frightened and trembling because she knew what had happened to her." In the story, once the woman is found out, she approaches Jesus in fear. I suspect she thought Jesus was angry with her. If he was like the crowd he would have been; after all her touch would have made him unclean. But there is nothing of that in Jesus' response. Jesus simply says "My daughter... your faith has restored you to health; go in peace and be free of your complaint"(Mk 5:34, NJB). Jesus relieves her of her complaint, but what was her complaint? - the haemorrhage - yes but that is only a small part of her complaint - her complaint really was isolation and a fear of "what had happened to her".

The woman's haemorrhage was gone, and so was her complaint of isolation. She was now free to become a member of the community again. But this was the frightening thing -

how, after twelve years of isolation and illness was this woman to live a normal life again? Normality was a frightening prospect. She would have to change her life.

When we are made well from a long illness or brought back into a community from which we were once estranged there is a fear. It is a fear of a new life. Even though the new life may be better than the old, the newness of it can be a fearful thing. The old, though difficult, was known and predictable; the new, though better, is unknown and unpredictable. How was this woman to cope with her new, restored way of life? Well, one final word of assurance was needed from Jesus...

Lastly, peace had to be granted to her - by Jesus, a member of the community. The woman was not really healed until she was at peace. Her haemorrhage may have been cured, but her spirit was not healed. We know this because she was still in fear. Complete healing and peace could only come through the acceptance of the community; and Jesus, a member of the community, grants her peace.

It is like that with us. Whatever our individual ailments or fears, they are not completely healed if there is no peace granted to us from within the community that we are. So we should be people who grant peace. Restored health is one thing but restored health in the midst of a peace granting community is another. It is the latter that we should endeavour to be.

A community of peace granting people - a novel idea? Maybe - but it certainly could be a definition of the church.

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**