

“I’ve Been Meaning to Ask...Where Does it Hurt”
Mark 5:21-43

The question for today’s sermon hits a little too close to home. I have learned to tip toe around this question with my family members as they have been in a lot of pain. Here are some of the answers I have gotten from family members. With my mom after a couple of months of chemo and radiation treatments her answer was either a sarcastic statement like, “I can’t be any better” or “It hurts everywhere, why do you even bother to ask?” My father’s response was something like this, “My heart is aching all the time watching my loved ones suffer like this.” My sister in California often details to me all the pain she is experiencing in her whole body from chemotherapy. My brother often tells me how grateful that his physical pain has been minimal even though his body is wasting away, and he is hardly able to move, but there is the emotional pain of leaving behind his three teenage children. So asking questions like, “how are you?” or “how is your day going?” have become difficult. But asking, “Where does it hurt?” has helped those who are suffering in my family to know that I see their pain and that their pain does not need to be hidden.

There is incredible power in noticing and acknowledging the pain of another. Our Bible reading for today tells the story of Jesus acknowledging the pain of two women. This passage from Mark 5 has a very interesting encounter in it between Jesus and a woman who was ashamed of her suffering. She wanted to be healed but without having to tell others about her hemorrhaging problem.

Physical illness was not always easy to speak about as some people believed that it was a sign of punishment from God for sin; one’s own sins or ancestral sins. Two people in our story had to risk exposing their shame to the public. The first one was a religious leader with a good standing in the community. His name was Jairus and he had a reputation to protect. A "leader of the synagogue" was not a person who was a Pharisee, rabbi or scribe - that is, one who held an ordained or academic position. It was an office of high importance for a willing wealthy lay person. A "leader of the synagogue" was responsible for financially maintaining the building, paying for its upkeep and being the primary contributor to any building expansion or renovation. He was also responsible for the conduct of synagogue worship and the selection of the public readings from the Torah. Thus, the first person with whom Jesus deals within this story was a very powerful person in the eyes of the people. Having to ask Jesus to help heal his daughter was a risk for him.

On the way to Jairus’ house, Jesus ends up encountering a woman with another shameful situation. She is not even named in the story because she was so insignificant. She had no money because she had spent all of her money on trying to get better. Her social status in society was ruined because of her illness. A woman with a flow of blood was considered unclean and was usually unable to be part of society (Lev. 12:1-8; 15:19-30). She was disqualified from marrying and if she were already married when the issue of

blood began, she was to be permanently separated from husband and children and was not allowed to participate in synagogue or temple worship.

The daughter of Jairus was 12, which was the age of a young girl becoming a woman. The hemorrhaging woman had her condition for 12 years which robbed her of her womanhood. In his book, *Binding the Strong Man*, biblical scholar Ched Myers summarizes the depth of the story by writing, "Mark shapes this story to intentionally juxtapose the two extremes of the Jewish social scale. The little girl had enjoyed twelve years of privilege as the daughter of a synagogue ruler yet was now 'near death' (5:23). The woman had suffered twelve years of destitution at the hands of the purity system and its 'doctors'; yet she still took initiative in her struggle for liberation."

Jesus recognized the shame of illness for the people he encountered. He paused to ask and to connect. Jesus was able to see human worth and faith in Jairus, his daughter, and the woman seeking healing.

Even though we have come a long way from the time of Jesus, we still carry our pain with a sense of shame and sometimes denial. We even hide it from ourselves. According to A Sanctified Art, "Before we can act, we must first acknowledge and believe the pain is real, for bearing witness to each other's pain helps us cultivate compassion" for ourselves and for others.

We can hold the space for acknowledging our pain. Instead of shame, we can offer places of grace where healing can begin to happen.

You received a conversation card as you walked in today. I invite you to ponder the question and find one person to ask it to this week. Let God guide you to think of who needs your compassionate listening. The next time you are in a struggle with someone, try thinking of or asking one of these questions.

What makes your heart hurt?

Where in your life do you feel vulnerable, humbled, or broken open?

What is a fear or anxiety that is weighing on you right now?

Share a challenge, hardship, or obstacle you have faced in the past. How has that experience shaped who you are now?

What is your first memory of grief? What have you learned from your grief?

Name a time when you have spoken your hurt out loud. How did that make you feel, and did it help you heal?

What is one way you care for yourself daily?

How do you emotionally process your pain? (E.g., time alone, therapy, exercise, time with friends, prayer, etc.)

When was the last time you cried? How did you feel after crying?

Describe a time when you felt fully seen, known, and accepted for who you are.

Share about a time when your pain or experience was dismissed or denied by others.

What do you wish you could have changed about that experience?

Share about a time you witnessed someone else's grief or pain. How did that experience impact you?

We will end with a meditation from Joyce Rupp called, "Walk a Mile in My Shoes." You can use this same meditation when you are in a place when you see people: in a medical waiting room, an office, a family area, waiting in line in a store, or any other public space. It could help you have compassion for yourself and for others.

Center yourself by taking several deep breaths. Look at your feet. Notice the shoes you are wearing. These shoes are yours. The size fits your feet and shoes have adjusted to the shape and imperfections of your feet. Your shoes carry information about you, such as where you walk or run, who you meet, where you go for entertainment, how often you open the refrigerator door, and the steps you take each day. Your shoes know what time of the day you slip into them and take them off, when you "put your feet up," or when you kick aside something that gets in the way. They know how long you stand at the kitchen sink and where you shop for food. Your shoes carry the story of "yourself." No one else can fit into those shoes, into your story, in the same way that you do.

Now look at the shoes on the screen. Gaze at them carefully. Notice the size and shape of the shoes. Imagine the "story" they carry, the storehouse of information they contain. If that person's shoes could speak, you would learn so much that is not visible about the person who wears them. You would discover not only exterior aspects but interior ones, as well. Those shoes could have waited in a doctor's office for an unwanted medical report; they may have taken a parent to the graveside of a child; they might have walked out the office door after a good position was given to someone else; perhaps they sat silent while the one who wore them sobbed after being betrayed.

What if you were asked to exchange shoes with the person whose shoes you have contemplated? Could you wear them comfortably for a day? Would they fit your feet? Most probably not. You would wobble or feel pain if you had them on for very long. So, too, we cannot "wear each other's stories." We empathize and respect people for who they are and what they have experienced, another human being making his or her way through life as best they can.

Now, you may close your eyes. Think of how easy it is to make snap judgments about another person because of external appearances and behavior. Imagine how much this person whose shoes you gazed upon want happiness and ease in life, just as you do. Think of how this person, too, has experienced gains and losses.

We pray, "Holy one...we are in awe of your presence...in the heart of each human being. Deepen our respect for one another's history of experience, the unique personality and diverse giftedness. Heal us of quick judgment that are often untrue. In our relationship with all people may we approach them with respect and a sincere desire to allow their sacred journey...May we walk in peace with each person who comes our way." Amen.