

I really appreciate Jelly Roll's authenticity and faith. It's okay not to be okay AND in the end, we're going to be alright. It's the already not yet of the Christian faith, isn't it? In the words of the Chilean poet-diplomat, Pablo Neruda, "*They can cut all the flowers, but they can't stop the spring.*" No matter how bleak the winter or our world or our lives, spring is coming, my friends. Let us hold fast to our hope in Jesus Christ on this Lenten journey from wilderness to glory! Here we are with Jesus again- in the wilderness- maybe not the literal wilderness but in a social and religious wilderness for sure. Wilderness looks differently to different people, just like healing and miracles do. For example, a crowd could be a wilderness. Sickness can be a wilderness. Being left out by others can be a wilderness. A moment of warning: I may use some language today that makes some of you uncomfortable; nevertheless, I prefer to call things what they are- not use coded language. Today's biblical stories are miracle stories performed by Jesus- one asked for and the other one just sort of taken. This is the only miracle story in the Bible that is interrupted by another miracle story. A few things I want you to invite you to consider as you listen to these stories: 1. They show up in all three Synoptic Gospels- Matthew, Mark and Luke but today we're going with Luke's version. 2. Luke was known to care about or be interested in stories of women much more than any other Gospel writer (and that's especially cool since March is Women's History month), 3. There are a lot of opposites or contrasts in these two stories: the seen and the unseen, rich and poor, young and old, sick and well, people with support and those without, the living and the dead and 4. the context of these stories takes place right as Jesus returns to Galilee from a boat

ride across the lake. You see Jesus was asked by the locals to leave Gerasa, the country of the Gerasenes, after he healed a man with unclean spirits. The spirits recognized Jesus and his authority and power and begged him to enter into a herd of swine feeding on the hillside, and Jesus gave them permission to do so. Then the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned. People were being people, and they came to see what was happening. A crowd quickly collected, and fear settled in soon thereafter. There in their midst was the guy, who they knew as the Gerasene Demoniac, now just a regular ole guy. Jesus' power to heal left them much more afraid than worshipful. Today's stories foreshadow what is to come in Jesus' story. Another crowd has gathered to welcome Jesus and the disciples back. They were waiting on him, as there were not only lots of needs but lots of curiosity. "Luke has been patiently pointing out, through one story after another, who Jesus really is. Luke is also, at the same time, opening the way for his central explanation of what Jesus has come to achieve" (N.T. Wright, *From Wilderness to Glory*). This is the way of the cross- some people are becoming agitated- not only that Jesus doesn't seem to mind breaking the Law but that there are rumors circulating that he's claiming to be the Son of God. Jesus brings radical change and that's not always easy to accept nor go along with. Before we listen to God's word for us this day, let us first pray. **PRAY. READ.**

This story is one of my favorites in all of scripture. Interestingly, I have taught numerous Bible studies on it, yet I've never actually preached it. Only Mark's version appears in the Lectionary- the planned weekly

readings of scripture in a three-year cycle. Again, you must pay attention to the details here. As soon as Jesus gets out of the boat, the crowd is awaiting him on the banks of Galilee. Also awaiting him was one of the leaders of the synagogue, Jairus. We don't know much other about Jairus though we can speculate that Jairus is taking a risk to see Jesus due to some of the uncertainty of who Jesus is. When Jairus reached Jesus, this respected community leader fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house to help his only daughter, who was 12 years old and dying. His posture alone tells us that he is desperate. We don't know if perhaps this daughter is also his only child?! You can sense his panic and need to not tarry. Just as soon as Jairus was dusting the dirt off his knees, Jesus steps forward into the smothering and swelling crowd. Here enters the unnamed woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. What do we know about her? What isn't said? We're told that she has had her menstrual cycle non-stop for 12 years. That's 4,383 days in a row. It's not like they had feminine products in the 1st century, either. For all this time- the age of Jairus' dying daughter- she has been ritually unclean, as indicated in the Law. "If a woman has a flow of blood outside her period, or if her period is prolonged, as long as the flow lasts, she shall be unclean, the same as for her monthly periods" (Lev. 15:25). Women couldn't even enter the synagogue until their bleeding had stopped. Why? Because their impurity was considered contagious. Like someone could catch your period from you! This reminds me of a story in the book written in 2007 by the journalist, A. J. Jacobs, entitled *The Year of Living Biblically*. In it Jacobs is determined to live the Bible literally for a year- meaning that he tried to follow every single rule to a

T, especially all the oft-ignored ones like the one I just read from Leviticus. One day his wife was irritated with Jacobs, and she happened to also have her monthly cycle, so instead of yelling at him or ignoring him, she chose to go and sit on everything sittable in their house, making it impossible for him to sit anywhere because she was considered to be unclean.

Back to this woman- we're told that over the years she had spent every cent to her name seeking help from doctors but to no avail. Shamed for something she couldn't control, she was an outcast, an embarrassment, a pariah. Lonely beyond description. She WAS wilderness. I don't know about y'all, but I think I'd feel beyond hopeless at this point. Yet, she had heard about a man- a teacher- a prophet- a healer, who did not recoil from women like her. She heard about a man who touched the unclean, who didn't seem to mind being close to lepers and prostitutes and mad men in tombs. She heard about a man who caused a stir- a man who caused religious people to clutch their pearls, a man who caused the blind to see (Nadia Bolz-Weber, [link](#)). Notice that she comes up from behind so that she could carefully access Jesus without being seen. Jairus approached Jesus from the front, but she had to remain hidden in the crowd and have a sneak approach. I wonder if and how long she thought and strategized, "If only I could just place myself close enough to Jesus to touch his clothes, I will be made well." She did just that and as soon as her hand contacted Jesus' fringe, her bleeding stopped at once. All the courage she had mustered to do this was worth it! She put her life on the line to save it, to be made whole, to know a life worth living or

perhaps to recover the one she once had. Jesus could feel that someone had touched the fringe of his robe. *Who touched me?* Jesus asks and everyone denies it. Peter blames it on the pressing crowd. But Jesus knows and says, "Someone touched me. I know the power has gone from me" (vv. 45-46). When the woman knew that Jesus knew, she had no choice but to face him. She was trembling and fell before Jesus, as Jairus did. That reminds me. What about Jairus? I bet he was beside himself waiting on Jesus while he stops to speak with this unclean woman. "C'mon Jesus! My only daughter is on the brink of death, and you're wasting your time on HER? I know I might've caused a scene. But God's timing nor whom God chooses to save is never ours, is it?"

Can you imagine the exposure? There in front of God and everybody she explains her whole truth and how she had been healed. It's almost as if Jesus wanted everyone to know and to hear her story. He needed the crowd to see her value, as he saw her. And he needed to provide the space for her to claim her own truth- that she, too, was worthy as a child of God. He could have easily let her be, knowing that he had quietly healed her but that's not what Jesus chooses to do. In doing this, Jesus not only exposed this woman but also himself and his reputation. With this bleeding woman touching him, he was now considered unclean and that was a big deal, as she "was considered ritually impure, a threat to the holiness of the entire community, a constant source of pollution among the people. She was destined to live her life on the edges of the society, untouched, unloved, and outcast judged guilty by her body" (Joyce Hollyday, *Clothed With The Sun*). And Jesus' only response to her

was this, *Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace* (v.48). Jesus called her his family because she was. The word for healed here can also mean saved. With one look, Jesus not only removed the bleeding, he also removed her shame. With one gesture, he shattered the purity laws that enslaved women to their biology. With one blessing, he proclaimed female bodies holy” (Hollyday).

Jesus’ words had barely left his mouth when someone from Jairus’ house approached, letting Jairus know that his only daughter had died. “Don’t bother the teacher anymore,” he said to Jairus. When Jesus heard this news, he said, “Don’t be afraid; just keep trusting, and she will be healed” (v. 50b). Remember healing comes in many different forms, just like wilderness and none of us get to determined how someone is healed and when. Jairus is in the wilderness of sickness and death just as some of you have been in that insufferable wilderness. When Jesus arrived at Jairus’ house, he didn’t allow anyone with him except for the child’s parents and Peter, James, and John. When I read of all the crying and mourning going on in that room, I imagine it was difficult to breathe and to stay in there. But Jesus speaks into the pain that is present and says, “Don’t cry. She isn’t dead. She’s only sleeping” (v. 52b). Their response was to laugh. That’s what we all do when we’re anxious or afraid or angry or sad or doubtful or cynical. Jesus moves beyond the laughter and takes her hand, calling her, “Child, get up” (v. 54). She got up at once, and he asked them to give her food. Giving her something to eat confirms that she is not dead but alive. Jairus and his wife were beside themselves with joy, but Jesus ordered them to tell no one (5:14).

After this day of Jesus encountering the touch of the bleeding woman and touching Jairus' daughter's corpse, most gathered in the crowd that day knew that he was doubly polluted. Yes, with the bleeding woman, Jesus couldn't help it; the woman came and touched him without his knowing. And in touching Jairus' daughter's corpse, that, too, made him unclean. Jesus didn't seem to care at all. For none of that compared to the love and compassion he had for the woman and for Jairus and his daughter. Jesus seems to find value where no one else will. We will see this same pattern emerging. "Jesus shares the pollution of sickness and death, but the power of his own love- and it is love, above all, that shines through these stories- turns that pollution into wholeness and hope" (Wright). Former bishop of the Episcopal Church, Rev. Michael Curry once said "if it doesn't look like love, if it doesn't look like Jesus of Nazareth, it cannot be claimed to be Christian." The religious authorities will continue to attempt to dictate who can receive God's healing grace and who cannot. "Where God sees life- hungry, hopeful, needy, broken, sacred life- those in political power are pronouncing death" (Debie Thomas, journeywithjesus.net). We will have to continue to ask ourselves these questions as we journey to the cross. "What looks like love? What looks like Jesus of Nazareth? The one whose heart melts at the cry of a desperate father. The one who visits the sick child and takes her limp hand in his. The one who risks defilement to touch the bloody and the broken. The one who insists on the whole truth, however falteringly told. The one who listens for as long as it takes. The one who brings life to dead places. The one who restores hope. The one who turns mourning into dancing. The one who renames the outcast,

'Daughter,' and bids her go in peace" (Thomas). I don't know about you, but that's the God I'll continue to try my best to follow into the wilderness of life- perhaps even muster the courage to touch the hem of his clothes. How about you?! Amen.