I came, I heard, I touched

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[0:00] Super Tuesday has come and gone, and if you've been following the U.S. elections, you will realize that Mr. Trump and Mrs. Clinton, it would seem, will be going head-to-head in November. I suppose that could still change, but that seems to be the direction of travel.

Now, in the interests of decency and decorum, I'll refrain from making any comment about either of those potential presidents of the United States of America. But one brief exchange at the end of Super Tuesday did capture my attention. You may or may not have picked up on this. In her, I suppose we could call it victory speech in as much as Hillary had won some of the states that were being contested on Tuesday. She made reference to Donald Trump's slogan, and she said the following, America has never stopped being great. Our task is to make America whole. Now, as you can imagine, Mr. Trump responded, and his response was simply a bemused, what is that all about, making America whole? I have to say I'm also intrigued as to what Hillary Clinton means by that. What does she have in mind when she speaks of making America whole? But what I do know and what captured my attention was her use of that language? Because it is language that echoes a profound gospel theme. It is God's redemptive purpose to make us whole in every aspect of our being, and not only to make us individually whole, but to make of his creation that which is altogether whole. And that day will come when we will experience that wholeness that wholeness that God has purposed for us and for all of us together and indeed the environment in which we will find ourselves. And Jesus certainly was and is in the business of making people whole, of binding up the broken, of restoring dignity to the downtrodden, of embracing the outcast, of granting peace to the desperate. And this morning we're going to consider one occasion when Jesus demonstrated this divine purpose and power in the life of one nameless woman. We've read of this woman there in Mark's gospel, and we're going to order the events that we have recorded for us under the following headings, and then think of them each in turn. First of all, to consider the woman's desperate plight. That is where Mark begins, as he describes this woman and the desperate circumstances that she finds herself in. So, her desperate plight. But then also, the woman identifies what we could call a window of opportunity. In the midst of her near hopelessness, there is this window, this small window of opportunity for her. And we want to think about what that was and what that involved. But then, of course, we discover there is a wonderful answer that is given to this woman, a wonderful outcome, as she grasped the opportunity before her. And as we go through the account, we might think, well, that would be the place for the story to end. But it doesn't end there, because at the very end, you have something more. You have Jesus posing what we're describing as a curious question. And as we think about the question that he poses, and we think about why he poses the question, we see that there is more to the story from Jesus' perspective, and that is something we'll see is important also. Well, hopefully all will become clear as we make our way through the account in this manner. First of all, then, this woman was the victim of a desperate plight.

We only need to turn to the passage to discover this. We can maybe begin by just identifying and noting. We don't really need to dwell on it. It's so clear in the words before us in the Bible. But we can think about the intensity of her suffering. There in verse 25 of Mark chapter 5, she's introduced to us, and a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years. And even if we don't know with complete certainty the nature of her illness, we are told how long she had been suffering. And we can maybe begin to just imagine how it must have been for her those 12 long years. We can maybe imagine how it would have been when she first was conscious of her ill. And maybe when the bleeding first began, and it would have been a matter of concern, but maybe not great concern. But then a week passed, and a month passed, and several months passed, and what had begun as something that she thought was maybe of no consequence, she begins to realize is much

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more serious. There's no change, and she grows weaker and weaker, and one year passes, and two, and three, and four, and there is no end in sight.
And again, we wonder, we're not told, but we wonder what was the impact of this in the family that she was part of, we imagine. Did her family stick by her as they discovered that this woman was an unclean woman, and permanently unclean, subject to bleeding in the way that she was? Or did she discover that even those who she might have thought she could rely on began to distance themselves from her? We don't know, but we wonder whether that might have been her fate. Twelve years of suffering. But Mark goes on and paints a picture that is even more intense in the suffering that it describes. In verse 26, we read, she had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors. Now, we don't know. Is there maybe a suggestion that the doctors were in some measure culpable? Maybe some not, but others yes. They saw, well, here's a desperate woman, well, we can get some money out of her. And maybe they raised false hopes. Maybe they gave her empty assurances, but all to no avail. Maybe some did their best, but their best simply wasn't good enough. And of course, as we also read, this had all involved her spending all that she had. She had spent all that she had. Maybe at the beginning, that was what gave her a measure of hope in the face of her illness. She thought, well,
I have money. With this money, I will secure my recovery. With this money, I will secure the health that I've lost. And so, with this money, she thought, things are going to be okay. And so, she began to spend her money on one doctor after another. But soon, the money ran out. She had spent all that she had. She was now destitute of the resources that she had imagined would save her. [8:12] It's not surprising. She had been ill for 12 years. I wonder how quickly the money ran out. 12 years of suffering. Suffering under many doctors. She had spent all that she had.

And even before we think a little bit more about her, it's maybe good to just to pause there for a moment and think about ourselves. How often, as we've even been mentioning, even as we prayed, how often are we foolish enough to imagine that our security can be built on our financial circumstances? If we have money in the bank, if we have a good job, if we've paid off the house or well advanced towards that, then we're okay. We'll be all right. The oil price can plummet. We might even lose our job. But we'll be okay. We're secure. We think that that will grant us security. And yet, so many things can come around the corner that money can't solve. And of course, we know that intellectually. We would all acknowledge that. I don't think anybody here would be so crass as to say, no, as long as I've got money, I'm okay. We don't say it. But often, we live as if that were the case. Well, this woman discovered that her money couldn't save her. And even if we, by the grace of
God, have come to the point where we know that money can't save us, the reality is that we are surrounded by many who think that money is the answer. The people that we need to relate to, the people we need to reach, the people we need to tell about Jesus. And so even if, by the grace of God, we have come to that point of realizing that money isn't what grants us security, we do need to be aware of how many do think that it does. What are we told by Mark in conclusion? Well, we're told that no one could heal her. And indeed, as we look at the other gospel writers as they record this incident, we're told that she was beyond really any hope of recovery. No one could heal her. Instead of getting better, there we read in verse 26, she grew worse. And so even as we look at what Mark tells us about this woman, and we can imagine or we can paint a picture for ourselves of the intensity of her physical suffering. But her suffering is broader and deeper than simply the physical illness that she is enduring. There was, of course, the physical pain and discomfort and whatever other consequences that there were of her illness. But of course, there's the emotional turmoil. There is this possibility that she may have been abandoned or put to one side by her family, ostracized by her community, because of the very nature of the illness that she suffered. And so her situation went from bad to worse and beyond. But there's even more to her suffering that Mark hints at in the language that he uses. In verse 29 in particular, let me draw your attention to a word that Mark uses there. When we read in verse 29, this is following her healing, but it makes reference to how she had been suffering.
Immediately her bleeding stopped, and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. Now, that word there translated suffering is an interesting word, and I think a revealing word.
It's a word that we find used elsewhere in the New Testament, and on the other occasions, because of the context in which it's used, it's translated as scourge or flogging, and it's used in the context of

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punishment. This is a word that speaks of, or certainly hints at, the idea of punishment.
[12:08] And it does suggest that this woman, in the midst of her suffering, if her physical suffering wasn't enough, if all the other types of suffering weren't enough, compounded by the sense, perhaps in her own mind, and certainly in the lips of others, that all of this was punishment. And you can imagine how that would have added to her anguish, and to her pain, and to her suffering. To imagine that all that she was going through was in some way that she couldn't understand, and for reasons she couldn't get her head around, was some kind of punishment, punishment from God Himself. Maybe that is what she imagined.

And you can imagine how that would have intensified the plight of this poor woman. So, hers was a desperate plight. All hope was well nigh gone. Indeed, for many years, hope, as it had subsisted, had proved a cruel companion for this woman.
Well, that is what we're told of this woman. But what about you? What about others who we live around? How about others to whom we are called to show the love of Jesus? There are many who suffer like this woman. The circumstances, of course, will not be identical. They may be very different, but the suffering is much the same. Deep, longstanding, unremitting. It may be due to physical illness or mental illness. It may be due to family breakdown or abuse that has been experienced, fear or isolation, guilt or shame, and perhaps we could go on, but suffering that is intense and unremitting and seemingly endless. And like this woman, perhaps this is your circumstance, or perhaps the circumstance of many who are round about you whom God has called you to serve. No one to turn to, no one who understands, no one who can help, even if they wanted to. They don't have the capacity to help. Hers was a desperate plight. But then, of course, in the account, we were presented with this opportunity that is before this woman. And of course, Jesus is her opportunity. And what did she need to do?
What did she do to grasp her opportunity? Well, I think in verse 27, we're given in a very neat way by Mark what this woman did to grasp her opportunity. And she did so by doing three things, or she's described as having done three things. Just follow with me in verse 27 and see what we're told. We read there, when she heard about Jesus. That's the first thing. She heard about Jesus. She came. That's the second thing she does. She approaches Jesus. She heard about Jesus. She came up behind him in the crowd.
And then we read, and she touched his cloak. Three things that this woman did to grasp her opportunity. She heard, she came, and she touched. This will prove to be for her, and it remains for us. This is the pathway to healing. This is the pathway to peace. This is the pathway to wholeness, to hear, to come, and to touch. As I was thinking of these three words, what came to my mind were the words of Julius Caesar to the Roman Senate following one of his many military victories, veni, vidi, vici. I came, I saw, I conquered.
[15:55] Well, the testimony of this woman is similar in a sense, but much deeper and much richer. Her testimony would have been as described by Mark, and no doubt she herself could have given these words of testimony to anybody who asked her. And they said, you're healed. How did that happen? And she could have said, I heard, I came, and I touched. That's what I did. I heard, I came, and I touched, and I'm healed.

Look at me now. She heard. She heard about Jesus. What did she hear about Jesus? Well, we don't know. We're not told what she'd heard about Jesus. She certainly heard that he was about. This is in Capernaum. That was where he hanged out. Wouldn't have been the first time. She heard about Jesus.
What did she hear that was said about Jesus? Even in what we've seen thus far in Mark, we've discovered a lot about who Jesus is. Had she heard some of even what the demons said concerning who Jesus was?
Or what others were saying about who Jesus was? Had she heard about him? No doubt she had heard what he could do, about the miracles that he could perform, about the sick who were healed, about those possessed by demons who were liberated. She would have heard about these things that he could do, that he had done, that he had done for others. She heard about Jesus. I think we can safely say of all of us who are here this morning, that is something that is true of us. You have heard about Jesus.
You've heard about who he is. You've heard about what he can do. You're doing that even this morning. We're hearing about Jesus. Well, that's true of us. But again, when we just look beyond ourselves, what about outside of this place, outside of this building, in this city where God has

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placed us? If we believe that to hear and to come and to touch is the pathway to wholeness, what about all those people out there who have never even had the opportunity for the first of those steps? They haven't heard about Jesus. They haven't heard about who he is. They haven't heard about what he can do, because we haven't told them.
[18:12] This woman heard. We've heard. We need to make sure that others also can hear. So she heard, but then Mark also tells us that it didn't remain there. She came. Why did she come? Why did she approach Jesus?

Well, it's such a, in a way, a silly question to ask. It's so obvious she came to Jesus because she recognized her desperate plight and pressing need. She needed help big time, and that need carried her to Jesus. She was perhaps on that day, we don't know, but perhaps the only one in that crowd with that intense sense of her great need of Jesus. So she came. She came because she needed him.
And that remains true today. We can hear about Jesus, but if we don't think we need him, then we'll keep him at a distance. If we remain in the fantasy world that we can look after ourselves, and we can provide for our own future and security, we have no need of Jesus, then we won't come to him. This woman, though desperate her plight, it granted her this one good thing, that it persuaded her of her pressing need of Jesus, and so she came to him. She heard, she came. But Mark tells us also that she touched. She touched his clothes, the tassel that hang from the garment that he was wearing.
What does this touch tell us about this woman? Well, it speaks surely of a flickering, tentative, nascent, but sincere faith. Indeed, Mark assures us that that is so, because we have the very words of this woman when she is thinking about what she will do. There in verse 28, we read, because she thought, if I just touch his clothes, I will be healed. Indeed, I've called it a flickering faith. It's perhaps to do it an injustice more than a flickering faith. If I touch his clothes, I will be healed. And that faith that this woman had, that faith that was a gift from God, that faith was necessary for her to discover the wholeness that God had purposed for her.
[20:38] Jesus makes that very clear when he tells us. He tells us, he told her, and through her, he tells us towards the end. Then in verse 34, he said to her, daughter, your faith has healed you.

It was necessary for her to exercise that faith. This faith that healed her, we might call it the instrumental means of her healing. The effective means was Jesus. It's Jesus who healed her. But the instrument by which, through which she secured and enjoyed her healing was the faith that is found in that touch as she approaches Jesus. This was her window of opportunity, and she grasped it. She heard, she came, she touched. Is that something that we have done? Is that something that you have done? Having heard about Jesus? Having been persuaded of your need of Jesus, have you approached him in faith and sought from him that which only he can provide? Forgiveness of sins and wholeness and new life. A window of opportunity. But then the story continues, and we're told about what happened. What is the wonderful answer that this woman received? What happens when she touches Jesus? Well, we're told in verse 29, immediately her bleeding stopped, and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. In few words, an eloquent description of the wonderful answer that she experiences. She is healed. She is healed immediately. She is healed permanently.
And she is healed, we might say, tangibly. She feels it. In her own body, she feels that she has been healed. But then even in the language that's used, we discover that there's more to this than physical healing. Then in verse 29, we've already made reference to the fact that that word suffering is a word that has connotations of punishment. And then it's interesting that in that context, we're told that she was freed from her suffering, delivered from her suffering. There is here more than physical healing. There's liberation, liberated from the scourge that she was enduring.
And we might say, well, that would be a good place for the story to end. That's a happy ending. We like happy endings. I don't know about you, but if I go to the cinema, and I don't do it very often, I feel cheated if I don't get a happy ending. I don't like these trendy films that don't have happy endings. And you say, well, here's a happy ending. This woman who had suffered so much, she touches Jesus, and she's healed. Well, we can all go home, because we've got the happy ending we want. But that wasn't the end of the story. For the woman, I would imagine her healing would have been enough.
[23:34] If at the beginning of that day you had said, well, at the end of today you'll be healed, she'd have said, well, that's enough for me. That is enough. That's more than I could even imagine.

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You see, this woman came to Jesus for something. We might put it in those terms. She came for something. She came to be healed. That's what she came for. And she secured something. She secured the healing that she sought.

But we discover, and we discover that in the question that Jesus then poses, that Jesus is not in the business of just giving us something, however wonderful, be it healing, be it forgiveness, however wonderful, is not just about giving us something. Jesus is about meeting and transforming and making whole someone. We focus on the something. But Jesus' concern is on someone, and on this case, of course, the woman. And hence the need to consider this curious question that Jesus poses in verse 30.

Who touched my clothes? Who touched me? We can picture the scene as this woman trembling and tentatively approaches Jesus and touches him in the midst of the crowd. How could he possibly know who had touched him? And so the question, and how many people had touched him in one way or another, but the woman, of course, knew that Jesus was speaking to her. She knew that this was a question directed to her. And why the question? Why did Jesus pose the question? Well, picking up on what we said a moment ago, the woman had come for something, but Jesus wanted to restore someone, this poor woman, to wholeness. And we see that in the words that follow, in the words that he directs to this woman when she identifies herself and he's able to see her face to face and direct words to her.

What does he say to her? Then in verse 34, he said to her, daughter. And we don't need to go any further there already. We have evidence of the wholeness that Jesus seeks for this woman. Daughter. The only time in the Gospels that we find Jesus using this word to address this woman or address anybody. Daughter.

Daughter. There's a tenderness to it. She is special to Jesus. More than special, she's part of his family. That's how he sees her. Daughter. There's been this great move, this great journey in a moment from isolation to intimacy, from shame to security, from brokenness to belonging, and all encapsulated in this way in which Jesus addresses her daughter. Daughter. And then what does he say? Your faith has healed you.

[26:26] A word that rightly in the context is translated healed, but in other circumstances can be used or can be translated saved. It's a word that has that elasticity or range of meaning. Your faith has healed you. Your faith has saved you. And yes, the reference is, the immediate reference is to her physical restoration. But the language goes beyond the physical. It speaks of the spiritual salvation that is granted to those who come to Jesus. Forgiveness of sins. Adoption into the family of God.

And we could go on. And Jesus goes on in these few words that he addresses to the woman. Go in peace. Go in peace. Well, as we know, the language from which this passage is translated is Greek, but the Greek word there used is the Greek equivalent of that word shalom, that Hebrew word shalom that we're familiar with, and familiar also with its meaning. A word that speaks of the wholeness that God seeks to grant and does grant to those who come to him. Go in peace. Peace with God.

Reconciliation with others. Peace in your soul. All part of God's liberating purpose for this woman, and indeed for any man or woman who comes in faith to put their trust in Jesus.

This is what Jesus wants for you. He is concerned about your immediate felt needs, but he is concerned also for your deepest and most profound needs, to be saved, to be forgiven, to know and experience peace with God. It is his desire to shower upon you his love, to welcome you into his family, to save you, to restore you, to make you whole.

And how does it happen? What do you have to do? Well, with the woman, you need to hear, you need to come, and you need to touch. You need to believe. You need to put your trust in Jesus as your Savior. You might say, well, how can I do that? Where is Jesus for me to do that? I've heard about him, yes, but how can I come to him? How can I touch him? I can't do what this woman did.

[28:58] Jesus is here this morning, and you can speak to him. You can ask him to help you. You can put your trust in him here this morning, and he will respond to you.

We notice also that the woman, when she first came to touch Jesus, she did so in a very anonymous way, and indeed, I'm sure that was her intention. But Jesus, as he calls her out, his great purpose was to address these words to her that would speak of the plans that he had for her, and the wonderful reality that was now hers that went beyond physical healing. That was his main purpose in calling her out. But I wonder if there wasn't also a sense in which Jesus knew that as

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part of her restoration, it was necessary for her to publicly identify herself. There was no longer any need or place for shame or fear. Now she could openly declare who she is and what she had done. She could embrace and identify with Jesus, and Jesus gives her that opportunity. Well, there was a multitude thronging Jesus that day in Capernaum, but only one returned home with these words ringing in her ears. Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering. And Jesus will gladly direct those same words today to any who come to him, recognizing their need and turning to Jesus. Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you are indeed a God who saves to the uttermost. We thank you that your purposes for those you call are purposes that transcend what we can even begin to imagine. We thank you that you do indeed call us to wholeness of life, again, in a measure that we only begin to understand and grapple with. We thank you that in our own experience as your people, with the passage of time, we will more and more discover the depth and the wonder of your purposes for us. We thank you for what we learn of your great compassion, but how that great compassion is married with your great capacity to attend to those whose circumstances, like those of this woman, were so desperate and seemingly hopeless. And so we pray that we would know what it is to, in faith, come to you seeking the help that we need, but also that we would be of those who would be ever seeking to direct others to you as the one who can meet their every need. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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