

“More Than Enough”

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Matthew 9:9-13, 20-22, the New Revised Standard Version Translation:

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.” Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well.

Note: sermons are not written to be read like this, or at least mine aren't written in this way. However, we had a recording snafu this morning and I don't have a recording of the sermon to share with you this morning. So I share this, the manuscript/notes I preached from. Please excuse any errors; it was never meant to be published this way, but I share the message with you in case there's someone who needs to read it

“More Than Enough”

Someone, somewhere in our lives told us we aren't enough just as we are.

It's happened to all of us, if we're being honest.

It was our teacher who told us we wouldn't amount to anything,

Our parent who saw our mess instead of our creativity,

The coach who counted baskets we missed, not the games we played.

It was the magazine that instructed us on how to have a body worthy of a swimsuit, as if our bodies were not made, just as they are, for light and sunshine and relaxing and play.

It was the words of our lawmakers and our newsreels that the color of our skin, the gender of our body, the person we love, the rights to our bodies were theirs to decide and tell the story of, not ours.

It was the relationship we couldn't make work, and so tell a story of failure instead of a story of setting each other free.

It was the addiction that almost destroyed us, and the story that is told not of our survival, but of how we failed, hit rock bottom, and are now “those people” destined for bad coffee in church basements because our addiction should be kept in the basement, there’s no place for it in the sanctuary or out in the light.

It was the violence, the one who told us our body is for someone else’s pleasure, our spirit for someone else’s gain.

It was the church who taught us more about our sinfulness than our blessedness
The church that drew lines around our communion tables, pulpits, marriages and baptismal fonts saying who was in and who was out as if that was ever ours to decide, as if anyone could ever be outside of God’s love.

For all of this, *I am so sorry.*

And I do offer you the sparkly cape from our children’s time.¹ It is true that God’s grace covers all of it – covers any wrong we have done, anyways, anything that we carry shame for. But some of us older disciples have been living with shame not from sin committed, but from stories told to us for so long that they’ve shaped us, and we need more than a sparkly cape to let that shame go.

Let’s hope, Beloved of God, that we are teaching our children here of their blessedness not their sinfulness, and raising a new generation not shaped by shame.

For the rest of us, thank God we have Jesus. And thank God we have the bold and persistent woman in our scripture today.

In our text today, we have a woman who knows shame. A woman who knows the story of not being enough. The woman in our text today has been hemorrhaging (bleeding) for twelve years. For us, that would be troubling to say the least. Context, as usual, is everything however – in Jesus’ day, this woman would have suffered not only the physical duress of bleeding for 12 years, but she would have labeled “unclean” by law, as it’s written in Leviticus 15:19-30, which would have meant:

- for 12 years, no one would have touched her without also becoming “unclean”

¹ Our Children’s Time was inspired by Martin Luther’s discussion of Grace in “On the Freedom of a Christian,” Martin Luther, 1520. In this text, Luther says God’s Grace is like a sheet that covers us and so covers our sins, too. We talked with our children about how Luther says God’s grace is like a sheet, and we pulled out a sparkly cape and said we believe God’s grace is like a sparkly cape that covers us even when we make mistakes. A few of the children tried on the cape and we said “here is Emily, and she does great things and she makes mistakes too, and that’s ok because look! She’s surrounded in God’s grace always, as if she’s always wearing her grace like a cape.”

- for 12 years, everywhere she sat, the bed she slept in, would have been “unclean,” and anyone who sat where she had sat or slept where she had slept or touched anything she had touched would have been “unclean”

- for 12 years, anyone who had sex with her would have become “unclean”

This woman would not have been able to work, she would not have had a place at anyone’s table to eat, she would not have been invited into any place where so-called “respectable” people were, because her very presence would have made others unclean.

She doesn’t have a name in this story. But she has names in our world:

She’s Barbara, the homeless woman we’ve turned away from and forgotten.

She’s Andrea, the addict we’ve given up on.

She’s Cassie whose eating disorder tells her she’s not worthy of a good meal.

She’s Aaron who was born “Jennifer” and who so dearly wants only to live in ways that feel authentic to him.

She’s so many souls we know who have been called “unclean,” and she’s each of us, too.

She’s a person who knows shame –
how it can be powerful.

How it can teach us we are unclean, unworthy.

How we can swallow shame so fully that it nearly becomes us.

As Brenae Brown, a shame and vulnerability expert, writes, “shame is the intensely painful feeling that we are unworthy of love and belonging.”² And “shame is lethal,”³ she says, or it can be. Can be truly lethal, ending lives, or lethal to our spirits, wellbeing, and thriving.

Monica Lewinsky, who is famous for having had a relationship with former president Bill Clinton, who was publically shamed for it, and whose work now is in educating and organizing against shaming and cyber bullying said in an interview last year, “shame sticks to you like tar.”⁴

Shame, Lewinsky would say, coats us. Covers us. Sticks to us like tar.

Only we’ve already heard a story this morning of being covered by something – what did we tell the children we are always covered by, as gift from God?

² Brenae Brown, *Daring Greatly*, (Penguin Publishing Group, 2015).

³ Brenae Brown, “Dr. Brenae Brown: Shame is Lethal,” *Oprah Winfrey Network Super Soul Sunday*, March 24, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEBjNv5M784>.

⁴ Jon Ronson, “Monica Lewinsky: the Shame Sticks to you Like Tar,” in *The Guardian*, April 22, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/16/monica-lewinsky-shame-sticks-like-tar-jon-ronson>.

Grace.

Not to push our metaphors too far here, but if shame is stuck to us like tar, what would happen when we put on Luther's coverings of grace, our children's capes of grace?

They would stick, right? The covering, the cape, would stick to the tar?

Grace sticks to shame. God's love sticks to shame and won't let go, no matter how big our shame is. That's how love works.

That's how love worked for the woman in our story today - she knew healing, even after 12 years of being told she was unclean.

I believe we can know healing from the shame we carry, too.

Healing starts, of course, with amends if they need to be made - if our shame stems from some kind of mistake, we do what we can to apologize where apology is needed.

And then, we learn from the faithful and persistent woman in our scripture today: she knew the world had gotten it wrong, and she believed she was loved.

She knew that even though the world told her she was unclean, Jesus would not think so. Even though her neighbors would not touch her without becoming unclean, Jesus would not be unclean by contact with her. And so in our story it is not Jesus who heals her - this strong and beautiful woman, mired in 12 years of uncleanness as she has been, she heals herself. Jesus tells her it is her own faith - in God, in love, in her own beloved-ness that she can take up her place at Jesus' side - that makes her well.

Someone along the way, the entire world even, may have told you also that you were unclean, that you should carry shame, you should not take up space or claim a seat at God's table.

This is the world's story, and it's wrong.

And it falls apart in a second
when we get close enough to love
to touch the fringe of Jesus' cloak,
to be near enough the gospel story
to believe the Good News that Jesus didn't come to live among the so-called righteous, he chose tax collectors and sinners knowing that people for whom life has not been easy are people who have great capacity for love.

The people the world is always calling wrong are always the people Jesus is always seeking out to call right, beloved, covered in grace.

“I desire mercy, not sacrifice,” Jesus said, for I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.

Friends, we all fall short. We all make mistakes. And our mistakes belong to us – we do not belong to them. In other words, we are not our mistakes, they only one small part of us.

So it's time, beloved of God, to be brave and take a breath and inch closer to love – at love's side, there is no such thing as unclean or not good enough. There is only loved, beloved, covered in grace.

If you have been doing the work of examining how you're spending your time and what you're giving your energy to these days, if you've been following along with our Lenten project and you've found you're giving time and heart to shame, I urge you: put it down. Let that be part of your Lenten work this year.

When the world calls us unclean, love calls us Child of God. When the world says don't touch, love says, draw near. You are well. You are so much more than enough.

So take heart, child of God. Let your shame go – it is not yours to carry anymore. It has been too long already, 12 years since you've taken your place at the table. God has held a place for you all that time – come claim your space and take heart, child of God, let your faith in love make you well.⁵

Amen.

⁵ “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” Jesus, in Matthew 9:22.