

June 21 – Matthew 9:18-22

## Your Faith Has Made You Well

The story of the woman being healed is a surprise because Jesus gives credit to the woman for her faith. He could have said, “be well” or “go wash in the Jordan and be healed”, or “I pronounce you well”. Instead he commends her for her faith saying it was the basis for her healing.

Connie Hyatt mentioned this scripture and how she read about it in a book by Walter Wink. His writings about owned faith were transformative for her. She wanted my views on this theme. As I reflected on this scripture Connie’s remarks made me focus my attention on the woman instead of on the actions of Jesus, where my concentration usually resides. When I began to ponder what about her faith Jesus praised and how it led to her wholeness I realized two things.

First her faith motivated her to action. The scriptures state that she had had a flow of blood for ten years. Most scholars believe it was some type of menstrual flow. Besides the physical issues such as anemia and being tired there were social aspects. Women, when they were having their period, were considered to be ritually unclean. They were instructed to not leave the house, they were not allowed to attend the synagogue or go to the temple. Anything they touched was considered unclean so in doing the ordinary tasks of a wife and mother she would have made her family ritually unclean as well. She had spent a decade in this kind of isolation. It would be very easy to give up but she did not see her situation as hopeless. We hear about her encounter with Jesus but we have to believe that this was not the first thing she had tried in seeking a cure. She had faith that God was with her. She had faith that God would heal her. She had faith that wholeness was possible. Her faith kept her open and alive to possibilities. When she saw one, her faith motivated her to action.

We can learn a lot from her. Think about how you deal with difficult, sometimes seemingly hopeless situations. Do you get discouraged? Probably. I am sure she felt that way. But what do you do beyond those moments of discouragement? Do you just give up? Do you feel God has abandoned you? Do you feel angry with God for letting

this happen to you? All of these are responses people give to situations such as this. But there are other responses. Do you own your faith, a faith that says God is with you in the shadow of the valley; a faith that says with God all things are possible? If you own this kind of faith, as this woman did, then you still have hope. You believe God is at work in your life. You move forward with anticipation, even in difficult times.

Let me share an example. Her eyesight was going, forcing her to move out of her home and into assisted living. She would not only have to sell her house but her niece, her closest relative, wanted her to move near her so it would mean leaving the town she had lived in for more than 20 years. I recall visiting her just a couple of days before the moving company would arrive to take her few remaining items of furniture to her new home. The house was empty of almost everything. I expected her to be totally devastated by this turn of events. Instead I saw a person with hope. She said, "I believe God is with me now as God has always been with me. I believe there is still something good waiting for me." This positive attitude helped her through her move and she was right. A boyfriend in the assisted living awaited, though she didn't know it. Owning our faith, believing God is with us and healing us at this moment, is a word this woman speaks to us.

Second her faith caused the woman to risk, to reach out. If a woman was ritually unclean and deliberately touched another causing them to be unclean she could be stoned to death. To touch any man was wrong, a rabbi or teacher, even worse. She risked her life because of her faith. She believed that in Jesus she could find healing.

Think about your lives of faith and where it has led you to risk. To go down that risky road is scary but it is the only way forward, the only way to real healing. Are you willing to reach out and risk like that woman did?

I think of the woman who had been divorced for many years. She had never spoken to her ex after the divorce. She still harbored a lot of anger over what he had done. Her daughter was preparing to get married. She came home for a visit and had a heart to heart chat with her mom. She let mom know that she had invited her father to the wedding. She let mom know that whatever problems they had that led to their

divorce were not her issue. She loved both her parents and wanted them at her wedding. She was not going to walk on egg shells either. She expected them both to be adults, be nice to one another and celebrate her wedding. When mom said she wasn't sure she could attend if he were there her daughter said, "Mom, you raised me in the church. I was taught that we are to forgive others. I expect you to do that with dad. If not, we will miss you at the wedding." She came to me in tears asking me what she should do. When I said, "Forgive him for the past so you can celebrate the future" she shook her head. That was a huge risk for her. She thought about just missing the wedding, she could be sick. But then I said, "Grandchildren will be coming. Do you want to be sick at their baptism, their birthdays and other important events?" Finally she said, "Jesus told us that if we follow him we will be given the strength to do what he asks. I guess I have to risk that Jesus will help me to let go of my anger." She went to the wedding and had a great time. She didn't sit at his table or talk to him much but she could celebrate that she was there when he had the father's dance because her daughter was so happy.

Where we are challenged to risk, to let go of the past, to move through uncomfortable present moments, to do something that gives us a shot at a new future, we see a woman who owned this kind of faith and it brought her wholeness.

We also need to hear that in Jesus blessing her faith, he did something amazing. Women were not honored for their faith, only the men. To be commended for her risky faith was amazing, I would guess empowering. We too, when we strive to be faithful are commended by God. So where are we being asked to believe and to risk? Where do we need affirmation for our faith?

In Mark it says that in touching the hem of Jesus' robe she was healed. Matthew wants to keep the initiative with Jesus and so has him proclaiming that her faith has made her well. Mark saw that the healing came in living and acting on her faith. I think Mark might have it right.

Also, in Matthew when Jesus says her faith has made her well was he talking about physical healing, or something else? Faith had moved her out of seeing herself as

an outcast. Faith had moved her from hopelessness. Faith had emboldened her. Faith had led her to a blessing. All of this had changed her, healed her emotionally and spiritually. For me, the physical healing was secondary.

We need to ask where does that owned faith bring healing today? When we have faith we can move beyond fear. We can risk. We can be bold. We can be faithful. We can again hear the affirmation that God delights in our actions. But we have to own our faith, our belief, before we can act. Where do we need to reach out and in the action find we are healed?