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*the One with all the questions:
How Are You?
Mark 5: 21-34*

I was in the fourth grade. She was in my class and her name was Becky Pease. She came from a poor family. She didn't dress as well as other kids... wasn't as well groomed as most. And somehow, she ended up with a big red bull's-eye on her back that said, "Pick on me." And we did. We decided Becky had cooties. Only, because her last name was "Pease," we called her cooties "Pease Fleas." If you touched Becky, you got Pease Fleas. The only way to get rid of them was to pass them on by touching another person and shouting, "Pease Fleas" and then running away so that they couldn't be returned.

Most of the time, Becky just endured this cruelty. Sometimes... in a desperate attempt to be accepted, she would run around touching people and laughing. Of course, her laugh didn't run deep and you know that inside she was dying. Humiliated. Ostracized.

To this day, I am ashamed that I did not stand up for Becky. Maybe some of you share similar regrets from your childhood. Maybe some of you were victims of this kind of treatment. When I read this morning's story of the untouchable woman, I think of Becky.

(Read Mark 5: 21-34)

Jesus and the disciples have just sailed back across the Sea of Galilee. On the other side Jesus healed a demoniac named "Legion." He cast the demons into a herd of pigs standing on a nearby cliff. Do you remember what happened next? They jumped off the cliff and into the lake. They committed "sooey-cide." The townspeople were furious and begged Jesus to go away. So, he did... and they arrived back home to discover a crowd waiting for them. By now, Jesus has made a name for himself; he can't go anywhere without being tracked down. As they get out of the boat, he is immediately surrounded by admirers.

Suddenly, the crowd separates. A VIP has arrived. Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, is the most important citizen in the community. Jairus rushes up and throws himself at Jesus' feet. He is desperate! His 12 year old daughter is dying. The Greek phrase is bleaker than the English. She is at death's door; every minute counts. Jairus begs Jesus to come with him and save his precious little girl. Jesus agrees, and off they go.

We'll come back to Jairus' story next week. But it's here, on the way to Jairus's house, that we meet a remarkable woman. We don't know her name, but it might have been Becky. Because she had cooties of the worst sort. She was an outcast. Why? Because she was soooo sick. For twelve years, this poor woman hemorrhaged. It was like having a menstrual period every single day for twelve years. Of course we men don't have a clue, but from what little we do know we think that would be a bad thing. Would that be a bad thing, ladies?

Mark paints a word picture to describe how desperate this woman was. The English translation doesn't do it justice. Mark fires off a volley of participles—"i-n-g" words—to describe her wretched state: "having a blood flow, having suffered from many doctors, having exhausted all her wealth, having not improved but having gotten worse." Get the picture? It was hopeless. She suffered much from many physicians, exhausted all her resources, and gained nothing.

Have any of you have ever suffered from a chronic ailment? Then you empathize as the rest of us cannot. Twelve years of bleeding. Awful! But in that time, it was even worse. Because of her condition, she was considered unclean. Any woman was unclean during her period and for seven days following. She could not go to the temple and anyone who came into contact with her was also unclean until they had been purified.

But this woman had no respite. She was always bleeding which means she was always unclean. She could not worship as others did. She could not marry as others did. She could not have friendships as others did. And no matter what she tried, she could not get better. She was as lonely and hopeless as she could be. Then she heard about Jesus. He drove out evil spirits. He healed crowds of people. He even touched lepers and made them clean. Maybe he could touch her. Maybe he could heal her. But did she dare ask? After all, he was a rabbi. What rabbi would be willing to make himself unclean? She couldn't risk a "No." So she came up with a plan.

As Jesus followed Jairus through the crowd, the people pressed in on him. Everyone wanted to see Jesus; to touch him. They wanted their shot at Jesus—their chance to see him and touch him—so they crowded in. Like all observant Jews, Jesus wore a prayer shawl like this called a "tallit." It had fringe on the edges called "tzit-tzit." The tallit was worn under the outer garment but the tzit-tzit stuck out as Jesus made his way through the crowd.

(Build a crowd in center of sanctuary. Pick someone.) Now, you be Jesus. I want you to start in the front here and walk down the middle of this crowd. Everyone, I want you to press in on him. Crowd him. Touch him. That was the scene that faced this desperate woman. Jesus was surrounded. She couldn't get to him without touching someone which, of course, was forbidden. But at this point, she didn't care. She had to reach Jesus. So she snuck in—pushed in, pressed in—and

when Jesus walked by, she stretched out her hand and managed to brush the fringe of his garment with her finger. That's all. Just a touch. But that's all it took. In that instant, two things happened. "Immediately her bleeding stopped, and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering." What must that power have felt like? One little touch of the fringe and she was zapped. I grew up on a little alfalfa farm surrounded by an electric fence. One day I was near the fence and slipped and fell. I landed on the fence...on my chin. I just lay there flopping around like a fish on a dock, unable to push myself off. I got zapped good!

Is that what it felt like when Jesus' power flowed into her? Whatever it felt like, in that moment she was healed. Twelve years of wasted money and hopeless cures. Nothing. But one touch of Jesus' garment—one touch by this desperate, faith-filled woman—and she was immediately healed. And she knew it.

What else happened immediately? Verse 30: "Immediately, Jesus realized that power had gone out from him." How incredible is that? Surrounded on all sides; pressed in on from every direction. But when this touch of faith made contact with Him, Jesus felt it. He knew it. Something had happened. And he asked His question. What? "Who touched my clothes?" Luke makes it even shorter: "Who touched me?"

The disciples thought Jesus was crazy. "What do you mean 'who touched me?' Everyone is touching you!" But Jesus felt the power leave him, stopped mid-stride, looked across the crowd and asked it: "Who touched me?"

I wonder how many would raise their hands in this room? If Jesus cried out, "Who touched me? Who has drawn close enough to me to feel my power, feel my healing. Who here at Chapel Hill has touched me? Anyone?"

What do you think went through that woman's heart when she heard Jesus say those words? Terror! Don't you think? She didn't want to be noticed! That's why she snuck up on him. She knew He wouldn't touch her like he had touched others. But she could steal a quick touch, and no one would know. One touch and she would be healed. But Jesus didn't do drive-by healings, did he? He called her out—and now, she had to decide whether she would come clean or not.

She did. Terrified as she might have been, she couldn't help herself. She knew she had been healed. She felt it. And so, she did what Jairus did and what Legion did. What? Threw herself at the feet of Jesus "trembling with fear!" Of course she was. After 12 years of humiliation, the last thing she wanted was to have attention drawn to her in front of a crowd that had always shunned her. But what happens next in front of Jesus is almost as healing as what happened when she snuck up from behind. Did you see the phrase? "...trembling with fear, she told him the whole truth."

Wow...the whole truth? All twelve years of it? Twelve years of pain, disappointment, rejection, loneliness. Twelve years of truth poured out of her, while the crowd stood there... listening. Even more... Jairus was still standing there. Remember him? Impatiently waiting for Jesus to heal his daughter. Jesus just listened as this woman poured out twelve years of truth. And then he pronounced these words in front of the crowd that would now be obliged to welcome her back to society: "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." Your physical suffering? Yes. Your social suffering? Yes! No more cooties. You are healed!

Last week I told you to look for the question behind the question. Jesus' question to Legion was, "What is your name?" But what was the deeper question? "Who are you... really?" You want to share your faith and life with another person? When was the last time you asked that friend of yours, "Who are you... really? What is your identity? I want to know you."

Well, there's a question behind this question, too. Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" But he didn't just want her identity, did he? He wanted her story! He took the time to hear her whole story—her twelve years of pain—and now, her healing. When Jesus paused to listen, the question behind His question was, "How are you... really? Something just happened to you. I felt it! I want to know your story. How are you... really?"

We have to add that "really," don't we? Otherwise, the phrase "How are you?" is just white noise. Rachel White, our missionary from England, told me this week that this was one of the adjustments she had to make. People kept asking her, "How are you?" and, she told me, "I thought they meant it. We don't ask that question in England like you do here. So every time someone asked me, 'How are you,' I stopped to ask myself, 'How am I?' so that I could answer their question. And then, I realized they don't mean it. They don't really want to know! It's just a greeting."

But Jesus wanted to know! When he said, "Who touched me," what he was really saying to that woman was, "How are you... really? I want to know you. I want to hear your story. I want to take time with you right now... even in the craziness of this moment. How are you... really?"

One of the most astounding things about this story is Jesus' "interruptability." Yes, he was surrounded with people who had expectations. Yes, Jairus who was desperately counting the seconds. Yes, he was on a mission. But this woman was part of that mission, and Jesus allowed himself to be interrupted. His ministry to her was not complete. He had more to do. Right then. Not later.

If God is going to use you as a Good News-sharer, you must be interruptable. You must make the most of what at first might seem an irritating distraction from whatever important thing you might be doing. Like this! (Video of violin player

interrupted.) Wasn't that awesome? He turned that interruption into something beautiful. (Of course, if your phone goes off, I don't have violin. I have a mallet.)

Friday I called on a friend who is dying of cancer. He has maybe a week left. I walked into his bedroom and saw him and said, "Jim, how are you? How is your heart? I know your body is shot. But I want to know how is your heart with all of this?" And we had a precious conversation about his marriage to a great woman, about the "gift" that cancer has been to him—yes, that's the word he used—and about his excitement to see if heaven matches his imagination of it. This is a guy who accepted Jesus one year ago. He was not ready to meet God then. He is now. That conversation was wonderful and deeply spiritual. And it began with a simple but genuine question. "How are you?"

"How are you... really?" "Tell me your story... as much of the truth as you want to share. I have time. I will listen. I will be interrupted because, right now, nothing is more important than this conversation with you." This question can transform a life. Because as you listen—especially to someone who does not know Jesus—you are going to hear the pain, heartache, brokenness and loneliness that only Jesus can cure. In fact, as they speak these words, it can stir them the longing for something more... the longing that only God can satisfy.

We aren't very good at this. We are too busy... especially with cell phones stuck to our hands. But I want to give you an assignment. Today, after church, will you find one person—in your family, in the Gathering Place, wherever—and practice this? "How are you... really? What is really going on in your life and in your heart right now?"

If you want to share the Good News of Jesus with someone, you must begin by noticing the people that you would otherwise pass right by. You must be willing to be interrupted, to stop and ask that All-American question, "How are you... really?" And then.... listen!

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**

1. Summarize the life of the woman in our story. Try to imagine what she is feeling in this moment as she sees Jesus passing by.
2. Did Jesus really not know who touched him? Either way, why did he ask the question, "Who touched me?" What is noteworthy of his response to the woman?
3. The question beneath this question is, "How are you...REALLY!" When was the last time you asked that of someone...and really meant it? And really waited for a response? What keeps you from doing so?