



August 30, 2015  
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## *I Spy God On the Move Connecting* Mark 5: 24-34

[Invite kids down front; speak the following to adults]

We're coming to the end of our I Spy series here in Family Worship Month at Chapel Hill. Each week we've been thinking about how we can spy God on the move. Next week we're going to introduce you to our sermon series for the year based upon *The Story*, which is an abridged, chronological Bible, and we're going to be talking about how we can spy God telling his story throughout history. This week, we're going to be sharing with you about Saturday Night at Chapel Hill, our new worship service, and we're going to be talking about how we can spy God connecting people to Himself and to His community.

[Tin Can Phone Illustration: To illustrate that something designed to be connected doesn't work when it is disconnected.]

This morning I want to tell you two stories: one from the Bible about a woman who had suffered with an illness for twelve years, and one about myself. My hope is that as we hear these stories, we will see the need for people to be connected to God and to God's community, and God will grow in us a desire to do that and help others to do that. [Dismiss kids]

Let me tell you the story about this woman. To set the context, Jesus has just gotten off a boat with his disciples and is greeted by a large crowd. In the crowd is a very powerful man whose daughter is dying; this powerful man falls at Jesus' feet and begs him to come quickly and heal his dying daughter. So Jesus and his disciples set off on this urgent mission. This is where our story begins and it's found in Mark 5:24.

<sup>24</sup> A large crowd followed and pressed around him. <sup>25</sup> And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. <sup>26</sup> She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. <sup>27</sup> When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup> because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed."

Here is a woman who was desperate to be connected to God. She had suffered an awful amount of the years, and her illness only grew worse. But perhaps worst of all, she was not only ill, but the nature of her disease meant that she was deemed unclean by the community at that time. This meant two things: 1) She couldn't go

to the temple; 2) She couldn't be amongst people without telling them she was unclean. Basically, in her day she was prevented from connecting with God and connecting with God's community because of her disease. She was a social outcast, and couldn't even worship the God she believed in because of her disease.

But then she heard of Jesus; this man who could heal the blind and the deaf and the lame. She realized, if only I can get healed, I can go back to the temple and worship God, and I can become a part of society again. And so she hatched a plan. She knew she couldn't just publicly come before Jesus because of her uncleanness. So she snuck up in a crowd, where she would be almost invisible, and she would just touch his cloak. There was a big chance it might not work, but she had suffered so long it was a risk worth taking.

My own story is not one of disease, but it is one of disconnection from God and God's community. I professed faith in Jesus at age 5 and reaffirmed my baptismal vows at age 12. However, from age 13 onwards my parents didn't attend church regularly. I continued to pray to God, and we sometimes did family worship at home, but I didn't have any Christian community other than my parents and my much younger sister. It was a dark and difficult time for my faith. I never stopped believing in God, but that belief didn't really affect my life. I was chasing after popularity at school and approval from my peers, but it wasn't satisfying. I always felt like I was never good enough, that I wasn't really one of the cool kids, that I was always on the outside.

Then one fall night, I remember being introduced to a friend of a friend. I'd heard about her before, and I knew that she went to church. Something deep inside of me called out and said: you need to be connected to God's community. I had this strong, desperate desire to be a part of her church, but I was too scared just to go. So as I chatted with her, I tried to turn the conversation around to church. I wanted to probe and see if she might invite me to come. I didn't want to show up without an invitation.

Let's leave my story there and go back to the story of our woman in Mark 5:

<sup>29</sup> Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. <sup>30</sup> At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" <sup>31</sup> "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' " <sup>32</sup> But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it.

Now remember, Jesus is on an urgent mission here. He's on his way to heal the dying daughter of a very powerful man. This could be the big time for him and the disciples; this could put them on the map. So every second counts. But yet, Jesus stops. He knows that something important just happened. And he isn't about to let the urgent get in the way of the important. We might say that Jesus had his head

on a swivel. He sensed in His Spirit that something just happened, that power had gone out from him. So he stopped. His disciples on the other hand just wanted to keep going. They wanted to heal this powerful man's daughter and put their name on the map. But Jesus stopped. He was so in tune with His Spirit that he knew he needed to find out who had touched him.

My own story wasn't quite the same as this woman's. That night as I probed this new friend with questions about church, she sadly seemed determined not to talk about it. I don't know what was going on. Maybe she was scared? Maybe she was intimidated by this rugby playing oaf who was quizzing her about her faith? I don't quite know. But I left that conversation sad; not knowing if I could satisfy this desire to be connected to God's community. Thankfully it wasn't the end of the story. In the meantime God began to work on her heart. She began to listen. She listened to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. She began to sense that my questioning was real and not a front. She asked around. She found out that I claimed to be a Christian. She put her head on a swivel and realized: I've got an opportunity here...

Let's go back to our woman in Mark 5:

<sup>33</sup> Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup> He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

This fearful woman, who for so many years has been a social outcast, who hasn't been allowed to the temple to worship God, comes trembling before Jesus. She falls at his knees. But Jesus doesn't scold her for reaching out. Instead he sees this poor woman who has suffered so much, who has been disconnected from God and God's community for so long... He sees her there and listens as she tells him the whole truth. This is the Jesus who is on an urgent mission, whose disciples are rushing him to move on. This Jesus takes time to listen to this woman tell the whole truth because she is too important to him, to let the urgency of something else get in the way.

And in this moment, Jesus, God in the flesh, provides this woman with an opportunity to become deeply connected with God. And not only that, but Jesus goes on to announce, in front of all the community, that this woman has been made well. In that one moment, he has not only connected her back into relationship with God, but back into God's community. He declares: "She is clean; don't make her an outcast anymore." And she is reconnected to God and reconnected to God's community. Jesus loves her too much to let her just walk away without having that relational connection to Him and without publicly declaring that she is welcome back into the community again.

In my story, a few months after that night when I had met this friend, I ended up meeting her again at a party. But this time the conversation went a little differently. The first thing she said to me was: "So I hear you're a Christian." I was totally taken aback. I said, "Yes." She said to me, "Well you should come to my church." All of a sudden, this huge feeling of joy washed over me as I realized this deep desire I had to be connected to God's community was being fulfilled. I told her, "I would love to. That would be awesome." And through that conversation I ended up finding a community of believers who loved me for who I was in Christ, accepted me with all my faults, walked with me through my difficulties, and called out gifts in me that I couldn't see myself. But most important of all, it was that community that strengthened and built up my weak faith and gave me a deep sense of joy and peace and trust in God... all because of that one person's head on a swivel.

God has a deep desire to connect to Himself and to His community those who have become disconnected. He is not standing there with a big wagging finger looking to tell people off for not being good enough, or not prioritizing their lives better, or not getting ill. He is standing there, just like Jesus was, looking around for those who are disconnected. He is desperate to see those people reconnected to Him and to His community. He knows that we were designed to live in relationship with God, and in relationship with God's people, and he loves us too much to let us walk away from that.

The question is... will we be a church of people who connect others to God and to God's community? Will we be a church of people who have their heads on a swivel? Will we be a church of people who don't let the urgent get in the way of the important? Because that is what Jesus was like, and we want to be a church of people who are ever becoming more like Him. Will you be a part of that?

That is the heart and desire behind Saturday Night at Chapel Hill. To connect those who are disconnected from God back to God. To connect those who are disconnected from God's community back to His community. That's our dream, that's our prayer. We want to be like Jesus was to this woman. We want to be like my friend was to me... connectors who allow the disconnected to experience the peace and joy that is found in true relationship with God and with His community.

So, to tell you a little more about Saturday Night at Chapel Hill, I'm going to ask Kathryn McIvor, who is co-leading Saturday Night with me, and Pastor Mark to come join me to talk some more. As they come up, I'd love us to watch a short video filmed last week as we gathered to pray for Saturday Night at Chapel Hill.

EW to MT: Where did this all begin? [talk about history, missing 900 etc.]

Follow-up Q: What's our hope and dream with Saturday Night? [connecting disconnected to God and community]

EW to KMc: What will Saturday Night be like? [openness/sensitivity to God's leading like Jesus in our story]

Follow-up Q: How will we make this happen? [more details on elements of Saturday Night]

EW to MT: Who do we want to be there? [the disconnected; and connectors like Jesus, not like his disciples]

Follow-up Q: What is your ask of those committed to 9:00am and 10.47? [pray etc.]