

“Healing from Within”

Valley Presbyterian Church – July 19, 2026

8th Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 43:1-7

Rev. Dr. John Wahl

Mark 5:25-34

Summer Worship Series:

A Curriculum of Love: Deepening our Love for God, our Neighbors, and Ourselves: Week Seven

The author of Mark – as biblical commentators have noted – is often very sparse in the details he offers; until he isn’t. In this story, Mark mentions neither the woman’s name, age, marital status, nor other descriptors; yet, he introduces her to his readers with a string of misfortunes. She has been bleeding for 12 years; has endured great physical, mental, and emotional stress under the care of many physicians; has spent all the money she had to no benefit; and, despite all that, her condition has only deteriorated.

Mark provides no details about what sort of hemorrhaging is occurring. But, given ancient understandings of blood and ritual purity, Mark’s implicit point is that her condition has rendered her infertile; her womb is no longer a source or a site of life. In her culture, that would be a cause of grief and shame for her and her family.¹

Whoever she is or whatever she had done prior to the sickness, now her malady defines her. It has taken over her identity and life. It marks her as ceremonially unclean and isolates her from the world. It has made her a picture of despair.

Best-selling author Brene Brown, also a Research Professor in Social Work at the University of Houston, understands shame as well as anyone else. From her professional experience, she defines shame as the feeling there is something fundamentally wrong with you. While you may experience guilt about something you have done, you feel shame about who you are. And whereas feeling guilty about something we said or did may prompt us to apologize or do better, shame does not; shame is so painful, so harmful that nothing good ever really comes out of it. When

¹ Matt Skinner from *WorkingPreacher.com*

we feel shame we hide, hold secrets, keep our distance, and it eats away at the core of us.

As *A Curriculum of Love* series author Siri Stroman reminds us, shame is not of God. Too often, when people are told by the church that their thoughts, feelings, and actions are fundamentally in error – that they are sinful – and that God will only lovingly accept them if repent or change the way they live, or say the right prayer, shame has been introduced and blessed. And, as a result, religious trauma in our culture has spiked.

The full extent of religious trauma is only now beginning to be studied, and it can be far more pervasive than we realize. While some trauma comes from striking events such as a trusted person in power (like a pastor) taking advantage of a member (or, sometimes, a minor), most religious trauma comes from long-term exposure to a persistent message of unworthiness. Shame hurts and its impacts are lasting. The church will sometimes try to assuage this painful trauma with rites of confession and forgiveness, but it doesn't change the underlying terror of being taught to believe that we are unworthy as we are.²

Twelve years is a long time to suffer from a physical condition; especially one that would have also caused this woman to be separated from her social circle, impoverished from futile treatments, and ostracized from her religious community. Perhaps Mark includes this detail that it has been a dozen years in juxtaposition to the story he tells right before and after this one of a young girl, the daughter of an official named Jairus, who gets sick and dies at twelve years old. In both of these cases, Jesus heals without any question of who they are or what brought them there, not waiting for evidence of their purity or faith before taking action.

Instead, we see this desperate woman approach Jesus from behind and reach out to him, believing that if she could only touch his robe, her condition might change. Mark tells us that immediately, her bleeding stopped and that she could feel in her body that she had been healed. At the same time, the author says, Jesus could feel power going out from him, prompting him to turn to the crowds and ask, “Who touched me?” (v. 31)

The disciples dismiss their Teacher's question, instead blaming the throng shoving and pushing around them, but Jesus does not abandon his quest. He is

² Siri Stroman, *A Curriculum of Love*

determined to draw out the person who dared to approach him. The woman can no longer hide. She must face up to the consequences for having potentially contaminated every person, including Jesus, who has come into contact with her. Trembling in fear, she falls down before Jesus and tells him the unvarnished truth. The woman had lived many years in the shadows, her identity is shaped by her own tragic story. Now, she must step into the light and tell her story of redemption and hope.³

Touching Jesus' robe stops the bleeding. It cures her ailment. But a more holistic healing, or restoration, comes when Jesus hears her story and publicly commends her faith, even calling her "daughter." She enters the scene alone, in secrecy. She departs it having been dignified and praised by Jesus, all while her neighbors are looking on.

She is no longer just an unnamed "woman," but now is a daughter, one whose "faith" has "made (her) well." Now a promise has been added to the new reality in her life. She receives Jesus' benediction that invites her to depart in "peace," with *shalom*, and in wholeness. And almost as an afterthought, she receives from Jesus the confirmation that she has been "healed" of – and saved from – her disease (5:34)

Jesus never looks at people from the lens of shame. "While he offers forgiveness," Stromann writes, "his starting point is that the person before him is a beloved Child of God who is hurting, lost, confused, in need of healing and help. He didn't create their beloved status by healing them, but he certainly helped them to see it. Humans deny our humanity, God doesn't. Humans shame each other, God doesn't. Humans demand perfection, God doesn't. Grace wraps up all that we are, all that we can be, and loves us into being, where shame leaves us in the darkness and waits until we are acceptable. One sounds like God, the other does not."⁴

Jesus chooses not to leave the people he encounters in the conditions in which he finds them. He offers them grace to understand that they don't need to feel ashamed about the things they cannot seem to change; and that, instead, they can be healed from within, made to feel whole. And Jesus has the power, as we see in these gospel stories of healing, to alter their condition.

The question that remains is: do we? What can the church do to alter the conditions of people's lives? Can it, also, bring healing into such troubled

³ Ahmi Lee from *WorkingPreacher.com*

⁴ Stromann

circumstances? Is it willing to cross over boundaries – whether they are related to purity, or ethnicity, gender, politics or anything else that divides us – and advocate for meaningful, life-giving change? Will God grant us the faith and courage to do so?

For starters, we can help remind people – inside the church and beyond its walls – that shame is not of God. Our purpose is not to make judgements based on how people look or what is in their bank accounts or how they live their lives. As Jesus welcomed and accepted this woman who was bold enough to touch his robe, so we, in faith communities, should embrace those with the courage to reach out; whether it comes from a place of desperation or faith, or maybe a little of each.

Sometimes, frankly, we are those that are fighting against feelings of unworthiness or shame. We may not have experienced a particular instance of religious trauma; instead, at some point, we were told or made to feel that we were indelibly flawed. It might be some dogma about which we harbored doubt or some habit we haven't been able to quit; but for whatever reason, we feel unworthy of grace and find it hard accept love. And, so, we lash out or bury the pain or walk away in anger.

As flawed and fragile humans, we sometimes act in horrible ways – toward others or to ourselves. But that does not preclude or deny the reality that we are beloved by God. This is the starting point; if we begin here, we may have the courage to look at our imperfections and shortcomings and take responsibility for them. I am more likely to respond to criticism if I know that the person offering it isn't judging me for it. I am more likely to own up to my mistakes if I know it won't ruin my relationship with the person confronting me. When grace is present, we are given space to grow into the fullness of who we can be; and any shame we feel is loved right out of us, just as Jesus would do.

Let us pray: *Dear God, you call us beloved and yearn to be in relationship with us. And yet in our lostness and shame, we can feel estranged both from you and from our own worthiness. Help us to learn to love and accept ourselves so we can draw closer to you and to those around us also needing love. Amen.*