

A SERVICE FOR THE SECOND RECOVERY SUNDAY

BY THE WELSH COUNCIL ON ALCOHOL
AND OTHER DRUGS

October 6th 2013



TOUCHING THE HEM
OF HIS GARMENT

Leader

Restoration Sunday reminds us that we are all dependent on something in order that we can keep a balance in life. There are fault lines in all of us, which can trip us up, or indeed hamper people from living a full life. Some will feel inadequate to face life and that the demands of life will be insurmountable. Some will be attracted by drugs and alcohol as a way of escaping the stresses of life, thereby creating a new dependency prison for themselves. In order to consider some of these issues today we shall consider the narrative of the woman with haemorrhages who stood in the crowd, and reached out to touch the hem of Jesus' clothing. But first, let us pray.

Prayer

O God, our Heavenly Father, in whom life is full and complete. You are as the fullness of summer, and we reach out to you with the humility of a servant seeking to touch the hem of your garment. Lord, make us whole and well again and forgive us our failings and our frailty. Allow us Lord to feel your presence and be embraced by you. We come as individuals and as a community of people to give you, the fount and the root of life, our praise and our worship.

Recite the Lord's Prayer together. ***"Our Father who art in heaven..."***

Hymn: Fill thou my life, O Lord my God

Readings Psalm 23
 Luke 8: 40-48

Leader: For our meditations today let us consider

- 1 The Woman
- 2 The Action
- 3 The Consequence

Who was the woman?

We know so little about her, her name, her lineage nor her background. Where did she come from? She was an ordinary woman, 'one of the crowd', who had possibly heard of Jesus, or may have seen him before and ventured towards him. This nameless lady had suffered haemorrhaging for twelve years. She had sought the help of many physicians – such was her desire to be healed. For all the money that she had spent, she remained ill, as she reached out her arm towards freedom. There was a social stigma towards those who suffered this illness. In Leviticus 15: 25-27 we read the basis for such attitudes. (Someone may read these verses). The belief was that those who haemorrhaged were unclean, and that anything they touched was unclean, including other peoples' clothes. No-one would want to be near them. As she reached out her hand she showed her desperation, and sought salvation. It's important to note that this woman name was unknown. How often does Jesus engage with those cannot be identified by name. There was a woman at Jacob's well, the centurion's servant, a woman from the town at the Pharisees house, a man with an unclean spirit. Other Gospel characters are identified as the family in Bethany, Zacchaeus, and Jairus amongst others. These were known or within the circle of friends of Jesus and the disciples Jesus was concerned for the strangers, the rejected, and those on the periphery of society. No-one is beyond the concern of God. In reaching out her hand, this woman recognises her how pitiful she appears and yearns freedom and restoration. When life seems desperate and life can seem like a hell on earth, then the outreached hand is the plea of the heart, with the inner being of man reaching unto God. The first step is in our hand and we remember the famous painting by Holman Hunt which shows the handle on our side of the door. John Roberts, a Welsh hymn-writer wrote

*When the burdens of life are so heavy
and the tensions unbearably tight;
I know whose strong hand will support me
and whose gentlest grasp is beyond sight.*

A reflection of someone's experience at the Living Room.

From the congregation: Mai's story – a problem with food.

I did everything possible to try and control what I was doing... I tried to starve myself, but once I ate the smallest morsel, I would binge food. I placed the food in the bin many times in my anger, and after a few minutes I would go to the bin, take the food out, and eat it. I would steal biscuits and food from the cupboards of friends in college when my supply had finished. I thought that if I didn't buy food, then I wouldn't eat... I fooled everyone including myself. I had no interest in acting or in succeeding and all I wanted to do was binge... I couldn't live like this anymore... Therefore I made the most difficult decision... But the best one that I ever took... Which was to put my life on 'hold' for four months? I faced all my fears for the first time. I realised that I was ill and that I needed help. I sought that help, and received it.

(Welsh Council of Alcohol and Other Drugs website)

From the congregation: the story of Jim

I was by this time absolutely overpowered, and I was prepared to do anything to be cured. I was prepared to listen and considered faith healing and a belief in a spiritual life. A belief that there is a superhuman power that would help me if I were to ask, call it God if you will. I had failed on my own, that was certain, and I was convinced that I could have help from beyond myself. In the beginning I trusted in the Living Room groups and in my friends that were also seeking such help. I began accepting and believing that there was a super human power that cared for me, and by now I know He is looking after me, by removing my fears and uncertainties if I place everything in his care....

(Welsh Council of Alcohol and Other Drugs website)

Prayer

You are wondrous O Lord my God, because you, in your mercy, showed your concern for me, without being interested in my name or my background, my status or my lineage. In Jesus we see your love reaching out towards individuals whoever they are along the road of life. We celebrate your generous love; we rejoice in you and within that joy remember (*please name those whom you wish to remember in your prayer*). Amen.

Hymn: The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want

What did the woman do? (Her action)

She reached out to touch Jesus' garment, she opened the door, which in turn reflected her desire for restoration and expressed her trust in Jesus. Her faith wasn't strong and confident. Perhaps she just said "I've heard about him, and what he has done. I'll give it a try", and she came from behind and touched the hem of his garment. She didn't want to make a fuss, and waited quietly for an opportunity. This wasn't strange, because within the Bible and other literatures there are examples of people with particular powers, and other people felt that even by touching their clothes, that they would be restored. Some are said to have been restored simply when they saw Abraham.

Maybe there is a sense of superstition here – just touching a garment? But there was also a sense of expectation – the ongoing hope! If the measure of faith was small, it was sufficient to draw Jesus' attention as he sensed some of his power leaving him.

On Restoration Sunday, we pause to reflect on the importance of faith, however small. Whilst we acknowledge the element of superstition in the touching of the garment, we realise that the real healing came when she sought the power of Jesus. This was her statement of faith and a sign of her understanding that Jesus was more than an ordinary person, but one who had the power of healing within him.

Dialogue

Voice 1 What is this faith, that people talk about? It belongs to the world of religion, doesn't it?

Voice 2 Well, yes and no. There's a medical team along here who can treat heart conditions, they have a good reputation and some say that they can do miracles. Their success is well known, and folk have faith in them.

Voice 3 What you are really saying is that people can trust them.

Voice 1 Yes, and another example is the Living Room - a community based recovery centre in Cardiff that's saving dozens of lives that were previously lost to alcohol and drug addiction.

Voice 2 Is faith based on knowledge to venture forward?

Voice 1 Yes, there is evidence.

Voice 3 O! I thought that faith assumed that we have the answer to every question.

Voice 1 No, faith grows with experience as we value that the evidence is safe and assured. But that first step is important, a starting point.

Voice 3 Do you think that there is something about Jesus of Nazareth, perhaps the narrative about him, that touched the woman before she touched his garment?

Voice 1 She must have known something about him before she ventured to touch his clothes. Possibly listening to the stories about him was the starting point, and that her steps in his direction were the signs of faith.

Voice 2 There must have been something in the history of the woman that Jesus was able to grasp – her desire to approach him, and that's why he said 'your faith has made you whole, and not the actual touching of his garment.

Voice 3 I see, the desire, the sight, the experience are the first elements of faith, and the beginnings of our healing start there.

Leader

Luke tells us in this story that we need to accept who Jesus is, before we can begin to trust him, especially as we associate him with the healing of Jairus and remember also the way he taught the crowds. He restores broken lives, because the energy of God flowed through him and reached people. This is the power of his healing – restoring self-respect and dignity, healing old pains and restoring humans afresh. We remember the words of William Williams Pantycelyn –

*I only have your strength to enable me along
Your salvation is my power, my conquest and my song*

Prayer

You are wonderful, O Lord my God. You show us that everybody counts and that your goal is restore all of us to being whole again, whatever the fault lines in our makeup.

Lord Jesus, you are wonderful, crucified and risen, the strength of our lives and the hope of our existence. Amen.

The consequences of the woman's action.

The first consequence for the woman was the physical healing. The haemorrhaging stopped, and her burden of guilt was removed, her shame was taken away, and she became a free person. Something happened to Jesus also. He sensed that power had left him, when he asked who had touched him. The woman must have felt ashamed when she knelt before him and admitted her circumstances publicly. Jesus sought to know her, and respond to her real need and promote her personal faith in him, so that she too, could be called a child of God. Hence the greeting – “My daughter”. The insignificant received a name and a status, a position and a privilege, and went on her way blessed with God's peace. She had a peace of mind, without pain and guilt free. The restoration was complete.

Voice from the congregation

Because of the flow of blood, apart from any pain and suffering, she had lost

her self-respect, and her relationship with others in the community. Her restoration meant that she had a better relationship with herself. She didn't need to hide, or feel guilty, alone and rejected, she received confidence.

Voice from the congregation

Through the flow of blood, she was ostracised from her community because of her uncleanness and the danger to infect others. She had been rejected and lonely, feeling guilty, especially since the physicians had failed to heal her. Now she could walk freely and confidently and able to restore her relationships with family and friends. She became an acceptable and respectable person again.

Voice from the congregation

The word 'daughter' reflects that there is a close relationship. By recalling who Jesus was, and that through him, the woman had a family relationship with God. Her restoration was complete, with herself, her community and with God. No wonder that she went 'in peace'.

Hymn: Amazing grace – how sweet the sound

Leader

Being lost is a lonely experience, confined, feeling unclean and in need of cleanliness, despair and in need of hope, in darkness unable to find light. When friends and family have rejected a person there is sense of being forlorn. One can be lost and lonely in a crowd.

The first sign of hope is the desire to be free. There is a cry for a fuller life, and to be a saved and renewed person. This is the person who reaches out her hand. Today, we celebrate that there is renewal in Jesus Christ, because in Jesus we are reconciled to God. In him there is life, and the life was the light of men (John 1:4). Jesus is the sunrise of human life, and radiates the warmth of his love, such love that forgives and makes whole our understanding of ourselves, our sense of community with others and our communion with God.

Let's all say

**My cup overflows, goodness and mercy will follow me each day of my life
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

Let us pray

We praise your name O Lord our God and Father,

and that you haven't left us forlorn in a world of threat and fear.

You gave us living hope in Jesus Christ our Lord,

and lit the flame of faith in our hearts, that can never be put out.

When the burdens and fears get the better of us

and when we tread on the surface of doubt, despair and dependency

Remind us that no-one is beyond your unfailing love.

We rejoice in you, we place our faith in you, and wait upon you.

When we sense that our faith is weak and inadequate, with more questions
and doubts persisting,

Help us to be more open and honest with you and with each other.

All

Your power is our refuge, our confidence and our strength.

Announcements and collection

Hymn: Guide me O thou great Jehovah

The blessing

This service is available as a PowerPoint presentation
for downloading from our websites:
www.welshcouncil.org.uk and **www.livingroom-cardiff.com**