

Each week as we come together to worship, I wonder can you ever grasp the issues that there are right now in this room. It might not be a health issue, but it might be a family issue. It might not be a worry issue, but it might be a job issue. It might not be a money issue, but it might be a marriage issue. And, I think it's important that we acknowledge that right now. Because if we don't then we are portraying ourselves as a church full of perfect people, with no need for God's touch. And that would be a lie. The fact remains that we all have issues to deal with daily. How do you deal with your issues? Where do you seek answers for those things which enter your life every day? Where, or with whom do you find the help you need when there are issues in your job?

There are two stories of healing in our reading this morning from Mark, but I want us to just think about the story of the woman who had an issue of bleeding. The reading begins with Jesus coming off the boat, and an encounter with a synagogue leader named Jairus. But then in the busyness of the crowd, Mark talks about a woman. Two situations, one where the person is named, and then the other where Mark tells us about a woman and how long she has been ill. She's known as the woman with an issue. That's her label. She becomes labeled more by her issue than her name. You see under the Law of Moses she was considered as ceremonially unclean and anything and everyone she touched would also be considered as unclean. But her illness hadn't lasted for just a short time. For 12 years she had lived a life of uncleanness and separation with no hope of being healed of her sickness. She would have little contact with other people and was shunned because of her condition. She was cut off from mainstream society; cut off from the worship in the temple; and according to the Law, she was cut off from God. She had an issue of blood, and no one had an answer for her, not even the doctors. And so, as the years went on with no hope of any cure, the woman would have been forgotten by society, labelled as unfortunate, pitied, but because of the law there was no means to reach out and give help.

Sometimes the issues we face are issues that travel with us. And although things have moved on, society continues to give us the label. For example, he's the man who ran away from his wife and had an affair, she's the woman who lost her child, he's the guy who was bankrupt. So, you become ashamed about something that happened long ago, and the issue never has the chance to be completely resolved. So, you can imagine how this woman felt, 12 years on from noticing a problem in her body, to feel that 12 years on there was no hope for a new life. All options were exhausted.

The woman heard about Jesus, and she knew that he was her only hope of deliverance. She was desperate for answers. When she saw and heard about Jesus, she knew the power he had to heal her.

How desperate do we have to get sometimes before we seek the only answer that works? We have tried everything but Jesus. What will it take to get our attention and turn us back to Christ? How desperate do we have to get sometimes before we seek Jesus? I can remember being with a family as their loved one was dying. They were ashamed to talk to me about their relative, who in their minds had lived a life without God. I can remember sitting beside his bedside and talking in those final days about things, and folks he was truly repentant both with God and the family that now surrounded him. But God wasn't condemning him. God was showering him with love. He could see the eternity that awaited him, and even in those last days he actively recognized what Jesus had done for him on the cross. Some would say that he wasn't healed of his issues, and yet he was, he was at peace as he stepped from

this life redeemed by the blood of Christ. That man reached out, even though it was at the end of his life. It was a defining moment as he reached to touch Jesus in desperation, just like this woman did.

Can you imagine in the woman's weakness the effort that it would have taken for her to push through? And can you imagine how the label of being unclean would also have brought anger and fear into the crowd. I'm sure some would have tried to stone her, knowing that they too had been touched by her in the mayhem and commotion of the crowd. But she didn't quit – she reached out and touched his cloak. Jesus knew that someone had been delivered and healed, and he turned to recognize the faith of just one person in the crowd.

And in that healing, unlike the crowd around him, Jesus didn't look upon her as something to be ashamed of. No, he loved her knowing the love that his Heavenly Father had for her. He called her, Daughter, for he knew that this woman was truly a child of God through faith, and that faith in the power of God to heal had made her whole. Her label had gone, and her identity was now in Christ. Jesus told her to go in peace.

Sometimes people will ask why they haven't received healing for a physical illness, and yet maybe there has been a deeper healing through it, where they receive a peace knowing that God walks with them in their illness. You see, Jesus is not only our healer, but he is our source of peace; a peace that is beyond anything that the world can give; a peace that is supernatural. I have experienced with Alison in knowing that during her treatment for cancer, it wasn't just the acknowledgement in our prayers and the prayers of many for her healing that mattered. It was the real and tangible sense of God's peace that surrounded us that was so supernatural.

That's the peace that I hope each one of us feels as we reach out to God as the woman did.

So today, what do we take home with us? Firstly, acknowledge that everyone of us has an issue that we need to bring to God right now. You may be feeling well, and yet there are other issues that need God's healing. Secondly, why not reach out today to God, rather than exhausting all your other options first. Why wait until the issues in your life bring you to the point of desperation? Reach out and touch the Lord right now as he surrounds this place by his Spirit. Reach out by faith and receive the answer for the issues that you are facing.

And therefore, as I end, we are going to pray. And if you want to receive God's healing and peace today, I'd ask you to hold out your hands as a sign you want to receive from him. Let's pray:

And so, Father God, you knew each of us while we were still in our mother's womb. You know all our influences, and you know all our issues that make us who we are. Come now by your Holy Spirit and search our hearts, reveal in each of us any issues from our past and present that cast shadows on our lives today. In this act of faith, we open our hands as a sign of our desire to be touched by you again. Cover us by your Holy Spirit today, that we may discover the light of your presence, and the peace that passes all understanding. We pray that you know our hearts to be open and willing to receive your healing in our lives today. So come now Holy Spirit as we reach out in faith. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.