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Luke 8:45-48, ESV.

⁴⁵ And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!" ⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me." ⁴⁷ And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. ⁴⁸ And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

The Kraspedou of God.

There are many homeless people living on the streets in Boulder. They come to Boulder because the streets are safe, there is a shelter in town, and law enforcement is gentle with them, moving them along from campsite to campsite, but not arresting them unless they're violent. Some of these folks with no homes are mentally ill and suffer from schizophrenia or severe depression or personality disorders. Some of them have suffered calamities in their lives, like losing a job and not being able to find a new one for an extended period. Some of them work, even full time, at minimum wage jobs, but cannot afford apartments in Boulder or in surrounding areas. And a small percentage of them simply want to live on the street and do not want the constraints of having a job and a home. I

see them frequently at the hospital, having toes and fingers and sometimes legs amputated because of frostbite or untreated diabetes, or in alcohol or drug withdrawal, or in the later stages of serious illnesses like cancer or COPD. Many, perhaps most homeless people have been disowned by their families or haven't had contact with any family members in years or decades. Nurses are incredibly compassionate people and do not like to see anyone die alone – and so during the pandemic, I was called in a few times to sit with a dying person who had no home and no family. Typically, the person wasn't able to talk, and so all I could do was sit there with my hand on their hand.

We're going to look at one of several "sandwiched" stories in the Gospels. This is a common technique in the story of Jesus, where we see one miraculous or spiritually inspiring story embedded in another. The sandwiched stories I want to look at appear in Mark, Matthew, and Luke. We'll read the Luke version, noting that Mark was written first. The outer story involves Jesus healing the daughter of a powerful man. The inner story – which interrupts the outer one briefly – involves a woman who is clearly poor. Here is how this begins in Luke, Chapter 8:

⁴⁰ Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. ⁴¹ And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored him to come to his house, ⁴² for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying.

People are joyously waiting to meet Jesus. But a man called Jairus, “*a ruler of the synagogue*”, falls at Jesus’ feet. He’s begging Jesus to come to his house and cure his young daughter. We’re going to discover in a moment that this is a dense crowd of people where even Jesus has trouble making his way through. But Jairus had no trouble: clearly, people made way for him. To be called a “ruler” in a synagogue, means that he is a wealthy patron, not a religious person, like a rabbi.

Here is what happens next:

As Jesus went, the people pressed around him. ⁴³ And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. ⁴⁵ And Jesus said, “Who was it that touched me?” When all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!” ⁴⁶ But Jesus said, “Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me.” ⁴⁷ And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. ⁴⁸ And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”

Jesus is going to heal the rich man’s daughter but notice that he allows himself to be interrupted to cure a poor woman. Notice that this woman initially tries to keep her identity hidden. She doesn’t declare her presence or call out to Jesus. She does not believe that she has the status to make Jesus focus on her. But she believed that simply by simply touching Jesus’ clothing she could be cured. I will get back to this inner story of our sandwiched tales.

A while back, there was a man who lived on the street and who suffered from some sort of seizure disorder – and who needed immediate medical care. He made it on his own to the main entrance to the hospital – not the emergency entrance – and then had a seizure just outside the main doors. A call came out on the hospital sound system, saying that a stat team was needed in the main lobby. Chaplains answer these sorts of calls in case the person needs comforting or there is a family member who is distraught. When this particular incident happened, the hospital was extremely busy. The emergency department was full, the ICU was full, and the hospital was short staffed. So, when I went to the lobby in response to this call, instead of finding a full medical team, I found just a single respiratory therapist. She was doing her job, assessing his situation, making sure the man could breathe, and assuring him that he would be cared for. A doctor and a charge nurse arrived a moment later, followed by more. All I could do was sit on the floor, hold his hand, and reassure him. This man said something to me that I want to share – and so I will get back to this. Let's call this man with no home and who was having a seizure "Charlie".

Let's get back to our sandwiched stories, where Jesus cures a rich man's daughter, but pauses to cure a poor woman. It's obvious what is going on with the poor woman, with the exception of a subtlety that has to do with the cultural

environment in which this woman was living. She has had vaginal bleeding for twelve years. In Mark, we read this about the woman: *“who had suffered much under many physicians”*. Luke says that she has spent every penny she owns on doctors, but nothing has worked, and Mark makes it clear that this was a very unpleasant experience. But then she simply touches the fringe of Jesus’ garment, and she is instantly healed. Jesus immediately responds by wanting to know who has just touched him. Peter explains that all kinds of people are touching him; they are pressing in on all sides because they all want to be close to Jesus. But Jesus instinctively knows the difference between an accidental touch and a deliberate, faith-filled touch. The woman, who has tried to remain hidden, realizes that she has been noticed by Jesus and so she reluctantly identifies herself. Jesus explains that her faith has healed her. And indeed, she knew that if she simply touched his clothing with faith in her heart, a miracle would happen.

So, what’s the subtlety in this story? Why was she reluctant to identify herself? Why is it so significant that the rescue of the rich man’s daughter is paused while Jesus cures the poor woman? In Jewish society at the time a woman was considered unclean when she was menstruating and she would not be allowed around other people. Since this woman had been bleeding for twelve years, she had been ostracized from society for twelve years. Jesus didn’t just

cure her medical problem: he allowed her to re-enter society and be accepted by her family and friends again. As a result of the rules of her society, she had spent a dozen years thinking of herself as being unworthy, of being sub-human. She had led a life of degradation. Now, though, she has connected with the man she knows is the Messiah. Jesus heals her in a truly profound fashion, medically, socially, and spiritually. And the sandwiched story is engineered carefully to show that Jesus cares at least as much about poor people as he does powerful people.

Back to Charlie. He was having a lot of trouble talking because of his seizure. He was taken to the emergency department. All of the rooms there were occupied. The ED was filled with loud voices, EMTs rolling patients in, medical personnel rushing about. The only room that didn't have someone in it was a room reserved for violent or uncontrolled patients, people often brought in by the police. The room had zero furniture in it so that nothing could be picked up and weaponized. All that was in the room was a pad on the floor. The man was laid down on. I knelt next to him and explained that he wasn't in this room because he had done anything wrong. The ED was full, I told him, and there was no place else to put him. He nodded and thanked me. I waited with Charlie for just a couple of minutes while the medical team got him situated and began to treat him for his seizure. I took his hand and told him that I had to go, that there

was a patient in the ICU that I had to see. Charlie, who was wearing clothes that were much too warm for the weather and who had matted hair, reached out and held my arm. In a barely audible voice, he said: "Thank you for touching me."

Most of us live like the crowd that gathered around Jesus. If we could go back in time and walk with Jesus, we would willingly join in with the throng of people desperately trying to get near him. We would jostle him as he struggles to walk by and go about his business. In fact, that is what we do now, how most of us practice our faith. We do come to church. But most of the time, we're just brushing up against God, almost by accident. It's as if we feel the same way about ourselves that the bleeding woman feels about herself - that we're not worthy. We should be more deliberate with our faith. We should be intentional. We want to make sure that when we turn to our God, we're not just trying to touch the fringe of his garment quickly and then race back to our busy lives. We should take the time, and with confidence, steadfastly connect with our creator.

One more thing. This "fringe" that the woman touched, what was it? The original Greek word in the Bible is "*kraspedou*". It can indeed be translated as fringe or border or tassel. But importantly, it refers to the trim that Jews of the day put on their clothing. It was deeply meaningful and religious in nature. It served as a constant reminder to the Chosen People of their dependence on and

unwavering faith in God. It was so much more than “fringe”. That is what this bleeding woman touched. It was highly symbolic because when she touched this fringe, she was touching Jesus’ very essence as the son of God. She was connecting with him in a seemingly minor fashion, with it only lasting for an instant. But it was not casual. It was extremely intentional. It was a deliberate attempt at connecting with Jesus the Messiah. She didn’t just brush up against Jesus the man.

That is our goal in this life on this Earth. That’s why God put us here. That’s why we pray, why we read the Bible, why we share our faith openly, even with people who might disapprove. If you would like to know how to make your contact with God, with Jesus, more deliberate, more focused, if you want to know how to deeply connect with God while touching the fringe of his garment, here’s the secret. It’s easy to do. That woman didn’t have to go through some monumental effort and get in Jesus’ face and then come up with a deep, complex, meaningful thing to say to him. She just reached through the crowd and touched his “*kraspedou*”. She didn’t just touch the hem of his garment, as many translations say. When you pray, you should do what she did and touch the full extent of God as the creator who made you so that he could love you, guide you, and lead you through his kingdom. The best thing is to do this many times each

day. Stop, ignore the world around you, remember that your relationship with God is more important than going to the grocery store or getting gas for your car or fixing up your garden or watching Youtube videos. Focus on the “*kraspedou*” of God’s garment. Go ahead and touch it. Tell yourself that you value that always available gift of being able to reach out and be with God. Thank God for this privilege. As you do this repeatedly over time, it will feel more natural. Focusing on the “*kraspedou*” makes connecting deeply with God a very simple thing. It will help you live as a believer all week long, not just on Sunday morning.

I dropped back in the ED to talk to Charlie one more time. He had been moved from the bare room to a regular room in the ED. My plan was to chat with him. He was over his seizure and had been successfully treated. He was alone in his ED room. But he was asleep and chaplains don’t wake people up. I did, however, stop and touch him one more time. I put a hand on his forehead, and I thanked God for helping him get to the hospital on time. I also asked God to please lift Charlie up, both spiritually and physically, to bring him to a better place in life. I don’t know what happened to Charlie, but I do know that when I touched him, I wasn’t just helping him. I was helping myself. That’s because there’s another way of touching the “*kraspedou*” of Christ’s garment. You can touch God by touching someone who needs help, by touching them physically or with words,

or by doing something for them. That ability that you have to connect so deeply with God can be achieved by connecting with a person in need.

Here is what happens after Jesus cures the bleeding woman. He gets back to the rich man, the powerful man in the synagogue, Jairus. We read this:

⁴⁹ While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more." ⁵⁰ But Jesus on hearing this answered him, "Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well." ⁵¹ And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child. ⁵² And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping." ⁵³ And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. ⁵⁴ But taking her by the hand he called, saying, "Child, arise." ⁵⁵ And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. ⁵⁶ And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened.

The girl is dead. Jesus enters the house, takes the girl's hand, and she comes back to life. Notice, the seemingly odd ending, where Jesus tells the parents "*to tell no one what had happened*". Why does he do this? Jesus is early in his ministry.

He's being mobbed by people everywhere he goes. Most of them are like Jairus, looking for a cure. They are not like the bleeding woman who is genuinely trying to touch his "*kraspedou*". He wants to make sure that genuine believers, and not just those looking to make use of his abilities, have access to him. God pays a lot of attention to people who have faith in their hearts.