

Mark 5:25–34, “Means of Grace”

7/4/21 Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Pastor Alex Amiot

Mark 5:25–34 (NKJV)

²⁵ Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, ²⁶ and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷ When she heard about Jesus, she came behind *Him* in the crowd and touched His garment. ²⁸ For she said, “If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well.”

²⁹ Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in *her* body that she was healed of the affliction. ³⁰ And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, “Who touched My clothes?”

³¹ But His disciples said to Him, “You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’ ”

³² And He looked around to see her who had done this thing. ³³ But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. ³⁴ And He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.”

What was she thinking? The woman in this passage was about to touch Jesus, but her sickness made her ceremonially unclean. According to the Levitical Law in the Old Testament, whomever she touched would become unclean too for the rest of the day.¹ On top of that, if you are unclean for any reason you are not allowed to enter the temple in Jerusalem or any of the local synagogues like the one in her town.

Jesus regularly visited synagogues as a guest preacher. What was she thinking? She was unclean; whomever she touched would become unclean; unclean people were not allowed to be active in the ministries of the temple or the synagogues; she was about to touch Jesus.

What’s going to happen? If Jesus was just another rabbi visiting the town to speak in the synagogue that day, the touch of this woman would disqualify Him from doing what He came to do. He wouldn’t be able to go into the synagogue. She was going to touch Him and make Him unclean. Or was she?

What she was thinking is not something we have to guess about. It’s written in Mark 5:28, “For she said, ‘If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well.’” She wasn’t going to make Jesus unclean; Jesus was going to make her clean. She wasn’t going to disqualify Him from going to the synagogue or the temple, He was going to cleanse her of her illness and free her to go enjoy the fellowship of the people of God that she had been missing for twelve years.

¹ Leviticus 15:7

Come to Holy Communion today thinking what she was thinking. You are unclean and you need to be made clean. You are a sinner who is continually in need of God's mercy and forgiveness. She was a child of God looking for the promised Christ. She knew she had found Him and that He was supremely capable of delivering her body and her soul. So come with that awareness of your sin and your need. Come with great confidence of His mercy to deliver you, body and soul.

If your bodily health and the entire wellbeing of your life is not restored today, then you may need to turn to Scripture for comfort and help as she would have been doing in all the years of her illness. Though she woke every morning to the reminder that she was still sick, she also would have woken every morning to God's mercies which were sustaining her in her hardship. She would have known Lamentations 3:22–24. So come to Holy Communion praying that passage, “²² The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ²⁴ ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in Him.’”

The benefits promised in Holy Communion deal directly with your sin and cleansing your soul, not your body. But the Lord will also restore your body. He may do it in this life, or you might have to wait twelve long years like this woman or longer for Christ's arrival. When Jesus returns in judgment, all who are found believing in Him will receive changed imperishable bodies as God makes all things new. Then we'll praise Him as she would have praised Him with the words of Psalm 30:2, “O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me.”

The word for “made well” in Mark 5:34 actually means “saved” when Jesus tells her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.” Jesus is first saying that her faith in Him has saved her, then that she can Go in peace because her body has also been healed of its affliction. He gives an absolution, then a blessing.

This is what you receive in Holy Communion. The body and blood of Christ are given to you, for your forgiveness. That's an absolution you can taste. You are forgiven. Then you receive the dismissal blessing, “Go in peace.”

She needed only to touch the hem of His garment, and she would be healed. She was touching the garment, but believing in the One who was wearing it. How are we healed? How are our souls made well today? Primarily, through the working of God's Word. We have heard and we believe that He is merciful, that He loves us, and that His love is demonstrated in Christ taking our sins upon Himself on the cross for our salvation. The epistle lesson said in 2 Corinthians 8:9, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.”

He took our uncleanness so that we would be clean through faith in Him. The Holy Spirit uses means to do His gracious work in our lives. The primary means of grace is the Gospel Word of God. But that same grace comes to us visibly and tangibly through the Sacraments of Baptism

and Holy Communion.² She needed only to touch His garment. We need only to take the bread and the cup, His true body and true blood, and we will be healed. Not healed physically unless He would grant a miracle, but healed in our hearts, our souls.

We don't have His clothes to touch like she did; we have something better. Take Christ's body in your hand. Take Christ's blood in the cup. Eat and drink for the forgiveness of your sins, for the cleansing of your souls.

Why is having Communion better than having His clothes? For one, touching His clothes did nothing for the others in the crowd that were thronging around Jesus. God had mercy in a special way on one specific occasion for one person to heal her by means of touching Jesus' clothes. That kind of miracle was not for her and for many—it was just for her. Holy Communion is better because Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 26:28, “this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.” Having the Lord's Supper is better than having His clothes because Communion is for all believers.

Second, Communion is better because it comes with Christ's command and His promise. He gave the instruction (the command) for the whole Church to receive His body with the bread and His blood with the cup when He said “Do this in remembrance of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:24–25). He gave the promise, the assurance, that He makes you who are unclean clean through this Sacrament when He said in Matthew 26:28 “this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

Having the Sacrament of the Altar, Holy Communion, is better than having His clothes because it comes with His command and His promise. If we try to invent ways for God to deliver His grace to us we will never have assurance that our methods are what He wants. But God in His mercy has given to us three means through which He promises to work to make unclean sinners like us clean and forgiven.

The means of grace for the cleansing of the woman's illness was the garment that Jesus was wearing. With faith in Jesus, she touched His garment and was healed. That means of grace was a one time deal. There are three means of grace that remain with the Christian Church until Jesus returns on the last day. The means of grace are God's Word, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion.

Baptism is only effective because God's Word has commanded it and God connects His promises of salvation to it. It's the same with Holy Communion. The Eucharist, Holy Communion, is only effective because God's Word has commanded it and God connects His promises of salvation to it. It is effective in a beneficial way to those who repent and believe, but it is effective in a negative way to those who come in an unworthy manner.

Holy Communion doesn't give any benefit to someone who comes not believing Christ's words. In fact, to the one who receives Christ's body and blood while they are in unbelief or

² Dr. Phil Haugen, Free Lutheran Seminary

continuing in unrepentant sin, Holy Communion becomes something that they eat and drink in judgment upon themselves. In this way hard hearts become harder.

You come in a worthy manner when you believe Christ's words, that the bread and the cup are His body and His blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. To be worthy is not to be holier than someone else, but to recognize, like the woman did, our great need and uncleanness and find in Jesus the only one who can heal us.

As we come humbly, with fear and trembling, we also come confidently with joy, knowing that Christ is here to deliver to us the forgiveness and victory which He accomplished at the cross.

He comforted the woman in Mark 5:34 with the words, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction." This absolution and blessing belongs to all who believe. You are forgiven. Go in peace. May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.