

Freed from bleeding


A homily on Mark 5:25–34

Janet Abai

The woman's bleeding

We see a woman who is enslaved by affliction but decides to look beyond that barrier to healing. Her slave master, bleeding, is brutal to her. This owner has led her to into “enduring much at the hands of many physicians” (Mark 5:26). This slave master has brought pain and penury as her co-owners. These deadly companions have owned and ruled her for twelve years. While twelve years may not seem like a long time, consider this: 144 months of blood; 4,383 days of smelly blood; 105,190 hours of blood, blood, smelly blood, draining life from her body.

May I suggest that, in addition to time, is theft: this slave master takes from the woman everything but gives her nothing but brokenness, pain,

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and penury. But regardless of this time wasted, this theft, the woman refuses to be subject to bleeding, to hiding, to penury, to shame. For a decade and two years, restrictive boundaries and obstacles seem to be winning over her healing. Even though she has spent all that

she had, she only grows worse. Life is dripping out of her body until she finally encounters life himself.

Before this encounter, no one could heal her. But after she meets Jesus, she knows this one can. She believes her breath is a steady promise—a promise of hope for a better tomorrow. She hears about Jesus. She comes into the crowd, the obstacles, the pain, the affliction, the poverty, the shame, the uncertainties, the diagnosis, the prognosis, the loneliness, the confusion, the heartbreak, the fears, the discouragement, and the smell. She comes up behind the Master-physician and pushes through the barrier of space, distractions, culture, physicians' verdicts, the crowd. Instantly, she receives a healing beyond boundaries. Jesus honors her, her flow of blood is dried up, and she knows and feels that she is healed of

her affliction. This is healing beyond boundaries. She is freed from years of bleeding.

My bleeding

As with the women in this story, in December 2019, I felt like I had paid all of my dues and yet was still a debtor. The prognosis I received from two hospitals made me feel empty, confused, lonely, and overwhelmed. I felt like a little David before the giant of my bleeding. I was afraid. I was afraid of how my family would take it. I was afraid for the husband I am yet to marry and the kids I am yet to bear. The enemy terrorized my mind with fear, worry, and discouragement.

Everything seemed dark. I didn't see a way out. Beyond confused, I felt empty-handed, disempowered, disengaged, and deeply disappointed. I was disappointed at God. I wondered if this God still loved me, still saw me. I wondered if this God valued me and my wholeness in any way. In

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the muddy valley of this trial, my faith, confidence, words, glow, laughter, concentration—all of it began to leak. The only thing I had left was a faint hope based on God's promises to me. I only had the testimonies of how I have seen God move, the prayers of a supportive community, and the love of my family, even though it was from afar.

My soul, body, and spirit felt paralyzed. Like the hemorrhaging woman, I did not stop reaching out to this God who seemed far away, even though on so many occasions it seemed like my ag-

onizing prayers, my silent desires were just hitting the air and bouncing back at me. It felt like I was just wasting my time.

To make matters worse, a few Christian friends tried to discourage me from stretching my mustard seed-like faith. Some of them said, "Maybe this is why God brought you to the United States—not for graduate school but to give you a better health care system to treat cancer." Others said to me, "If you have faith, you will accept this cancer prognosis as the will of God and stop trying to live in denial." Still others said that it was not holy to deny God's will for sickness in our lives. None of them talked about

Bible characters like this women—people who received healing, hope, and restoration due to their act of faith.

Ultimately, their one-sided “Christian advice” dragged me further into despair, fear, confusion, and anxiety. However, something in me refused to give up. Something in me wanted still to reach out to this God of healing, even though it felt like God was lost in the crowd. Miraculously, the day I was scheduled for a biopsy was the day my story began to change. I was told that a different specialist looked at my latest test result and suggested something different. By the end of the week, this God of hope, healing, and mysterious mercy decided to heal me of that which plagued my soul. I was redirected to have a different test, and the result came out negative for the previous prognosis.

Praise the God of healing, hope, and restoration! Beyond any boundary, as with the woman with the issue of blood, God allowed my poor, frail, bloody hand to touch God’s garment. And God made me whole. Jesus freed me from my bleeding.

Your bleeding

Have you ever felt like you paid your dues yet you remained a debtor? Have you had a situation where your knowledge, culture, family, wealth, and exposure all failed you? Have you felt like a little David before the giant of your bleeding? How long have you been hemorrhaging? What is leaking from your life, your soul, your body, your spirit? Loved ones? Marriage? Children? From where is the blood oozing?

As with the religious people who tried to stop the woman in Mark from reaching out her tired hand, have you contributed to delaying or disrupting other people’s healing with your churchy advice? How has your availability (or unavailability) contributed to someone’s health, healing, and hope (or not)? What types of healing are you still anticipating or experiencing? You are not alone. Jesus can heal you from your bleeding.

About the author

Janet Abai is a Master of Arts: Theology and Peace Studies student at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. She is from Jos, Nigeria.