



## First United Church of Oak Park

### **An Unknown Saint**

Mark 5

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I wish we knew her name. We would have a saint! St. Helena or St. Zipporah or St. Rachel. I wish we knew her name.

But what we do know is that she had been sick. And this sickness, it was believed that she would infect anyone she was in contact with. The laws of the people of God were very strict — if anyone so much as touched her, they would be presumed to be infected and unclean and would have to be quarantined. She was banished from the world of human touch until she was well again, until her symptoms were gone and then with a period of some weeks after that just to be safe. The laws of the people of God were very strict on this score.

But the problem was that she was not getting better. She had been sick for twelve years. Twelve years, long enough to have forgotten what it feels like to be well. Twelve years, banished from the world of human touch, long enough to have forgotten what embracing her loved ones felt like. To be isolated like that from even simple human touch, it is almost like being banished from the world of humanity entirely.

This woman, however, had not silently suffered through this. She had done everything in her power to be well again. The gospel says that “she had endured much under many physicians and

spent all that she had and she was no better but rather grew worse.”

First, I imagine she went to the established doctors, with established cures. And when those did not help, perhaps she went to see the young up-and-comers with newer methods. And when those did not help, perhaps she went to those whose practice was more alternative, then perhaps to the experimental, then perhaps the opportunistic, the dishonest, the exploitative. She had endured much under many physicians and spent all that she had and she was no better but rather grew worse — so much heartbreak in these words.

Then one day, after twelve years of this, she heard that there was a healer coming through town. Right then. He wasn't a doctor or anything, but people were saying that even just to touch him was to be healed, body and soul. To touch him — what a cruel irony. Touching him would make her well. Touching anybody was exactly what she was not allowed to do because she was sick. So she said to herself, “If I touch his clothes, even, I will be well.” Bless her. And as Jesus came by, with a great crowd following him, she found a moment and rushed forward and touched just his cloak as it trailed behind him.

And suddenly, what seemed impossible — that she should feel well again — what seemed impossible was suddenly true. Right away she could tell that she was well again. Right away she knew that what had been lost would be returned to her — she would be able to embrace her family again, to walk through the world without fear again, to touch people again.

Of all the wonders that occur in this story we read today — out of all the wonders, the most amazing to me is that this woman had

not lost faith. After twelve years of diligently seeking cure — and cure after cure after cure — after twelve years she had not given in to despair. She still had faith even as things got no better, but rather grew worse. She still had faith enough to believe that she still might be well again, that she yet might return to the world of human touch. Jesus even says so! He says to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well.” I wish we knew her name.

I am so grateful for the witness of scripture. Because the landscape of scripture stretches over millennia. People of all sorts and walks of life with every manner of trouble and triumph still live and walk through the pages of scripture.

Here in this story we find a person of faith who has walked the lonesome road we find ourselves on today — we are not the first. Here we see someone whose life is suddenly transformed by disease; here someone who suddenly is cut off from human touch; here someone who diligently follows medical advice even as things get no better but rather grow worse; here someone who throughout it all, yet holds on to faith, and by her faith finds her way back to health and wholeness. I wish we knew her name. We would have a saint! St. Helena or St. Zipporah or St. Rachel.

Here we are on the same path she trod. Having been diligent, having followed medical advice, and yet things are no better but rather grow worse. Here we are, still cut off from embracing our loved ones and missing the world of human touch. We must look to her for our example. We must be faithful just as she was.

We must hold on to faith that we will someday be well again. That someday we will be returned to the world of human touch. A world of crowded trains where people squeeze into the last few inches beside the sliding doors, squeezing right up against strangers in

order to save a few minutes. We will return to the world where an electric crack of the bat can send a home-run ball flying over the outfield fence and tens of thousands of people scream and shout and high-five strangers over a game. We will return to the world where we can hold newborn grandkids, and hug our friends when they sit down around a dinner table.