



# First United Church of Oak Park

## A Relatable Hero

Mark 5:25-34

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I don't like superhero movies.

This must be shocking to most of you because superhero movies never stop! There's a new one out like every six months, and people go insane for them. But I've never been that into them. I don't really find them relatable. I think superhero movies make an attempt at being relatable, but they don't quite get it. Superhero storylines will often show the superhero as an underdog or having some sort of weakness. Their backstory is then overcome by magical powers given to them and they use their powers for good. It's very entertaining... but not really relatable. That's why when I was asked to preach this weekend on a biblical superhero of faith, I decided to not go with someone like David or Mary or Jesus, even. But rather the bleeding woman.

Gosh, I wish we had her name. I wish we knew more of her story. I wish we could hear all the details about what she went through and what happened to her. Instead, we get a snippet of her. The reader is told that the woman has been bleeding for 12 years, she's been seen by many doctors and spent all the money that she has and has not gotten any better, but worse.

The next thing that we learn about her should make our ears perk up. To tell this story, the New Testament writers interrupt the story of Jesus healing Jairus' daughter. Jairus was a ruler of the Synagogue, making him a pretty prominent figure in Jesus' time. The fact that the New Testament writers included this story at this point should make us wonder. And the story itself should really make us curious.

We learn that **one**: we are talking about a woman, meaning a second-class citizen in that time. **Two**: a BLEEDING woman, meaning a second-class citizen who is impure according to Jewish law. And **three**: she's poor, she has nothing left. The story of this second-class, impure, impoverished woman interrupts Jesus' journey to save the affluent, powerful Synagogue leader's daughter by defiling him with her touch. This story is radical.

And the story goes on. The woman is healed. Jesus stops and asks, "Who touched me?" The Scripture tells us that the disciples are confused with Jesus. "It's a crowd, there are probably a ton of people touching you, Jesus." And that's another reason we should be curious because *Jesus is curious*. The story says that he felt the power leave his body, but Jesus could've kept going. Instead, he stops.

This story of the bleeding woman makes me think that God knows that relatable faith is not always the consistency of belief but the holding onto the sliver of hope that you have left and reaching out anyway. The bleeding woman, with confident desperation, reached out and revealed her last bit of hope. She brushed up against God in the flesh as a last-ditch effort. Is this faith?

Jesus tells us, "If you have faith as little as a mustard seed, you can move mountains." I used to think, "Oh Jesus is saying that even the smallest movements can make big waves." Now I read this, and I think, "Jesus is talking to us who are on our last leg in this life... I am not thriving." And he's saying, "give me just a mustard seed worth of belief and I'll rejuvenate your heart."

Last week, my family and I went to a nature preserve nearby and met a man sitting on the bank of the river. He was nursing a six-pack and listening to 80's pop. This man said "hi" and word-vomited his last 48 hours to Nick and me and our toddlers. He told us his family had left him. He had broken relationships and lost a baby and nothing in his life was right. He made a comment about throwing himself in the river, but he thought it was probably too shallow to drown. He was suffering. All he had left was the ability to tell some strangers what happened to him. He grabbed onto our wispy threads of humanity, reaching out to tell his story because he didn't know what else to do. Is this faith?

We experience long periods of pain. Like the woman who was bleeding or this man on the bank of the river. We suffer. Things that we can't control. Things that we don't understand. Things that make us yell at God: those things happen, and what is the faithful response?

I think ideally, our faithful response would be immediate trust that God will get us through it. Or a dedication to God amidst the pain. We see a lot of faithful characters in the Bible who look like superheroes when it comes to faith. They say things like "not my will but yours, God." And that is beautifully heroic. But that feels really hard to live up to all of the time. When pain hits, our buckets of faith can start to empty. And then what? Does that mean we aren't faithful?

This last spring, I experienced an emptying of my faith bucket. It was the day after Easter, the most hope-filled, faithful day of the year. And I really did have hope. It was a beautiful Easter. The weather was gorgeous, and it was easy to believe God was with me. I was getting the kids ready for the day when I received a confusing text. I picked up my phone and called my mother-in-law. She told me that my husband's aunt had been in a shooting. Aunt Deana was in critical condition. It was minute by minute, please pray. Throughout the day we learned the details of the senseless, tragic, horrific event. Another mass shooting. Another

situation where lives are lost due to something absolutely ridiculous. Our sweet Aunt Deana didn't make it. A wife, a mother, a daughter, and sister, a friend. A woman who was THE BEST WOMAN. A blanket of darkness and pain fell over our family. I tried to summon up the strength to pray and all I could give God was "why?" or "Help" or "What the LITERAL HELL are you putting us through, God?" Is this faith?

Is this faith, God? Tell me how you have superhero-like faith, Mary-mother-of- God-like faith, David vs. Goliath faith, when this kind of pain hits you. How can you have faith when a woman who does nothing but love gets taken away much too early? How can you have faith when your family abandons you? When you're sitting on the edge of the river and all you have is a six-pack and a couple of twenty-somethings with toddlers. How can you have faith when you've been bleeding for years, you've seen every doctor, you've tried everything, and nothing helps? HOW, GOD? TELL ME HOW. All I have left in my faith bucket is this last grain of rice. I'm grasping wispy threads. I'm holding the tiniest mustard seed. Is this faith???

Jesus stops, and the woman confesses that it's her who touched him, and Jesus has all the right to condemn her. She's sick, she's bleeding, she's out of line but instead Jesus says, "Daughter, your faith has made you well." Your tiny, grasping, mustard seed faith has made you well.

What does it look like to have superhero-like faith? Of course, it looks like immediate trust and dedication to God. But I would argue, based on the healing of the bleeding woman, that superhero-like faith looks like this. Looks like the last-ditch effort. Looks like the mustard seed. We don't have to give God big claims of faith. Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And I say, "Blessed are you who have mustard seed-like faith, for God will rejuvenate your soul."

Amen.