

## **Let Freedom In**

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Trinity Church in the City of Boston  
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Your faith has made you well, go in peace.

In the stories from today's Gospel, if all you heard were everyday stories about Jesus as teacher and healer, then you've missed something. Yes, Jesus is acting as He almost always does, both as teacher and healer in these stories, but there are two stories sandwiched together. One of them has the expected actions from Jesus and from the crowd and in the other, something completely out of the ordinary happens. That's the story that's sandwiched, if you will, as the meat in the middle of the sandwich between the two pieces of story that begin and end the Gospel today.

In the first story, Jesus is approached, as is proper and right, with all the rules of the society and of the religion being obeyed by a ruler of the synagogue, Jairus by name. For those of us who are Episcopalians, it would be to say as if, the Senior Warden or the Junior Warden or a member of the Vestry had approached Jesus. It's someone who is Jesus' equal, man to man, asking for God's help for his daughter who is at the point of death. All the formal rules of social intercourse are being obeyed. Jesus goes with him. So far, so good, everything we would expect. All in the crowd and all of us nod and say good teacher, good healer, well done. And in the midst of His processing towards Jairus' house the unexpected happens. As so often happens in Jesus' life, and in ours, it's not so much in the expected that God breaks through and we see the glory that is being revealed, but in the unexpected. The crowd presses in on Jesus and in the crowd there is a woman with a hemorrhage and this is where the story begins to veer off into dangerous territory.

In an absolutely opposite way to the first part of the story, this woman is not following social protocol, she is breaking religious rules, and she is dangerous. First, she should never, as a woman, approach Jesus at all and certainly should not touch Him. In that day and place it was not the place of women to speak to men in public and it certainly was not the place of a woman to touch a man in public, even if they were married. And she is not Jesus' wife. First rule broken.

Second rule broken. She has been hemorrhaging for twelve years. One might say her menstrual cycle has been wrong for twelve years. In Jewish terms she is unclean because she is continually bleeding. For her to touch Jesus makes Him unclean. She's broken a second rule. In just a minute we'll see that she's not the only one who is breaking rules here.

Now you might expect that Jesus, the good and upstanding, righteous Son of Israel would do the right thing. By the rules of His day the right thing is that if He finds out who has done this to Him, He should shame her publicly. In fact He says, "who is it that touched me," because He feels that power has gone out from Him. His disciples, I think

addressing Him as He must be kidding says, “what do you mean, who touched you? There is a whole crowd pressing in on you?” But she knows that she must speak up and so she does. For the third time in this story a rule is broken, instead of shaming her, instead of calling her up short in public, Jesus commends her faith. “Daughter,” he says, “daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace.” Wow! Healing, hope, out of rule breaking.

Now you may be saying to yourselves, we’re two thousand years after this story, Bill, and we don’t have these rules anymore so what has this got to do with us? Well we don’t have these exact rules, but don’t we still divide people into those who are clean and those who are not, those who are pure, those who are dangerous, those who are acceptable, and those who are not. Do we not say God is on the side of those who are pure, clean, acceptable, those who follow the rules and God is not with anyone else. If we don’t say it consciously, doesn’t that lurk somewhere in our hearts for all of us? If you don’t believe me, let me give you an example. The Episcopal Church just a bit over a week ago elected a woman as our Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, presently the Bishop of Nevada. She will take up the mantle of Presiding Bishop in November when Frank Griswold lays it down. Within the week after her election, two of her brother bishops, not calling her daughter, have declared themselves to be not in communion with her. Jack Iker, Bishop of Fort Worth, TX and Bob Duncan, Bishop of Pittsburgh, PA. They have done so for two reasons, one, she is a woman and two, she has made it clear that she stands for full inclusion of gay and lesbian people in the church. They have declared her unclean, unacceptable, impure and have decided that God cannot work through her. So, do we not still have these categories dogging us, squeezing out rather than letting in the glory that God would reveal. And of course it’s not only within the church and it’s not only around issues of gender or sexual orientation that we do this.

In a stunning example, in the middle of my delivering this sermon this morning at 7:45, one of the wilder of the homeless who sleeps on the front porch of this church, decided to enter. His hair looked like a clown’s head of hair and his eyes were every bit as wild as his hair. He marched, wild-eyed right down the middle aisle of the church and stopped right in front of me as I was preaching and fixed me with his stare. There was palpable tension in the church. No one got up and said, “welcome, come sit with me,” nor did I. He looked at me for fifteen seconds and turned and walked out. Clean or unclean, welcome or not, God’s glory being revealed in an unlikely place? Women, the homeless, and probably the mentally ill in this case, those who have a different sexual orientation, people of another color other than the majority, someone who holds an opinion that your social circle won’t accept? We could go on and on naming those who are excluded and declared unclean and declared not beloved of God. You can add to the list.

Into the midst of our declarations that these people are not welcome, that God cannot act in their lives, comes Jesus, to us, just as He came to the woman with the hemorrhage. He invites us to know shame; he simply invites us to break through the barriers. He wants to say to us, “do you have the faith to believe that I can heal these divisions? Do you have the faith to believe that I can reveal my glory in these broken places in your life, in the life of these religious communities, in the life of your nation? Or do you not? Are you so

sure? Bill, are you so sure that you have it all figured out and you know where God is at work and where God is not? That you don't need to watch for the inbreaking of God in unexpected places?" And He invites us to this table, all of us, whether you would consider the person in the pew with you, clean or unclean, acceptable or not, or whether there is some part of you that you think is not acceptable here. He says come, bring with you the faith that I can welcome you, heal you and send you out whole, all of you, every bit of you.

Do you have that faith? Do you have that faith to make you whole? Do you find that peace of Christ that welcomes everyone, the wild-eyed, the impure, the unacceptable, the rule-breakers or do you not? If you need more faith, then bring that self with you to Christ's table and as you receive Him in bread and wine, body and blood, ask for His faith, Christ's faith. That you, our parish, our church, our worldwide Anglican Communion, and on this Independence Day weekend, our Nation be healed. That those barriers that remain, that drive us away from a greater freedom than we can barely imagine, that freedom of the coming kingdom of God, Ask to let that freedom in. And when you have a chance extend it to someone who needs it, even if that someone is your own broken and shameful heart. Amen.