

## **If I but interrupt him ...**

*Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on June 13<sup>th</sup> 2021 Mark 5:21-43)*

I was desperate, I didn't really want much, just wanted this to be over, 12 years was more than I could bear. I was anaemic, I never had any energy, was always tired, completely listless.

My illness made me 'unclean', impure and touching anyway else would make them unclean as well. That's why I found myself on the margins of society. None of this was my fault, I just happened to get sick.

I'd heard about this Jesus, his teaching, his healing, his compassion. The crowds were gathering and I thought, I just thought ... I wasn't wanting to seek the limelight, I know how annoying it can be to interrupt someone, I just thought touching him would help.

I thought he wouldn't even notice me. I expected he'd think it was just an unnecessary interruption. I thought that all I needed to do was touch him, or even just the hem of his cloak and that would be enough, that some of his healing power might reach me. I knew he was on important business, he had to attend to the life of a young girl, her life was hanging in the balance, only twelve years old, a lifetime in front of her. She wasn't just anyone's daughter though, her father was one of the leaders of the synagogue, funny though, he was part of the group that argued with Jesus and now he was seeking his help – he must have been as desperate as me!

The crowd was gathering, I started to feel a little bit brave, surely no one would even notice me. The last thing I needed was to draw attention to myself. I knew I was triply marginalized, marginalized because I was a woman, marginalized because I was sick, marginalized because I was poor – I had spent everything I had trying to find a cure.

I didn't dare speak to him.

He was in the midst of such a busy day, crowds imploring him to do all kinds of things and the rush to get to help the daughter of that man Jairus.

I reached out, reached out in hope and I touched him as he went by. And yes, it worked! I was healed physically at least. I thought I could then just slip away unnoticed.

But he knew something had happened and wanted to know, wanted to know who touched him. His disciples brushed his question off (thank goodness) and told him it was impossible to know, look at all the people around him, the chaos surrounding him. Such a naïve question!

But he insisted, he wanted to know who touched him. He really wants to know. Before I knew it, I find myself identifying myself, find myself admitting it was me. Then I found myself telling him the whole sordid tale – what had been wrong, how long I had been like that, how I had done everything and used all my money trying to find a cure and how, I was so desperate, that I stupidly thought that if I could just touch him my life might be so different. But he didn't laugh or criticize me. He looked me in the face, he called me 'daughter', he looked at me with love and compassion, he didn't care that by touching him I would make him unclean too. But there was more, he wanted me to be braver still. I could no longer stay anonymous, pretty soon everyone would know all about me.

More than that, I now had to take life by the horns and go and live it, no more hiding – that’s hard after twelve years of living in the shadows.

He welcomed me, he called me ‘daughter’, he valued my faith and my courage, he gave me dignity and he blessed me on my way – he said – go in peace. I was restored both physically and to a place in society.

Healing for Jesus wasn’t just a mechanical thing, it involved relationship, he needed or wanted to know who he was dealing with, who he was healing or helping.

He then went on his way. He did help that little girl. How anxious that man, her father, must have been desperate just like me. Odd that his powerful friends at the synagogue had been powerless to help him. Guess he had to take a big deep breath and humble himself and ask Jesus for help. Perhaps, we two are not that different after all. Poor girl, only twelve, my that’s how many years I have been sick.

I reached out in my uncleanness and touched Jesus and he healed me in body and soul.

Jesus reached out in his cleanness and touched the unclean child and she was healed in body and soul.

Clearly these barriers of purity we have build up and think important are unimportant to Jesus. Faith can overcome such barriers. Love can overcome such barriers.

I think differently about interruptions now. Maybe they can be very important and we should pay attention to them, maybe sometimes, they are just as important as what we are doing.

How will you deal with the next interruption? It is written<sup>1</sup> “... my whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I discovered that my interruptions were my work.” Jesus knew that I think.

It took courage to reach out and touch Jesus. I risked the ridicule of others, I risked making him unclean, but how it was worth the risk, I now have a whole new life before me, just like the little girl.

He treated me with dignity, he didn’t ignore the interruption, he took his time, he allowed himself to be distracted, why, he treated me just like the man, clearly, we were just as important as each other, no partiality here.

My challenge now is to care for others on the margins, those who the world has forgotten, and to do my utmost to offer them dignity, no matter, who they are or what their issue is.

Paul tells the faithful in Corinth that they need to be generous, to share what they have and this will show others how genuine is their faith, how genuine is their love and care. Guess that means your time as well.

From now on I will see interruptions as a gift and opportunity to share the love of God, never as a distraction. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from Henri Nouwen