

Mark 5:21-43

We all experience losses of some kind – and a lot of life involves managing how to cope with the losses we experience. Many losses are minor but others are life changing. Now that we're all able to get back to traveling again a lot of my friends and family have been flying and, as it happens, have experienced the minor loss and nuisance of losing luggage. Fr. Mark and Laura have arrived in England and hopefully their luggage made it...but I read a story this week about a man who flew from Rome back to London where he lived, but couldn't find his luggage anywhere in the London Gatwick airport baggage area. He went to the lost luggage office and told the attendant that his bags hadn't shown up on the carousel. She smiled and told him not to worry because they were trained professionals and he was in good hands. 'Now', she asked the man, 'has your plane arrived yet?'

I know I've lost some really important things during moves – some of those losses still really bother to me. And there's actually a list online of the most unusual things people lost and left in the London public transport system – the items include a prosthetic arm, a lawnmower, a stuffed fox, and a coffin (presumably empty). Losses come to us in many ways big and small.

And our Scripture lessons today deal with issues of loss on quite a profound level – discussing death itself in our reading from Wisdom and the story of the young girl who died in the Gospel. We also read of the woman who had been hemorrhaging for years – and her loss is far more profound than it may appear at first glance. And I'd like to unpack her story today because it's so illustrative for us.

Here's what we know about this woman – first – it's often assumed that she is elderly but the text does not give us an age- we only know she has been bleeding continuously for 12 years. We read that she had seen many physicians and no one could help her – in fact, one of the major losses for this woman is that she'd lost all her money and she was now completely out – she had spent all she

had to find a cure to no avail. So her first loss is financial. The next loss this woman has endured is a loss of any sense of normal life- in fact – in that day and culture – the fact that she was bleeding continuously made her ritually unclean – which meant that she was not supposed to be touched or to touch anyone else. And so we can assume that this woman was intensely isolated and alone. She shouldn't have been in public or in the crowd that day because of her "impurity" she was suffering – so her next loss is one of community and relationship. And we can only guess the way her condition had impacted her relationships with a mate or family or friends in addition to her loss of community. Her fourth loss is that of her health – she must have been continually anemic and weak, even struggling to stay nourished, being in a perpetual state of illness. The fifth loss we can surmise, is revealed in the text – and that is the loss of her sense of self-worth...she had become poor and was alone and without support – unable to fulfill whatever role she might have had in her family and community. Her terrified response to Jesus also reveals this sense of shame she must have carried. To say that this woman was suffering would be an understatement.

Interestingly this story is 'sandwiched' – and that is actually the term used to describe the way the Gospel of Mark juxtaposes stories throughout this Gospel – one story will be sandwiched between another. Often those stories are related in some way. This story of the woman is sandwiched between the story of Jairus' daughter who dies and is then healed. Both of the stories deal with some common themes: they're both females who have suffered and become unclean in some way – the woman due to the presence of blood, the young girl due to death. Both have themes related to the number 12 – the older woman has been bleeding for 12 years and the young girl is 12 years old. And so we take note that the woman had been suffering the entire lifespan of the girl who had just died. And both of them, of course, are healed by Jesus through touch. There's a lot of parallels here for us to draw on.

While Jesus' touch heals the young girl, in the case of the hemorrhaging women- it is the woman who does the touching to find healing. We can only imagine her act was entirely desperate- she had run out of all options but somehow still had enough faith in God to seek out, reach out and touch the hem of Jesus' garment. Immediately Jesus is aware that God's power has flowed through him and he asks, "who touched me?" We learn that the woman is with fear and trembling. Again, this woman was not supposed to be there or to touch anyone – and now she has touched this public figure - this rabbi well known for his miracles. She then falls down before Jesus and tells him the whole truth. She must have feared the worst – believing she may be chastised or shamed publicly for what she has done. But what is Jesus' reaction? He calls her "daughter" – a term of endearment - he shows her compassion and dignity and tells her that her faith has made her well – he is lifting her up in front of the crowd as an example of faith and then, of course, assures her that she has been healed and bids her to go with a blessing of peace. "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

We all suffer losses. What losses have you suffered from? What losses are you facing right now?

Like the woman in the story, we all faced loss and isolation in some way during pandemic – we all lost, like her, some of our most important connections to community and to relationships and, for some of us, like the woman, even lost the grace of human touch.

During the past several months working with the Diocese and the unaccompanied minors – the children at the Convention Center doing pastoral care - we heard stories of tremendous loss. Young girls who did not want to leave all that they knew- who did not want to leave their land or home or their friends and other loved one – but they describe having no choice due to a variety of sad and even traumatic and tragic circumstances. I

have had many losses – but none like theirs. We all suffer losses...ad some more than others.

No one can fully understand the losses that you face. Loss itself, like grief, can be isolating because no one else completely gets it. But God does. We, like the woman in story, are known to God – our losses and the depth of whatever we suffer is known by God. And, like the woman, we have the opportunity to reach out our hand and touch God – through prayer, through worship, through our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. And we, like the woman, may be afraid – but we will not be met with scorn or shame because, like her, we will be embraced as a child of God. When Jesus healed her and treated her with compassion and dignity, he was not only healing her body but was restoring her place in the community, was assuring of her of her worth, and was restoring her back into relationship. God desires healing for you too. And God desires your restoration into relationship and community and to know you are loved.

Whatever losses you are dealing with or may suffer in the future – know that the message of healing is yours too – and hear God say to you as he did to her: "Child, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed."

Amen.