



Central Peninsula Church

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Mark 5:25-34

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Shame Off Me!

You may remember the scene in *The Lion King* where Scar, the King's evil brother, conspires with the hyenas to get rid of King Mufasa and his son, Simba. Scar tricks Simba into waiting in a gorge while the hyenas start a wildebeest stampede. Mufasa saves him just in the nick of time but cannot save himself. He dies in the presence of his grief-stricken son. Scar then reappears and slyly asks Simba, "What have you done? Simba replies, "He tried to save me. It was an accident. I didn't mean for it to happen." "Of course you didn't," Scar reassures him, "no one ever means for these things to happen, but the King is dead and if it weren't for you he would still be alive. What will your mother think?" When Simba asks what he should do Scar tells him, "Run away Simba, run, run away and never return." This scene vividly portrays the face of shame and its effect upon the heart. It is here that the responsibility for his father's death gets deceptively transferred onto Simba's lap. He then takes his uncle's advice, covers his head and runs into the shadows, leaving behind his family and friends, his kingdom and his dignity.

I think most of us can relate to Simba's plight at some level. We have all carried the marks of undeserved shame. Whether it came from the messages of our culture, our families, or the legalism of our religious institutions, we know what it means to be rejected and the feelings of worthlessness that result. Like an invisible load shame weighs our spirits down and crushes our joy. It tells us we're flawed, unacceptable and unworthy of love; not as though a few seams of our clothing are in need of stitching but that the entire fabric is frayed beyond repair. Unlike guilt, which comes upon us when we make a mistake, shame communicates the message that we are a mis-take. It attacks our very personhood, our identity, and leaves us feeling as though we will never measure up to who we were meant to be.

One of the questions for us to consider is whether it's always a bad thing to feel shame. One psychologist, whose research helped blaze the trail, says that "shame is without parallel a sickness of the soul" and "a violation of our essential dignity." Sometimes it is, especially when it's

imposed by those external sources that try and shape us in their image. But then again, shame may also be our last contact with what is most human and dignified about us. The reason for this is simple. As image bearers of God we are bound to feel a deep dissatisfaction whenever we fall short of what we were created to be. If we have never felt shame we may have lost contact with who we most truly are. I mean, let's get honest, if we feel like flawed people it may well be because we are! We're cracked vessels, works under construction, hearts slightly off center. All our oars aren't in the water. And it occurs to me that the shame I often feel may just be a gift from God precisely because it calls me back to Christ time and time again. If I have never felt shame then I have become either totally divine or totally corrupt, and my best intuition tells me I am neither. So there is a toxic and false side of shame and a healthy side. Unfortunately, they both feel the same way. One, however, is a false trapping, a critical voice from the world that we have internalized. The other is our true calling home. So this morning we are going to take a peak inside the covers of shame and see how Jesus treats it. And I want us to focus our attention on the steps God calls us to take as He faithfully draws us out of our shame. Turn with me to Mark chapter 5, verses 25- 34.

This story is found in all three synoptic gospels and is actually sandwiched in the middle of a bigger story - that of Jesus raising Jairus' daughter from the dead. It is early in Jesus' ministry. He has just returned to the shores along Galilee. He has calmed the storm, delivered the Garasene demoniac. Huge crowds are pressing in upon Him. It must have been like a mob scene, like groupies at a Kid Rock concert, just trying to steal a look or touch from this guy who was creating so much controversy. So out of the crowd, a church leader by the name of Jairus falls before the Lord and begs Him to come to his home and heal his dying daughter. Jesus agrees. But before He is able to help her the ambulance ride to the girl's side is interrupted by an anonymous woman.

Let's pick up the story starting in verse 25: **"(And there was) a woman who had had a hemorrhage for**

twelve years, and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse.”

Mark tells us here what prompted this woman to approach the Lord. He doesn't dignify her with a name. She's just another face in the crowd. We are told she has a physical wound, that she's a "bleeder." She's been suffering from what doctors would call a vaginal hemorrhage, a continual flow of blood which must have caused her great pain and distress. Can you imagine? It would be like 12 years of PMS.

But as tough as the physical suffering was, the religious and social suffering was worse. Because of her condition she was considered unclean and untouchable, so that she was cut off from fellowship entirely. Like the lepers of that day, she had to keep her distance, could not mingle with her family or friends. She had never been invited to the school prom, couldn't attend church services on Sunday or seek the support of God's people. She is an outcast - one whose life has been darkened by suffering and disease.

Think about the emotional scars she carried, the baggage, how guilty she must have felt. How many times had she been rejected, feeling as if she was far beyond the reach of grace? How she must have longed for someone to touch her and help her feel loved and accepted. But to make matters even worse this was a chronic and progressive condition, one that left her poverty stricken. She had exhausted all the latest therapies, all the physician's cures. One can easily imagine her sitting in the back row of all the faith healing conferences of the day, to no avail. She had been prescribed a number of costly remedies, from tonics and medicines to carrying a barley corn found in the dung of a female donkey. Think of all the hoops she had to jump through, all the times she thought she had found a sliver of hope only to have it washed away as her condition progressed. Well, this was a desperate woman, one whose entire identity was shrouded in shame. And I'm not convinced she was aware of it. After experiencing so much rejection it would be normal to think she didn't deserve any better, that this was the hand that God had dealt her. Can you imagine the sense of hopelessness?

Most of us walk through a valley of shame now and then. Some of us, however, take a lifelong lease on it; it becomes our permanent home. We become, in a sense, shame-bound. Our feelings become tilted toward shame.

Anything can bring it on. A mild criticism at work. A disapproving look from our spouse. A memory of a foolish word we once said to someone. Having a mistake pointed out to us. Anything in the slightest bit negative can set us off. Some people I know are so hooked into shame that they're afraid to live without it. It has become part of their very identity and being. How important it is that we clearly identify those false influences that would wage war against who we truly are in God's sight. False shame invades those areas of our heart that have been deprived of love and acceptance, or when the boundaries that God intended to protect our humanity have been violated by external forces. Someone may have taught us early on to accept false images of who we are supposed to be. It comes from being abandoned or controlled by unaccepting parents. It comes from browbeating churches with legalistic underpinnings. It is put on us by a culture that shames us if we are not handsome enough, smart enough, or loaded with enough luxuries. It comes from what others tell us about who we are or what we are expected to be, and for this reason alone it is a shame we don't deserve.

In response, we have one of two choices we can make - we can rush out in search of some temporary and artificial relief or we can probe our shame and discover a great deal about ourselves that is worth knowing. We can try and hide ourselves behind a fig leaf or we can expose ourselves to the truth of God's light. Those are the choices. Shame sets us at this crossing point. And this is where we find this woman. She is obviously aware of her need and yet can find no remedy whatsoever. But **'After hearing about Jesus, (she) came up in the crowd behind Him, and touched His cloak. For she thought, 'If I just touch His garments, I shall get well.' And immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction.'** Here we see her coming into faith with the Lord.

Mark tells us that after hearing about Jesus her hope was aroused. Oddly enough, faith begins with hope - *"it is the assurance of things hoped for,"* For those who struggle with faith, it starts with a sense of restlessness and discontent. We will never have faith unless we are dissatisfied with our present condition and are longing for something better. We can imagine this woman bending her ears to the wind and finally, after 12 years, hearing the news, that she didn't have to live that way any longer, that

this man Jesus was the Messiah and that in Him dwelt the power to dispel the shroud of darkness that covered her and deliver her from her condition. Maybe she knew of some folks who had been healed by him. Maybe she went to a secret meeting of Bleeders Anonymous and heard the testimonies. I don't know! Whatever she heard gave her the assurance that Jesus could heal her. And here we see the second point about faith - faith trusts in the sufficient grace of God to meet us at our deepest need. So it's not only a desire for something better, but an awareness of something bigger - bigger than the sting of her pain or preoccupation with it, bigger than all the critical voices that had robbed her of joy. "If I just touch His robes," she thought, "I'll get well." She had awakened to her need and the Lord's willingness to meet her there. So she steps out, touches the Lord's robe and immediately her physical wounds are healed. And here's the third point about faith - faith is embodied in action - "*without action (it) is useless.*" I could stand here all day and say to myself, "I know that chair is able to hold me up. I believe it will." But that's not faith. It's only mental conviction. Faith is when I actually go over, sit down on it and test my belief against the facts. And when faith takes action, it opens the door to the power of God. In other words, it transfers divine power to those, who like this woman, are utterly powerless.

Notice how she came to the Lord. Mark tells us she came up in the crowd *behind* Him. Like a stealth bomber she wanted to sneak in unobserved and out again without a trace. But in all fairness to her, imagine how difficult it would be to overcome her experience. Like many people whose identity is based in shame, her belief system was set up to sabotage any vestige of hope. You may have seen *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, starring Jim Carey. It's a very funny, touching and redemptive movie. Like this woman, Grinch had been ostracized by his community in Whoville. As a child he had internalized a shame he didn't deserve. So he's been living in a cave, isolated and alone, ever since. Then one day, during the Christmas season, an innocent little girl penetrates his world and invites him - calls him - to take part in the spirit of Christmas. Grinch agrees. But just as quickly as he does so, his decision is overruled by a critical voice within. "The nerve of those Whos to invite me on such short notice," he says to himself. "Even if I wanted to go my schedule wouldn't allow it." Then he goes through his itinerary: "4 o'clock wallow in self-pity, 4:30 stare into the

abyss, 5 o'clock solve world hunger - tell no-one, 5:30 jazzercise, 6:30 dinner with me - I can't cancel that one again, 7 o'clock wrestle with self-loathing. . . that's it - I'm booked!" And then his eyes get big and he says, "But what will I wear?" This woman, who so desired to connect with the Lord, would also have to rise above the internal dialogue of her critical voice. She would have to walk out of her isolation and disrobe her shame. She would need to navigate her way through the crowd, risk the religious sneers and social rejection. And how would Jesus respond? Would He mirror the social ostracism she had come to expect? Would she receive a scolding rather than a blessing? I'm sure these fears factored into her thinking. And let me just say here, if you ever wrestle with these kinds of thoughts be assured of one thing - it's not the voice of God. God doesn't muddy the water; He makes it perfectly clear. He doesn't belittle or accuse us, He simply calls us faithfully. So this shy and timid woman would need to find the courage to not give in to the fear and scorn. Her faith was calling her to over-come these kinds of hurdles that were etched like stone along her path.

How the religious crowd must have fell back in horror when they saw what she was doing. "How inappropriate," they probably thought, "to approach the Lord in this way." But the truth is that what this woman did was entirely appropriate. Some would have us believe that we need to clean ourselves up before we can come to the Lord; that we need to do something to somehow qualify for the presence of God as if there was some esoteric rite of passage or initiation fee required. They would argue that unless "our marriages are straightened out," or "we get a handle on our alcohol problem," or "get some seminary classes under our belt" that we are unacceptable in God's sight. But the truth is, this woman couldn't do anything to help herself. And furthermore, the same is true of ourselves. At the core of every heart we all need to be touched by God in a place we cannot touch ourselves. Trying to fix ourselves before coming to God would be like saying, "I can't go to the doctor, I'm too sick! What would he think?" What a ridiculous idea! Doctors are into sick people, that's what they do. And so is God! But there is something in every heart that feels unworthy of being served like that. And this is precisely why we need to throw off the legalistic trappings that bind us to a shame-based theology and come before the Lord as is. And when He sees us at this point of

pain and in need of His touch He never withholds His help. Now, we may not always receive the physical healing we long for, but that's a matter for God to decide. Some harm must await heavens cure. Heaven is where, in the words of C.S. Lewis, the "great bleeding wound from which all of us suffer will eternally be healed."

So this woman sneaks up behind Jesus, steals a touch and immediately the flow of her blood dries up. What a great picture of God's power! How relieved she must have felt after experiencing all those years of discomfort. But the story doesn't end here, for her or for us. Jesus is not resigned to merely touch our physical wounds. He wants to penetrate our relational ones as well. Let's read on. **"And Jesus perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, 'Who touched My garments?' And His disciples said to Him, 'You see the multitude pressing in on You, and You say, "Who touched Me?"" And He kept looking around to see the woman who had done this. But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him, and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.'"**

These verses are packed with great stuff! Jesus, sensing power going out from him, turns towards the crowd and asks this curious question "Who touched My garments?" Now, when God asks a question it's not because He's having a senior moment and doesn't know the answer! But His disciples don't get it. They respond by saying, "How are we supposed to know, Lord - everybody is touching you - like duh!" But the one person who does understand its significance is seized by fear. Why is that? Maybe she felt guilty for violating Jewish law. Maybe she was concerned that she had somehow contaminated the Lord by touching Him. But Mark connects her fear to knowing what has happened to her. She's been healed. And part of her is naturally overflowing with awe and gratitude. Everything inside of her wants to jump for joy, run around and slap five. But she cannot, will not, risk exposure. Her relational shame is too great.

So why does Jesus call attention to it? Hasn't she suffered enough public humiliation? Couldn't He just let her go with a silent wink? By asking this question, "Who touched My garment?," Jesus is calling her to identify

herself. He wants to draw her out of her shame, her anonymity and out of hiding. He wants her to experience more than just healing. Jesus wants her to experience Him. And as she slinks back into the shadows, thinking she's gotten away, she suddenly hears the Lords' voice calling her back. These were words she probably would never forget! At that moment one could hear a pin drop. She must have felt like a child who has just been caught with her hand in the cookie jar. All of her past experiences had taught her to fear being held up for inspection, to be stared at and rejected as an object of scorn rather than as a person to love. And now Jesus was calling her to discover that she was, in spite of everything she believed to the contrary, accepted by the very person she most needed acceptance from. What a wonderful picture of God's faithfulness to draw her out in this way. Jesus challenges her, as He challenges us, to develop a deeper, more intimate level of faith.

So she comes before Him in true humility and, throwing herself at His feet, tells the whole truth. Phillips translation says she "told Him the whole story." I love that! The entire, unedited version. No skeletons in the closet. No more secrets. She rises above her fear and fully discloses what it was like to live with 12 years of pain and poverty. Shouldering all the ridicule and rejection. Feeling unclean and unworthy. Living in isolation and fear. I'm sure the Lord listened with great empathy and tenderness. And I am equally certain that He was concerned about her responses to the woundings she'd received. So she may have told Him how outraged the doctors and church leaders had made her. The bitterness she had harbored towards her family and friends for abandoning her. How envious she felt whenever she saw families sitting down to dinner, or lovers walking hand in hand by the seashore. How she silently cursed God for condemning her to live with this plague. How she had sought out counterfeits to help salve the emptiness inside. And how difficult it was for her not to take her own life. Until this day, when she became willing to place her faith, her choices and her shame into His hands. At some point she probably sought the Lord's forgiveness, for those who had shamed her and for herself as well. And I am certain that it was granted.

Now I have taken some liberty to fill in some of her story line, but what is being described here is the often neglected principle of confession. So often I have encountered believers who are bound up simply because

they keep their struggles private, away from God's light and the support of His people. God wants us to bring ourselves before Him on a daily basis. And promises to cleanse us from all that is inconsistent with His character. But notice that Jesus does not lead this woman into a private confessional. He hears her story within ear shot of the community that is surrounding them. Now I am not suggesting that we expose ourselves from every rooftop, but God certainly desires that we get real with one another. And the question is - are we a community where it is safe enough to express or confess our struggles without fear of rejection? I think we are. But that's risky business for some. Granted, there may be times when we risk disclosure only to receive some pretty weird responses. Some may respond with "suggestions" or unsolicited direction. Others with inappropriate judgment and we are left standing alone with a wound that's still bleeding. But nothing is more significant or reaches us at deeper level than to see the look of acceptance and empathy in the midst of our confusion and defeat. Sebastian Moore writes, "Confession is the most generous, secure, adventurous expression of the human heart. It is the risk that is only taken in the certainty of being acceptable and accepted. It is the full and final expression of that confidence. Only to your lover do you expose your worst. Jesus presents a God who calls for this confession only so that He may reveal himself in a person's depths as his lover. This confession in a context of divine acceptance releases the deepest energies of the human spirit." Who better than Jesus - Himself "despised and rejected" - to hear her confession, identify with her suffering and extend the grace she so desperately needed. Accepting grace then is God's answer to shame. Reflecting it one to another is ours. How important it is that we see others pain through the eyes of grace.

Listen to Jesus' response. "Daughter, your faith has made you well." How long had it been since anyone had called her "daughter?" How her heart must have stirred at the sound of those words. What a great picture of the tenderness of God. Where she had been disowned, Jesus assumes ownership as a Father to His child. Where she had been nameless and anonymous, Jesus settles her identity with a fierce protectiveness; in essence saying: "You belong to me, and no one will ever snatch you from My hand. I have changed your name. No longer will you be called wounded, outcast, lonely or afraid.

Instead, you will be called confidence, joyfulness, overcoming one - the one who seeks My face."

Jesus then affirms her faith. It has been the difference maker - saving her where everything else had failed. And though her faith was basically self-centered, uninformed and driven by desperation it was, none-the-less, sincere. This is possibly the most reassuring thing about this story. Jesus does not wait until we get it all figured out. He dignifies her faith by responding immediately to her timid touch. Hers was also a faith that refused to sit on its hands, one that was willing to overcome the social and religious taboos that had been placed in her path. And through it she found the courage to come out of her shame and expose herself completely. We all need a little of what she had. Jesus then pronounces a wonderful blessing over her; perhaps one she never received from her earthly father. He tells her "Go in peace," - with a sense of "shalom," knowing that His wholeness was living within her; restoring her dignity and resurrecting her to newness of life. And then He blesses her ongoing healing. She need never look back. Wherever she walks from this day forth she takes with her the integrity of knowing whose child she is. What a great story!

You know, there isn't a person here who doesn't have wounds that are untouchable, not one of us. We have all swallowed some messages we don't deserve. And we have all made choices that have left us feeling short of what we were intended to be. Well, there is only one hope for the kind of shame and fear we all live with at times - it comes in God's call, drawing us back to who we truly are. So what is our part? First of all, like this woman, we need to come to Him as we are, in our brokenness and poverty. Secondly, we come in faith, putting as much faith as we can muster in as much of God as we understand. Thirdly, we must become willing to get real with God and other people we can trust and listen for patiently for His blessing. Regardless of how we may feel about ourselves we are not mistakes, unacceptable or un-worthy of love. We are sons and daughters of the Most High God.

I want to wrap this up by telling you another story - one written by Max Lucado to God's children everywhere. It's called "I Am Special":

The Wemmicks were small wooden people. Each of the wooden people was carved by a woodworker named Eli. His workshop sat on a hill overlooking their village.

Every Wemmick was different. Some had big noses, others had large eyes. Some were tall and others were short. Some wore hats, others wore coats. But all were made by the same carver and all lived in the village. And all day, every day, the Wemmicks did the same thing: They gave each other stickers. Each Wemmick had a box of golden star stickers and a box of gray dot stickers. Up and down the streets all over the city, people could be seen sticking stars or dots on one another. The pretty ones, those with smooth wood and fine paint, always got stars. But if the wood was rough or the paint chipped, the Wemmicks gave dots. The talented ones got stars, too. Some could lift big sticks high above their heads or jump over tall boxes. Still others knew big words or could sing very pretty songs. Everyone gave them stars. Some Wemmicks had stars all over them! Every time they got a star it made them feel so good that they did something else and got another star. Others could do little. They got dots.

Punchinello was one of these. He tried to jump high like the others, but he always fell. And when he fell, the others would gather around and give him dots. Sometimes when he fell, it would scar his wood, so the people would give him more dots. He would try to explain why he fell and say something silly, and the Wemmicks would give him more dots. After a while he had so many dots that he didn't want to go outside. He was afraid he would do something dumb, such as forget his hat or step in the water, and then people would give him another dot. In fact, he had so many gray dots that some people would come up and give him one without a reason. "He deserves lots of dots," the wooden people would agree with one another. "He's not a good wooden person." After a while Punchinello believed them. "I'm not a good Wemmick," he would say. The few times he went outside, he hung around other Wemmicks who had a lot of dots. He felt better around them.

One day he met a Wemmick who was unlike any he'd ever met. She had no dots or stars. She was just wooden. Her name was Lucia. It wasn't that people didn't try to give her stickers; it's just that the stickers didn't stick. Some admired Lucia for having no dots, so they would run up and give her a star. But it would fall off. Some would look down on her for having no stars, so they would give her a dot. But it wouldn't stay either. That's the way I want to be, thought Punchinello.

I don't want anyone's marks. So he asked the stickerless

Wemmick how she did it. "It's easy," Lucia replied. "Every day I go see Eli." "Eli?" "Yes, Eli. The woodcarver. I sit in the workshop with him." "Why?" Punchinello asked. "Why don't you find out for yourself? Go up the hill. He's there." And with that the Wemmick with no marks turned and skipped away. "But he won't want to see me!" Punchinello cried out. Lucia didn't hear. So Punchinello went home. He sat near a window and watched the wooden people as they scurried around giving each other stars and dots. "It's not right," he muttered to himself. And he resolved to go see Eli. He walked up the narrow path to the top of the hill and stepped into the big shop. His wooden eyes widened at the size of everything. The stool was as tall as he was. He had to stretch on his tiptoes to see the top of the workbench. A hammer

"I'm not staying here!" and he turned to leave. Then he heard his name.

"Punchinello?" The voice was deep and strong. Punchinello stopped. "Punchinello! How good to see you. Come and let me have a look at you." Punchinello turned slowly and looked at the large bearded craftsman. "You know my name?" the little Wemmick asked. "Of course I do. I made you." Eli stooped down and picked him up and set him on the bench. "Hmm," the maker spoke thoughtfully as he inspected the gray circles. "Looks like you've been given some bad marks." "I didn't mean to, Eli. I really tried hard." "Oh, you don't have to defend yourself to me, child. I don't care what the other Wemmicks think." "You don't?" "No, and you shouldn't either. Who are they to give stars or dots? They're Wemmicks just like you. What they think doesn't matter, Punchinello. All that matters is what I think. And I think you are pretty special." Punchinello laughed. "Me, special? Why? I can't walk fast. I can't jump. My paint is peeling. Why do I matter to you?" Eli looked at Punchinello, put his hands on those small wooden shoulders, and spoke very slowly. "Because you're mine. That's why you matter to me." Punchinello had never had anyone look at him like this - much less his maker. He didn't know what to say. "Everyday I've been hoping you'd come," Eli explained. "I came because I met someone who had no marks." "I know," Eli replied. "She told me about you." "Why don't the stickers stay on her?" "Because she has decided that what I think is more important than what they think. The stickers only stick if you let them." "What?" "The stickers only stick if they matter to you. The more you trust my love, the less you

care about their stickers.” “I’m not sure I understand.” “You will but it will take time. You’ve got a lot of marks. For now, just come to see me every day and let me remind you how much I care.” Eli lifted Punchinello off the bench and set him on the ground. “Remember,” Eli said as the Wemmick walked out the door. “You are special because I made you. And I don’t make mistakes.” Punchinello didn’t stop, but in his heart he thought, “I think he really means it.” And when he did, a dot fell to the ground.

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