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Mark 5:25-34 (KJV) And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, 26And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse,

27When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. 28For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. 29And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.

30And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, 31Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?

32And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. 33But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. 34And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.

when she was little.

As a result of these conflicting views of God, she was conflicted on how to see him as well. But when the truth came out, about her “condition”, her heart had been broken by the fallout.

She had been forced to leave home, and lived with distant relatives far from the Temple. They had not turned her away, but they barely acknowledged her presence, and that wore at her heart. Since she had arrived, she had cried every night, and for a long time, she could not pray, because when she did, she saw her father, and she believed God felt the same about her as he did.

She was “unclean”, and would never be anything else.

Sadly, time could not heal her wounds; her condition could not allow it. She was reminded, every single day, that she was a failure; she was unable to ever approach the temple, much less God. No sacrifice, no prayer, could seem to make any difference, and she gave up hope and withdrew into herself.

The Hem of His Garment

by Dorothy Bellion

Based on Math. 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34, Luke 8:43-48

Twelve years. Twelve long, miserable years. And she was at the end of herself....

She could still vividly recall the first time she realized she was different. She also remembered praying about it every day, trying everything she could think of to hide her “sin”. She had feared the difficulty it would cause, and her father, who was a member of the Pharisee sect fulfilled her fears, and then some. His reaction stung, even now.

She could remember all the stories from the Torah her father had taught her, back when he was still proud of her. Somehow, he always found the ones that showed God (or, as he insisted on calling Him, “He who sits on high, blessed be He”) as the Judge. The expulsion from Paradise, the judgment of Sodom, those were the type of stories her father had favored.

But her mother was different. She had always preferred the stories of mercy. The restoration of King David after he had sinned, the forgiveness shown by Joseph to his brothers, those were what her mother would read to her

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Do we Need Pride Parades?

The first Pride Parade was a riot, literally a riot. Pride Parades are held in memory of a riot against police persecution at Stonewall, a bar that served sexual minority people.

There have been significant advances in LGBT rights since the Stonewall riots. Some countries allow same-sex marriage and in some areas of the world sexual minority people are protected from discrimination. For some people, things appear to be very good. Unfortunately, we still see the bullying of sexual minority students, gay and bisexual youth are still being kicked out of their homes, queer youth are still taking their lives and gay bashing is still taking place.

As long as we look around the world and see:

- Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.
- LGBT students bullied in schools.
- Significantly higher suicide rate among sexual minority youth.
- LGBT people executed by the authorities in some countries.
- Queer people hunted down and lynched by mobs of people.

Pride Parades are needed.

Pride Parades give affirming people and companies a chance to take the public position that LGBT people are to be treated with respect and dignity. For people in areas of the world where it is illegal to be gay, Pride Parades in other countries are a source of hope.

She did no more than the minimum to stay alive, and her only prayer now was for a quick death. Since she was doomed in any case, unworthy of ever being right with her father or God, she just wanted her pain in this life to end, no matter what would happen afterward.

But even that prayer had gone unanswered, and as the years dragged on, she gave up on even that hope, and died inside. She went through the motions of living, but there was nothing at all behind her eyes.

Or at least, that had been true until this year.

For the last few years, there had been a growing excitement and anticipation in the community. Many of the scribes were sure that the time of the Messiah was at hand.

Everyone knew the stories from the writings of the prophets, that a deliverer would come and restore the nation to its proper place. As the oppression of Rome seemed to be growing stronger every year, everyone hoped that he would come soon.

There had been false Messiahs, men who had claimed the title, but none had succeeded, or even made any difference, except making things worse. At first, she had been too numb to pay any attention. What difference would it make to someone like her?

But then, one Sabbath, she had slipped into a meeting in disguise. She had known where the impulse had come from, but she felt called, and did

not resist. No one seemed to even notice her presence. There, the local priest had chosen to read a passage from the prophet Isaiah. It was a strange choice, but it changed everything for her.

The passage started like this:

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with grief....”

It pierced her, going through the armor she had built around herself, striking her right in her heart. Here was someone like her! Maybe not with the same problem, but someone who was a servant of God, but would understand what she went through.

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Emanuel African Episcopal Church Murders - Charleston, South Carolina

At Created Gay, our hearts ached at news that a man murdered nine people at Emanuel AME. As news continues to come in, we are starting to see evidence that the crime appears to have been motivated by racism. The man charged with the mass murders, Dylaan Roof, appears to have decided to target the church, because it was a Black church.

Churches belonging to the largely LGBT denomination, the Metropolitan Community Church, have been the targets of vandalism and arson. As a community, LGBT people understand that our places of worship can also be the targets of hate. We stand with our brothers and sisters in Emanuel AME as we struggle to understand hate, to reduce hate and to create a society where all people are celebrated as being God carriers.

But who was this man? Why did the prophet talk about him? And how did that jibe with the official view of the Messiah? She did not know, but she began to hope that such a one could maybe heal even her.

Thus, when the teacher called Jesus came back home after being away, and seemed to have amazing abilities, including healing the sick, she followed the crowd at a distance, becoming more and more intrigued as she watched him.

He was so different from the teachers of the Law. He quoted the Law, but somehow, made it his own, even changing it, something no one else would dare to do.

Plus, he was so gentle, taking time to talk and touch even the lowest person he met. Most of his followers were "sinners" but his presence seemed elevate them, make them seem specially favored by God himself.

And then there was the healings. No illness seemed beyond him, he could cast out a demon, or heal the

lame and blind with a word or a touch, and soon the sick and tormented from all around were coming or being brought to him.

For some reason that reading of the scripture came to mind when she saw him, and, for the first time in years, she started to hope again. Her faith, long dormant, began to blossom within her.

Thus it was that Jarius, a ruler of the synagogue came to Jesus and begged him to heal his daughter, who was very sick. She realized they would pass by very close to where she was watching, and the idea of asking for a healing came into her mind.

But she could not bear having to share her shame with him, much less the crowd that surrounded him, so she agonized what to do.

"Perhaps, if I touched him, it would be just the same as if he touched me." she thought.

She carefully tried to get close enough to reach him.

"Just a touch of his robe, and maybe God will heal me through him."

She seemed to be given the first bit of luck she could remember having since her problems had started. It was like the crowd parted enough to let her slip through unnoticed, and soon she was just behind him.

With a trembling hand, she reached out, and touched the very fringe of her robe, praying as she did so.

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Suddenly, she was whole, and knew it at once. She hoped to slip back away before anyone noticed, but Jesus stopped and looked around.

Pride Photo



Flag on left has cross and Pride colors. Flag on the right reads, "Never Give Up." The sign says, "This is a gay that the Lord has made."

"Who touched me?"

She trembled. He was looking at her, and she was sure she knew exactly that it had been her, but wanted her to admit it.

One of his disciples said "Sir, we are surrounded by a crowd, how can you ask who touched you?"

"I felt the power of God leave me. Who touched me?"

He was looking at her again, and she could not deny it any longer.

"It ... it was I, Lord."

She fell on her knees before him, and sobbing, told him who she was, what she had been through, and how touching him had made her whole.

She waited for him to condemn her, to take back the healing, to demand she be punished, but he looked at her with love instead.

"Your faith has made you well....daughter."

Her strength gone, she collapsed at that last word, and lay on the ground weeping in gratitude, and then Jesus did something even more amazing than healing her, he crouched down, he bent down to her! He, who was everything, bent down to her, who was nothing. And then he raised her back up to her knees, laid a hand on

her head, and said, "Go in peace."

She staggered to her feet, and fled, and once again the crowd parted to let her pass. She ran all the way home, and showed herself to her relatives. They had tolerated her before, but they now rejoiced with her, and a party soon followed.

After the party, she lay down, praying and thanking God for her healing, when she heard His voice fully for the first time in her life. Afterward, she fell asleep, knowing she had to obey that voice, that starting tomorrow, she had a job to do.'

She had to return to her home, and meet once more with her father.

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She struggled with the instructions she had received as much as Abraham had when he had been told to sacrifice his son. How could she do this? And yet, how could she not, considering what had happened to her?

Finally, she had arrived at her father's house, and knocked. Her mother answered, and stared at her in shock.

"Is it...is it really you, my child?"

"Its me Mama. I saw a great man, a prophet, the one they call Jesus, and he healed me. Is Papa home?"

"Not yet. He has been at meetings with the other Pharisees all day."

"I will come back then later."

"You could...you could come in, and wait. I ... I have missed you. And...and I a so sorry that I let your father kick you out."

She said "I will talk about it when Papa comes home." , and went inside.

The silence was awkward, and she wondered to herself how long she could keep silent. She was just about to give in to the urge to speak when her father came home.

He came in the door, and stood, staring at her.

"Hello Papa."

"What... what are you doing here?"

"I am healed, Papa. Can't you tell? This man, Jesus, who has been talked about throughout the land, has made me whole. And I praise the Almighty for my healing."

At first shakingly, then with growing confidence, she told them what happened.

She watched her father's expression change, the hard look that had become so familiar to her softened, and tears came to his eyes. He staggered, and sat down on a chair, and wept.

"Not a day... not a day has gone by that I have not thought of you. I hated myself for sending you away. I ... I was so worried about the others judging me, I let myself reject my own child."

"Papa, Momma, I have a message for both of you. A message from God himself."

At the mention of that holy name, never spoken but once a year, her father looked up at her, and then hung his head in shame, while her mother fighter.

"What message could it be, but judgment?" they both thought.

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“He has commanded me to say... I forgive you.”

“Forgive?” her father said.

“I was forgiven my doubt, my fear, my rejection of him in the face of my distress. I ... I can do no less.” Her mother rushed over, and her father rose up, and together they hugged her fiercely, and the three of them wept.

After a while, they parted, and her father said, “Let me hold a party, daughter, please. I want to share my good news.”

Soon, a celebration was held, and she saw many of her friends, neighbors, and relatives for the first time in a very long time, and each one kissed her and welcomed her home.

Finally, the party ended, and she came out of the house to find her father staring into the distance. She came up beside him, and slipped an arm around him, and asked, “What are you thinking, Papa?”

“I... I am glad you are home, my dear. But I can't help but grieve the loss of my son. But I understand, he was never really real, was he?”

She looked at him, and understood the grief he was feeling. All the dreams and hopes he had held for his son were gone. And she saw how the fear of that loss had led him to his anger when she had told him what she was.

“I...I am sorry I couldn't be him for you, Papa.”

“I know hon, and it isn't your fault. And God has now been gracious to me, for I lost what was never there, but have had my daughter restored to me.”

“And I have my Papa back, at last. But what will you do now?”

“I .. I do not know. I think I have to leave the council. I have heard how they talk about this man who healed you, and I don't think I could stand hearing it anymore, after what I have learned today. Maybe...maybe he will come here, or one of these followers you saw, and teach us the right way to serve God.”

“I...I am sure of it, Papa, but I think some bad things must happen first. The way I saw that passage in the writings, the one that gave me hope again, he will be like the scapegoat in that ceremony.”

He looked at her, and remembered the passage she meant, and saw clearly what she was talking about, and then he wept, and said, “How... how can that be? And if it is true, then ... where will our hope come from?”

“Where it has always been, Papa. From God.”

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“I am still having to get used to saying that name out loud. I will try and hold on to faith.”

“You will Papa. You are a good man, who loves God, and He will help you.”

“I still don't understand how you can call me good, after how I treated you.”

“Don't you remember what the Torah says? 'Come, let us reason together, although your sins be scarlet, you will be made white as snow'. When we repent, God not only forgives, but puts it behind him, forever.”

“You have become wise, much wiser than this foolish old man.”

“Not because I am special father, but because of Him. He will do the same for you, if you seek his wisdom.”

“I will try, my daughter.”

“I have waited my whole life for you to call me that.”

“And I am only sorry it took me so long.”

She kissed him, and said, “Already forgiven. I am just glad to be home, and whole, at last.”

“As am I to have you home, and whole. But we should get some rest. Another day will be dawning soon.”

“It has been a good first day of my true life, and of being your daughter.”

“And I have now have a second chance to be a father.”

“God will bless that chance, if we let him.”

He smiled, and saw her strength, her faith, and felt it come into him as well. If she was right about that man, there would be some truly dark days ahead, so they would all need that strength, but for the first time, he saw not just the justice of God, but his mercy as well, and knew they could make it.

Together, the three of them.

As a family, at last.

John 3:4-17 (KJV) Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 8The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

9Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

10Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? 11Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. 12If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? 13And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. 14And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Born Again, Not Born Obnoxious

by Gary Simpson

I cannot get the first line of a fun spiritual song by Matthew Jones out of my mind.

"There are things that we know
that we don't know we know;
come to the Tree of Life."

Hold onto that thought.

There is a lot in the story of the meeting of Jesus and Nicodemus that is a mystery to me. There are scholars, such as commentator Matthew Henry, who take the position that Nicodemus visited Jesus at night, because he was either "afraid" or "ashamed to be seen with Christ."¹ I do not dogmatically dismiss that position, but there are other explanations, which could make sense. While the meeting at night might seem odd to us, meeting in the evening, after the rush of daily duties was over, was considered by ancient Jews to be a good time to study the Bible.² I really want to know more details behind the meeting. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin. While the Romans limited some of the powers of the Sanhedrin, the Sanhedrin "was the supreme court of the Jews."³ As a member of the Sanhedrin, it was part of his duties to examine anyone who might be suspected of being a false prophet.⁴ I am left wondering if Nicodemus met with Jesus to determine if Jesus was a false prophet, someone dangerous, who needed to be taken down a notch or two by the Sanhedrin. I cannot help but wonder if Nicodemus' visit with Jesus was a de facto heresy trial?

While I am no expert regarding the Catholic Church, I am of the understanding that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith defends the Catholic church from heresy.⁵ The thought crossed my mind that Nicodemus' visit to Jesus

could be compared with the cardinal in charge of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith visiting a local populist parish priest. I wonder if Jesus felt comfortable with Nicodemus' visit. I am not sure I

¹ Matthew Henry. "Matthew Henry Commentary." *Bible Study App*. (Nashville, Tennessee: HarperCollins Christian Pub., Updated May 4, 2015). ebook.

² William Barclay. *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, Revised 2001), ebook.

³ Barclay.

⁴ Barclay.

⁵ "Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith." *Wikipedia*. n.d., 09 May 2015. <http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congregation_for_the_Doctrine_of_the_Faith>.

would have felt comfortable with Nicodemus coming to see me, because of the risk of saying something that could be twisted or misinterpreted, the risk of being branded as a heretical teacher.

In order to understand biblical texts, we need to reflect on who the original audience was. We need to understand to whom the stories were told and to whom the passages were written. Ancient Palestine, in the days of Jesus, was not a democracy. The children of Israel were not a free people. The Romans controlled ancient Palestine. There was no freedom for the children of Israel. The Israelites were a defeated people. The presence of Roman occupying soldiers was deeply resented by many Jewish people. Members of the early Christian movement, a movement which eventually developed into a distinct religion, were persecuted. Some people hold that the Roman Empire had what could be described as a state religion. Rejection of the state religion might have been considered to be treasonous.⁶ Because of limits on religious freedom, Jewish people and the early Christian church may have felt religious oppression.

The passage in St. John meant something to an oppressed people, especially to members of the early Christian church, who may have, at times, felt the sting of rejection from many Jewish people and who may have been persecuted by Roman authorities. To a people who may have felt dehumanized, oppressed and insulted by Roman occupation, the popular Jewish rabbi says the Kingdom of God is for everybody who believes. To a people who may have wondered if God loved them, because they had been captured by the Romans, Jesus provides assurance of God's love, even in the face of spiritual disillusionment. Jesus presented the Kingdom of God as accessible, easily accessible. And in doing so, Jesus took religion and access to God back from the foreign oppressors and gave religion and God back to the people. The words of Jesus still appeal to those who feel oppressed, to those who feel rejected by society and by formal, organized religion.

Religion now, as when Jesus walked on the earth, can be a source of spiritual oppression, because we make people think that they must keep an overwhelming number of laws and rules to earn God's love. Many people need to hear and reflect on the words of Jesus in this passage to understand God's love and to feel liberated from the devastating impact of shame and guilt on their hearts and on their world views. David Watson, who wrote the book *God Does Not Foreclose*, is cited as saying if people "are to be tried in an eternal court for neglecting to respond to the gospel as it is regularly proclaimed and demonstrated by the average North American congregation, any competent defense lawyer would immediately, and successfully, appeal. Which is, of course, precisely what Christ does for us in eternity."⁷

There is a tendency for Christians to unintentionally portray God, as an angry God, sending people into never-ending, painful punishment in hell. The possible impact of that understanding on church and society is troubling. Theologian Karl Barth observes that people "tend to resemble the gods they serve. A vindictive God always produces vindictiveness among those he influences."⁸ American novelist Kurt Vonnegut notes that if we can start to see humans as the ones who either fulfill or frustrate God's greatest dreams we might be able to stop treating each other like garbage and start treasuring each other.⁹ Our gospel reading, when studied carefully, gives us a very life-changing, society-changing understandings.

⁶ "Religion in Ancient Rome." n.d., 09 May 2015. <http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_ancient_Rome>.

⁷ Cited in Kalen Fristad. *Destined for Salvation: God's Promise to Save Everyone*. (Kearney, Nebraska: Morris Pub., 1997), 21-22.

⁸ Karl Barth, cited in Fristad, 137.

⁹ Kurt Vonnegut, cited in Fristad, 138.

Today's reading from the gospel of St. John contains one of my favorite Bible texts. John 3:16 has a very inclusive feel. "For God so loved the world . . . that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Many years ago, when I was attacked for believing membership in a specific denomination is not a requirement for salvation, I cited John 3:16 as defense for my position. A popular Christian website uses the word whosoever for both its name and its Internet address. The Christian website is successful due, in part, to the fact that the name of the website resonates with people and summarizes the message of the website.

John 3:16 liberates, because it places all people on an equal footing. The well-known and influential theologian Paul Tillich notes, 'Even the saint remains a sinner and needs forgiveness and even the sinner is a saint in so far as he stands under divine forgiveness.'¹⁰ Through Christ, there is no need to feel inferior, second-class, undeserving, unworthy, unloved and unlovable.

In John 3:16, we get a sense that the bar one must jump to buy God's love is not lowered by Christ; it is taken away. There is no way a person can be so evil, awful or terrible that they are beyond hope, beyond the assurance of God's love. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who was put to death by the Nazis during World War II, believed that the central message of the New Testament is that God reconciled the entire world to God through Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer notes that "no parts of the world, be it never so forlorn and never so Godless, which is not entirely accepted by God and reconciled with God and Jesus Christ."¹¹

Some of us have learned to avoid those who declare themselves "born again," because some people who are born again are just plain born obnoxious. The more deeply people understand the implications of John 3:16, the less likely they are to be born obnoxious.

Being born again as going through a "fundamental and permanent revolution."¹² The revolution called "born again" changes one's perspective on life, one's life scripts, one's world view and the rules by which one lives life. We no longer see the world from the perspective of the oppressed, the downtrodden, the bashed, the discouraged. We see the world from the perspective of the risen Christ. Being born again, empowers us to do what we previously thought was impossible.

Possibly family, possibly society, possibly organized religion gave you the impression:

You are not good enough.
You are damaged goods.
You are a mistake.
You are evil.
Sexuality and gender is a curse.
You skin is the wrong color.

And your heart cries out in pain.
Because your heart, your soul knows better.

Echoing in our hearts is what we did not know we knew.
John 3:16 reminds us of what we knew.
Whosoever is me! God loves me!

¹⁰ Paul Tillich (1963), cited in Fristad, 126.

¹¹ Fristad, 125.

¹² "Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary." *Bible Study App*. (Nashville, Tennessee: HarperCollins Christian Pub., Updated May 4, 2015). ebook.

"There are things that we know
that we don't know we know;
come to the Tree of Life."

Possibly family, possibly society, possibly organized religion gave you the impression:

Jesus loves you, but we are not sure about God.
The smallest sin will keep you out of heaven.
You are an abomination.
There is no hope.

And your heart cries out in pain.
Because your heart knows better.

Echoing in our hearts is what we did not know we knew.
John 3:16 reminds us of what we knew.
Whosoever is me! I am good enough for God!

"There are things that we know
that we don't know we know;
come to the Tree of Life."

Possibly family, possibly society, possibly organized religion opened your eyes to social injustice.

And your heart cries out with the pain of others.
Because your heart knows better.

Echoing in our hearts is what we did not know we knew.
John 3:16 reminds us of what we knew.
Whosoever is everybody! Everybody is good enough for God.
And should be treated that way.

"There are things that we know
that we don't know we know;
come to the Tree of Life."

There are things that I know
that I don't know I know;
The Tree of Life came to me.

Blessing:

John 3:16 is more about God believing in us than it is about us believing in God. Just one person believing in us makes a difference and the more significant the person is in our lives the more difference it makes.

- The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob believes in you.
- Believe in others, for when we believe in people, we show them that God believes in them.
- Believe in your family and watch the transformation.
- Believe in your neighbors, colleagues and friends, for that is part of the walk of faith.
- And for God's sake, believe in yourself and feel the transformation.