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Speaker: Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor
Scripture: Luke 8:40-48
The Woman Who touched Jesus Robe

Do you ever have those moments when you feel old, reminders of how quickly time is passing by? For me it happened recently when a news item on my twitter feed informed me that it was 32 years ago, 1987 that the movie, *The Princess Bride* was released. Are most of you familiar with this movie? It is the love story of Westley and Buttercup set against a fantasy backdrop.

I did a little poll of our church staff this week and found out that just about everyone, from the youngest to the oldest not only had heard of the movie but most had seen it multiple times. Everyone was enthusiastic and loved the film except one person. *Inconceivable*. There was something about the movie wasn't there? It was like a fairy tale for adults that seemed to connect with everyone.

It had a medieval theme, pirates, fencing, fighting, revenge, Billy Crystal and Andre the Giant, true love and even miracles. With its witty banter and dialogue it seems as though every line was quotable and is remembered even to this day.

Do you remember some of the lines from the movie? As I already mentioned, *inconceivable* but there is also;

As you wish.

Death cannot stop true love.

Mawage is wot bwings us togeder today.

Hello. My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die.

I don't know what history you have with this movie be for me, when I was a youth pastor in the late 1990's, it became a bit of a tradition that every retreat we had to watch this movie at least once as a group.

There was just something special about it that connected with everyone.

Perhaps overshadowed throughout this film is an effective storytelling technique used by filmmakers and literary authors called, *framing*. Framing is when you insert a story within a story. If you know *The Princess Bride* well, you may remember that it begins with a grandfather wanting to read a book to his sick grandson that he had read to the boy's dad when he was sick. That is the outer story. The contents of the book- *The Princess Bride* becomes the inner story.

We have seen this technique in other movies such as the blockbuster, *Titanic*. You may remember that the story of the sinking ship was told through the eyes of the old woman who had been a passenger on the ship as a young lady. *Forrest Gump* is another example. The whole movie is told by Forrest to strangers as he sits on a bench waiting for a bus.

It is interesting that the bible also uses this technique of framing. Did you know that? The whole book is an overarching story of God's redemptive plan for humanity that contains many stories within it but the gospel writers use framing as well. It starts with one story, interrupts that story to tell another story and then returns to complete the first story. Today, we find ourselves in one of these situations in Luke 8.

Just a reminder that we are in this message series at North Park entitled, "*On The Way*".

In this series, we are going to go back and forth between Jesus' teachings in the gospels that were a little more intentional and those that appeared to be more spontaneous. Today, our focus is on one that seems to be somewhat spontaneous.

If you have your bible, let's open to the gospel of Luke 8:40-48. In the text, the story begins with Jesus headed to the home of Jairus to attend to his daughter who was dying. In fact, the NIV translation of Luke 8:42, Jesus was *on his way*... As we are beginning to see through this message series, a lot can happen, *on the way* in life.

Let's take a closer look at a few of the details of these stories. First, there is Jairus. He is described in,

Luke 8:41

Then a man named Jairus, a leader of the local synagogue,

As a ruler in the local synagogue, Jairus would have been a prominent member of the religious elite in this society which meant that there was probably some friction between him and Jesus. Remember, Jesus' teaching at this time was making the Jewish religious leaders a little nervous so at best, Jairus probably kept a distance between him and Jesus. That is, until disaster strikes his family.

Look as the text continues.

Luke 8:41-42

Then a man named Jairus, a leader of the local synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come home with him. His only daughter, who was about twelve years old, was dying.

Jairus' daughter, who we are told is about 12 years old, was very sick and on the verge of dying. Now this distraught father, with hope slipping away gets word that Jesus has returned to town. So he swallows his pride and forgets about their religious or political differences and runs and falls at the feet of Jesus begging him, *please come to my home and look after my daughter.*

Jairus knows that despite their theological differences, Jesus is the one and only person who could heal his daughter. Desperate times call for desperate measures. For this synagogue leader to be on his knees in public begging and pleading for Jesus to heal his daughter was shameful in this culture. But that is the heart of a father isn't it? Are there any fathers in here? Have you ever been in a situation where you were so concerned for your child that you would do anything, no matter how

you looked to ensure that they were cared for? When my oldest son, Scotty was a little guy, he used to get these stomach aches that would just leave him writhing in pain. To see him in that condition just ripped my heart out.

At the time, the doctors diagnosed it as a twisted bowel. Periodically, depending on what activity Scotty was doing, his bowel could get twisted and leave him in this terrible pain. Carolyn and I were told that when it happens we were to lay him out, just kind of stretch him out and hopefully it would dissipate in time. On one occasion however, it was particularly bad and nothing was helping so, I rushed him up to the hospital and carried him into the ER. With tears in my eyes, I explain to the triage nurse what had happened and begged her to get some help for my boy. We waited right through the night for a doctor to see us and I just held him in the waiting room, pleading with God to give my child some reprieve from his pain.

Fortunately, Scotty has outgrown this condition but for some of you in here today, you know what it is to have a chronically sick child and the desperation that can well up inside you to get them some healing and relief, no matter what it takes or how you look. You know well, the heart of Jairus in this text.

Obviously, this father's despair struck a chord with Jesus so he sets out to go with Jairus to the bedside of his daughter. There were crowds jostling all around him and then an unknown woman causes an interruption to Jesus' progress. This is when we get introduced to the story within a story that I mentioned earlier.

We are not given the woman's name, but we do have some important details of her life that we should take note of.

Look at *Luke 8:43*

A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding, and she could find no cure.

Now for us, reading this story through the lens of our 21st century culture, this may not elicit anything more than pity in us. Poor woman, to have to endure that nuisance and discomfort for 12 years. It's a pity. For the listeners of Jesus day thought, this woman's condition was a big deal. Firstly, as I

mentioned, this woman has suffered for 12 years from some kind of incurable condition that caused her to bleed constantly. We are not exactly sure what the condition was but it not only caused discomfort and inconvenience, she was suffering. It was painful. This story is also told in the gospel of Mark, and there it gives a few more details about her plight.

*Mark 5:26, says that the woman,
She had suffered a great deal from many doctors, and over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse.*

The woman's constant hemorrhaging probably left her anemic, weak and breathless so that even walking would have been difficult.

The text says, she had spent all of her money trying to find a cure, so she probably now had to rely on the mercy of others, perhaps strangers to get food and basic essentials. Remember, there were no foodbanks or social agencies at this time. She was alone. We are not told of anyone who was advocating or caring for her to ensure that she gets the help she needs. Can you image? Have you ever found yourself in such a dire circumstance?

Sick, poor and alone. That is a recipe for desperation isn't it? Oh and I forgot to mention one very important societal repercussion to this woman's story. Due to her continual bleeding, in this first century world, she would have been deemed to be unclean according to Jewish law that guided this culture.

In the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament, there are a number of rules and restrictions related to personal purity.

*Leviticus 15:25
"If a woman has a flow of blood for many days that is unrelated to her menstrual period, or if the blood continues beyond the normal period, she is ceremonially unclean. As during her menstrual period, the woman will be unclean as long as the discharge continues.*

So this woman was not only sick, poor and lonely as if that weren't enough, she was also considered

unclean and that is where the true shame and desperation would come in. Due to her condition, this woman was not even to be in the company of another person, let alone be in the midst of this social gathering or a crowd of people. She was an outcast and was required by Jewish law to remain separate from other people because everything and everyone that she would touch or bump into would be considered unclean as well. In fact, if a person who was unclean in this society ever found that they needed to step out in public, they were required by law to declare it for everyone to hear, *Unclean, I am unclean*. The reason? So that people could clear a path for her. They could get out of her way, for fear of coming into any sort of contact with this tainted human being and catching something themselves. Can you imagine how shameful that would be?

Shame. Have you ever been shamed? Throughout the centuries shame has looked differently in different societies. In the middle ages, villagers would cast out those who had acted dishonorably. Send them into exile. Medieval times had the stockade where offenders would be locked up in the public square to be ridiculed by all who passed by. In the 17th century, women adulterers were forced to wear a scarlet "A" in public.

Today in our digital age, shame can have a broader and deeper impact. Any act of indiscretion can now be caught on video and posted online instantaneously for the world to see. Last February, a 9 second video of a woman tossing a chair off a 45th floor balcony in Toronto hit the internet. It sparked widespread outrage and the woman was shamed into surrendering to police a short time later. But it didn't stop there. Memes and the *#girlchair*, continued to pile on and cyberbully this woman relentlessly. But in all of these cases, the person who was shamed had at least done something that contributed to the shaming however justified or unjustified it was.

For this woman in the text, her condition was beyond her control. Nothing that she had done had brought on her predicament. She had tried to find healing but to no avail and it would probably be fair to say that she now finds herself somewhat desperate. There is no doubt that this woman would have heard of Jesus. He made regular circuits throughout the towns and villages of the day. We know that his reputation was building as a healer

and teacher. In fact, just a short time before this, it says about Jesus in,

Mark 3:8, 10

The news about his miracles had spread far and wide, and vast numbers of people came to see him...He had healed many people that day, so all the sick people eagerly pushed forward to touch him.

They thought that if they could just touch him, perhaps they too would be healed. This woman probably felt the same way. If I could just touch him. When she heard that Jesus would be coming through Capernaum some accounts said that she travelled 50 km in her weakened condition. Remember, she had no one to advocate for her. No one to petition Jesus to come to her home like Jairus could do for his daughter. No, she had to go to Jesus.

She risked everything didn't she? She risked her health, she could have died on the way to get to Jesus. She risked her reputation and personal dignity such that it was and she risked punishment, imprisonment and perhaps even a death sentence. She knew to be there in the midst of the crowd around Jesus on this day in her condition was a crime that if found out, she could be severely punished. She risked it all for a chance, for an opportunity to be healed by Jesus. To be clean. She was desperate. But was that her sole motivation? Was it really desperation? It played a part for sure but what prompted her to do what she did next?

Luke 8:44

Coming up behind Jesus, she touched the fringe of his robe.

If only I could just touch his robe, I will be healed so she throws all caution to the wind as she presses through the mob around Jesus, stretching, stretching and she feels the edge of Jesus' robe.

Luke 8:44

Immediately, the bleeding stopped.

Just like that, she was healed. After twelve long years of being subject to this debilitating condition, she is healed. Can you imagine the joy? How she must have felt in that moment? I have been nursing a cough and cold all this week and it was a nuisance at best. Am I ever glad it is finally going away!

But, have you ever had a condition that has persisted for days or maybe weeks? The relief that you feel when it was gone. Can you imagine years? Having a persistent ailment for 12 years!

I can just picture this woman huddled in the streets as the crowd continues to pass her by, an expression of pure joy, bliss across her face. Tears rolling down her cheeks. Maybe relief as she realizes that she is healed and she got away with it. No one discovered her secret. She was able to get through the crowds with no one recognizing her or her condition to touch Jesus's robe. Thank goodness that her uncleanness was not passed on to Him! That was a risk but instead, it was his healing power that was passed to her. Mission accomplished. She is healed. Time to head back home.

Hold on just a minute. Now it's Jesus' turn.

Luke 8:45

"Who touched me?" Jesus asked.

Who touched my robe? Now what is Jesus up to here? Right away everyone around him starts denying it. *I didn't touch your robe. It wasn't me!* Then Peter blurts out.

Luke 8:45

"Master, this whole crowd is pressing up against you."

In other words, *it could have been anyone, Jesus! With all of the commotion around us does it really matter who touched you? It was probably just an accident.*

Now remember the story within a story. Jairus is standing right there with Jesus. Understandably, he is in a hurry to get him to the bedside of his daughter before she dies, so that he can heal her. There is no time to waste and yet now Jesus has been distracted by someone touching his robe. You can picture Jairus agreeing with Peter, *yeah Jesus it could be anyone, let's keep going. Come on, come one, come on.* But there is something deeper going on here.

Put yourself in the shoes of the woman now. How she must have felt. Momentary exuberance thinking that she had accomplished what she had come to accomplish. Overwhelmed with gratitude for sure but given the circumstances hoping to quietly slip away from the crowd and head back home. Now,

Jesus stops everything and singles her out. Have you ever been singled out? In front of a crowd of people? Many of you know that I am in school these days and the whole focus of my program is the area of preaching and communication. So, you can imagine that over the past few years, I have had to make a number of presentations and preach sermons in front of my classmates and my professors. It is one thing to stand before all of you on a weekly basis where you tend to be so supportive and gracious. Well most of you.

Just a little confession, if you ever find me locking onto your face anytime during my sermon, it is probably because you've maybe given me a little smile or a nod that I have found comforting. You are tracking with me. *Yes, Paul go on. Even if no one else in this room understands a thing you are talking about, I am with you brother.* That just gives me the encouragement I need to get through soldier through. Either that or I am looking at you because the point I am making in that moment was prepared just for you!

Standing in front of my preaching peers and professors however, their motive is different. It is for critical evaluation and they are observing and willing to comment on everything from the content of my sermon. To the way I present it. To the way I combed my hair that day, such as it is. I can feel totally exposed, totally alone and vulnerable. Have you ever felt like that? Just as there is a method to their madness, to help me become a better preacher, Jesus also has a reason for drawing attention to the person who touched his robe. Jesus continues,

Luke 8:46

"Someone deliberately touched me, for I felt healing power go out from me."

Jairus must be thinking, *Again with the robe?! Forget about it, we have to get to my house.*

In this instant, you can just sense that this woman had a decision to make. She could hide in the crowd or she could fess up. Desperate times. But maybe desperation wasn't her motivation in the first place. Is that a possibility?

The definition of desperation is *a state of despair, typically one that results in rash or extreme behavior.* A woman motivated by desperation

perhaps would have fled the moment that she was caught, won't she?

If despair was your motivation, the moment Jesus called out, *who touched my robe*, you would have high tailed it out of there, won't you? RUN! That is rash and extreme but look at how the woman responds to Jesus.

Luke 8:47

When the woman realized that she could not stay hidden, she began to tremble and fell to her knees in front of him.

The whole crowd heard her explain why she had touched him and that she had been immediately healed. Oh, she was frightened and trembling for sure. She has been called out in front of all these people by Jesus. She knows that she has some secrets that now may be revealed but she doesn't flee. She doesn't act irrationally. She steps forward and confesses to what she has done and no doubt shares with Jesus her long suffering illness, poverty and isolation. She probably shared with Jesus how she had heard about him, about his teachings and miracles and how she believed that if she could only make her way into his presence and touch his robe, that she too could be healed.

Jesus is so moved by her actions that he uses her example as a teachable moment as he is *on the way* to heal Jairus' daughter, He says to her,

Luke 8:48

"Daughter," he said to her, "your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

Your faith has made you well. Did you notice? It is not *your desperation that has made you well.* Jesus is not acknowledging desperation as the woman's motivation for touching his robe but, faith.

Faith is so much different that desperation, isn't it? Remember desperation is *a state of despair, typically one that results in rash or extreme behavior*, but faith, what is a definition of faith?

In the bible, in the New Testament book of,

Hebrews 11:1, it tells us that.

Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.

Faith is complete trust and confidence. Did you see the difference between faith and desperation? Let's make no mistake, there are times in everyone's life where we have or will feel desperate but, may that be the catalyst that drives us to faith. In fact, God can do some of His best work in those seemingly desperate times in our life. If we let Him drive us to faith. There is a certainty with faith, an assurance but desperation is a roll of the dice.

Jesus wasn't angry that this woman has touched him and interrupted him on the way to somewhere else but he did choose to stop everything and called her out publicly in front of a large crowd to commend her faith. To teach the crowd around him on that day and remember, that included Jairus, and to teach us today, what it truly takes to be healed, body, soul, mind and spirit. It takes faith.

Genuine faith involves action because the bible tells us that faith that isn't put into action is no faith at all. It takes stepping out from the hiddenness of crowd and coming to Jesus on your own. I love the way that Jesus sends her on her way in,

Luke 8:48

Go in peace.

Those are words of blessing. In essence, he was saying to her, *go in my salvation. You are saved. May the hope and redemption that I have come to offer humanity be lived out through faith and action in your entire life. Your faith in me has made you clean now, your suffering is over.* Isn't that awesome?

Let me ask you a question. Did you happen to notice the number of similarities there are between the story of Jairus and his daughter and the story of the bleeding woman? The story within the story. Both are referred to as daughter in the text. Both stories contain 12 years. The woman has been bleeding twelve years, the entire life time of Jairus' daughter, who is 12 years old.

Both Jairus and the woman came to Jesus out of a crowd.

For both Jairus' daughter and the bleeding woman there was no cure for their illness except Jesus.

In both cases it was a touch of Jesus that healed them.

The point is this, instead of Jesus' encounter with the bleeding woman being a stressful interruption while he was *on the way* to something more important, a life and death situation, Jesus' uses the story within a story, to teach about faith. To the woman, to Jairus, to the crowd around them and to us.

After witnessing what Jesus did for the women, Jairus receives news that his daughter has died before he could bring Jesus to her. I can only imagine the pain and grief that began to well up inside of Jairus and maybe even resentment. *Oh Jesus, if only you wouldn't have gotten distracted by that silly woman, we maybe could have reached my daughter in time to save her.* As if sensing his feelings, Jesus turns and says to Jairus, *on the way,*

Luke 8:50

"Don't be afraid. Just have faith, and she will be healed."

In other words, *you saw what I just did and the way that I commended that woman for her faith and healed her. I want you to have the same kind of faith that I can work in your life situation and heal your daughter.* Jairus has faith and Jesus does heal his daughter.

Framing, a story within a story is used to focus the viewer or listener back to the main theme. In the Princess Bride, this technique reminds us that adventure should never become something unimaginable, something unbelievable, something *inconceivable*. It can be right in our hands through the creativity of a book or a movie.

The author of this passage does the same thing to remind us that:

1. Faith in Jesus is the antidote to our life situations that can bring fear and maybe even a little desperation.

AND

2. We are all in this together. The story of our unfolding lives is a story within the grander story of God sending his son, Jesus for our salvation. Each of our stories are interconnected with one another. The people God brings into our lives *on the way*.

Where does the story of your life fit with Jesus, today? Where does it fit with those around you? Are you a little fearful, tired and lonely? Do you feel a little desperation setting in? Perhaps some of you come here just to hide in the crowd just like that crowd around Jesus on that day. Even our set-up here at North Park promotes hiding doesn't it? You can sit here among many others, or sit up in the balcony and kind of blend in and then escape immediately after the last song has been sung. You remain, hidden.

Today, I want to challenge you. Some of you need to take a risk and come out from the crowd just like Jairus and the bleeding woman in the text. There is something going on in your life today and you need Jesus. You need to step out and come to him, touch his robe, fall at his feet and discover how despair can be transformed into life changing faith in him.

Almost every week, I encounter people, many of you, who are going through serious difficulties. Sickness and disease, mental health issues, grief, abuse, addictions and relationship break ups. Seemingly desperate times for sure and I am humbled as I read your notes or chat with you in person and see the way that you have surrendered it all to Jesus and he is transforming what can seem like desperate times into deeper faith in him.

I want you to know something, God uses your story to impact me. To impact us, to impact the people he brings into your life. Just as Luke used the story of the bleeding woman within the story of Jairus to teach and grow his faith in Jesus, so God can use others around us to grow our faith and encourage us as well. It is the story within the story. Do you see that?

What are you holding onto today? Are there areas of your life that feel out of control? Things that may consume you with worry, fear, hurt or despair. Areas where you feel isolated, alone or maybe you just feel unclean. Here's your invitation, come as you are to Jesus, touch his robe and receive his cleansing and salvation today. Feel his presence and healing in your life. It will grow your faith and just as you have probably been impacted by the way you have heard about Jesus' work in the lives of others, he can and will use your life of faith to impact people around you. As we live within the grander narrative, the story within the story, of Jesus. Amen.

Points to Ponder

On The Way ~ A Story with a Story

Luke 8:40-56

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Take a poll in your group of those who have seen the movie, *The Princess Bride*. For those who have, share some of your favourite scenes. What was it about the movie that made it so memorable? Discuss the framing technique in the movie and why it was effective for the overall story line. If you are not familiar with this movie, talk about how framing is used in other movies such as *Titanic* or *Forrest Gump*.
2. Have you ever been in a situation that you felt desperate? Describe the circumstance and the way that you responded. Did it cause you to do things you normally wouldn't do? Why?
3. Have you ever been on the way to look after a very important matter and suddenly got interrupted or "sideswiped" by another issue? How did you respond in that moment? Looking back on the circumstance, can you see how one event helped you see the other event in a different way?
4. Share how shame impacts your life. Describe a time when you felt shame and how you processed it.
5. Do you ever "hide" in a crowd with your faith in Jesus? Describe a situation that caused you to step out from the crowd and reach for Jesus. What did you learn from that experience?
6. Describe a time when the faith you saw in someone else's life actually impacted your own faith. What was it about this person's "story" that caused it to have such an effect on your own "story"?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Invite Jesus to grow your faith by stepping out from the crowd and reaching for him.