

Laity Notes

Chuck Hall

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THE EASTER SEASON

“As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. Then Jesus asked, “Who touched me?” When all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you.” But Jesus said, “Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me.” When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.” (Luke 8:43-48)

I wonder where this woman was during the first Easter season? The event described occurred in Galilee, immediately after Jesus returned from the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, having run all those pigs into the lake. From this, we might fairly assume that she was a Galilean. The text offers no reason to think otherwise. We know little of her social status. How much was “all her money?” Paying physicians would suggest that she had some means, but beyond that small hint we are left to wonder. Mark 5:25-34 and Matthew 9:20-22 offer no additional information. The story does make plain that during the twelve years she suffered bleeding, she would have been ritually impure within her own Jewish community and not have participated in religious ceremonies. Anyone who touched her in that state would have become ritually impure. Her problem extended to close family and friends.

We also know that this woman was courageous. It took great courage for her to work her way through the crowd surrounding Jesus to get close

enough to touch his garment and to risk his reaction. There must have been plenty of pushing and jostling along the way. Her effort required persistence and courage. And what a reward. Her hemorrhage stopped. A twelve-year problem was erased by a touch. What relief! Her conviction that had brought her to this point had proven true. Touching had healed.

Her moment of joy must have been shattered by that question: “Who touched me?” All others quickly claimed innocence, and Peter tried to explain it away by the crowded situation. But Jesus would not be deterred: “Who touched me?” Did the crowd become silent? How long was that pause? How long did it take for the woman to conclude that she could not remain hidden? A few moments? A minute? However long, that silence must have seemed like eternity to her. What a frightful moment it must have been.

At this decisive point courage trumped fear. Her “trembling” and “falling down” said it all. She was scared to death. Despite her fear, she gathered all her courage and came forward, in front of everyone, to admit that she was the one who had touched him. She told them that her bleeding had stopped. She confessed all. Was there another silent pause?

Jesus then spoke: “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.” From joy, to terror, to a deep sense of peace, riding on the words of Jesus. One of those moments which forever remains a clear image in your mind.

Would she later have made that long trek from Galilee to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover that turned out to be the last one for Jesus? Or did she remain in Galilee that year and instead hear the news a few days later, the time it would have taken pilgrims to walk back home after their Jerusalem visit? Upon hearing the news about Jesus' crucifixion, would she then have packed her belongings and gone south to join the fledgling group that began to gather? If she went to Jerusalem upon hearing the news, would she have remained there and stayed away from home for the full seven weeks until Pentecost? Or did she travel to Jerusalem, stay a few weeks, and return to Galilee before Pentecost? And miss by a few days the most famous Pentecost of all?

Where did this woman spend her first Easter season? I wonder?

WHAT CAN I DO?

On January 12 we voted to table merger talks and chose instead to have a go at this ourselves. That was a courageous decision. The odds are against us. We have chosen a difficult route. I think it is fair to say that the very survival of our church is at stake. Many good things have been set in motion during the past three months, but we are a long way from being out of the woods and we cannot afford to let our guard down or our energy lapse.

For each of us the January 12th decision means something a little bit different. For this reason, we can expect a variety of responses, and it would be foolish to expect the same response from all. As individuals we are different, and our manners of response will be different. While each of us faces the question, “What can I do?” there are as many avenues of response as there are members in our congregation. Each of us has our own way of things, and there is room under our church roof for all of us.

Allowing for such differences, we each remain faced with the question, “What can I do?” In seeking our answer we might look to the woman who touched the fringe of Jesus’ clothes. We might borrow a small chapter from her book of courage. Each of us has a reservoir of courage, and this might well be the moment to draw upon it. For some this might mean a telephone call, for some it might mean dropping an extra nickel into the offering plate, for some it might mean going to church when they would rather not, for some it might mean picking up a paint brush, and for some it might mean putting on an apron. These are but a few examples from an endless list.

What happened to the woman who touched the robe of Jesus did not happen solely to her. The crowd about her could not have escaped the influence of what they saw and heard. They could not have escaped the power of that setting. Who knows how many in that crowd found some extra courage within themselves after watching the woman? Who knows how many over the centuries after having heard or read her story have found themselves renewed and strengthened for a difficult task? Who knows how many of us might draw strength from doing that little something extra we come up with as our answer to the question, “What can I do?” It might not be obvious and it may not readily

come to mind, but for each of us there is a courageous answer to the question, “What can I do?” Our individual answers to this question will set the tone and the shape of our response as a church congregation. The hill might be steep, but it is only a hill. We all are climbers. Each of us has climbed hills before.

UNITED METHODIST WOMEN

Each year the United Methodist Women attend three study sessions to broaden their education. One study pertains to social justice, another covers a specific country, and the third is a Bible study. This year their Bible study will cover the Book of James.

I have been asked to teach this class about James, and would like to include the United Methodist Women in our regular Sunday School class for the four-week study. In our regular Sunday School class we have been studying the Book of Exodus since February and are currently in the wilderness wanderings, between the deliverance from Egypt and the encounter on Mount Sinai between Moses and God.

In the near future, we will interrupt our study of Exodus and switch to a four-week study of James to accommodate the United Methodist Women. For those wishing to bone up for James, you might read the recommended book by Elsa Tamez, *The Scandalous Message of James: Faith Without Works Is Dead*. Everyone is welcome to participate in this study.

The New Testament has 27 books. These include the four Gospels followed by Acts and ending with Revelations. Between Acts and Revelations are 21 letters. Of these 21 letters, 14 belong to what is known as the Pauline corpus. Paul wrote seven, and those influenced by Paul’s teaching wrote the other 7. The remaining 7 letters outside the Pauline corpus are known as the “general” or “catholic” epistles because they do not appear to have been written to any specific church and are more general in their approach. The term “catholic” is used in the sense of “general.” The Book of James is the first of these seven catholic epistles. The other 6 include 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, and Jude.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Please email me at cjhall_45@yahoo.com or leave a telephone message at 404-1894.