

Sometimes the most important things that happen to you in life are the intrusions. I'm sure you've experienced this: You're on your way somewhere, with an agenda, a clear, direct purpose in mind, and you get distracted. Something else comes up that demands your attention, and that "something else" turns out to be more important than the journey on which you originally launched.

I know that lots of laypeople complain that clergy do not manage their time very well. Sometimes it seems to take us too long to get things done. Try to have some sympathy with us. We get distracted. We've set aside time to prepare a sermon, but here comes someone with a need, an immediate problem, and we drop everything for this intrusion.

Today's Gospel is a story about a woman who was an intrusion. Jesus is going about important business. A leader of the synagogue has asked Jesus to make a house visit on his ailing daughter, and Jesus gets distracted. A woman appears. She intrudes from what Gene Robinson often described as "the margins." She demands to be noticed. She intrudes into the story. She is a person in pain.

For 12 years she has been hemorrhaging. That is a lot of blood to lose, a lot of life to be lost. We also learn that she had "endured much under many physicians." In frantic pursuit of well-being, she has spent her days in whatever was the first-century equivalent of waiting rooms, in emergency rooms. It could be worse, I suppose. Were she in such places today, she'd likely have to fill out those endless insurance forms and...*still* wait. Whether then or now, she has been poked at, tested, discussed, humiliated, lost her dignity, and still she suffers.

Now she has nothing. Medicine has done all it could for her. She is poor. She has no hope. Or at least no hope except for this preacher guy, Jesus. She's at the end of her rope, and makes *one last effort* to live. She reaches out, she pushes out from the margins to move toward the power she sees in Jesus.

Can you see her hand moving out to touch Jesus? You know the picture by Michelangelo of the creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel? There, the Almighty, God the Creator, reaches out to touch the listless, the lifeless body of Adam, to give him the spark of life. Here, the action moves in a different direction. Here, the woman reaches

out to Jesus. Her lifeless, bloody finger reaches out toward Jesus, toward life. She had said to herself, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be well."

This is one of the strongest images of faith I know of in the New Testament.

Her hand, reaching out from the margins of the crowd to where she had been pushed by her poverty, reaching out to touch Jesus, the Lord, the giver of life. She reaches out and receives the life for which she had hoped. Immediately (one of Mark's favorite words, *euthus*) she is healed. For the one pushed to the margins of life, there is great life.

Now Jesus speaks. It's hard to tell from the tone of his voice if he is upset with this intrusive woman, or anxious because some of the power has left him, or compassionate toward this hurting person. But his disciples? No ambiguity there. His disciples appear to have little concern over this woman. Jesus is different. He wants not just to *heal* this woman, but to actually *know who she is*. To connect with her as a whole person.

Perhaps this is one of the most healing moments in the whole story. This woman who was an unknown, identified only by her bleeding and her pain, is now going to be known, known by face, known by name, in all of her particularity and individuality.

Again, this woman takes matters in hand. She steps up and identifies herself. This tells me much about her. She makes a bold, decisive move, a move that all of her upbringing and her cultural norms tell her is inappropriate. She is pushed out from that location on the margins where society has relegated her. She is pushed out toward Jesus. She had been told to be the merely passive recipient of whatever life there was, and had boldly reached out and seized life for herself. She has touched the center of power from her pain. Never mind her fear: will she be severely disciplined?

Jesus speaks to her. He doesn't criticize or scold her. He *addresses* her, not as "you patient," or "you recipient of the health care system." Tenderly he calls her "daughter." It is an intimate designation that honors her, that places her within the family, the family of God.

He praises her action: "Your faith has made you well." Note that Jesus doesn't even claim to have healed her. Rather, he gives *her* all the credit. *She* had faith that Jesus could heal her. Yet she also had faith in herself. She had refused to accept the relegated position to which society had assigned her. She was determined to be someone more than simply a person in pain and helplessness. She had faith in Jesus, yes, but she also

had faith in her own capacity to reach out and touch, to receive the power. And so Jesus blesses her, “Go in peace.” Go in wholeness, go to live life in its fullness. Your faith has made you well.

As the intrusion at the heart of this story ends, Mark goes back to what we would probably look upon as the “main” story, the “big” story, the story about the daughter of the leader of the synagogue. And, to be sure, life will also be given there. But we still can’t help being *more* impressed with the life that is given to this once-sad woman. This woman becomes a way of knowing who Jesus is. We have learned something about her, but she also, through her action, has revealed some important things about Jesus.

Can this be your story? Can it be ours? Maybe it’s only because I’m on the threshold of my 65<sup>th</sup> year – you know, the year I go on Medicare – but it’s my observation that, for many of us, life is ebbing away, day by day. We, like the disciples, stand by and watch people get pushed to the margins, relegated to hopeless situations, powerless, weak, and in pain. Right now, in our national life, “margins” is synonymous with “on the border.” But there are lots of other situations like this. Too easily we say, “She is beyond all hope,” or “You just have to adapt and accept your present situation.”

But here comes this story of this pushy, intrusive woman, intruding into our settled arrangement, reminding us that in Jesus Christ, there is a power let loose in the world, which is there for us.

In whatever pain you suffer, however caught or trapped, will you reach out to that power? Will you let Christ speak to you? Will you let the life that God intends for you, flow toward you? This is the faith that makes us whole.