

“The Touch of Faith”
(A Sermon for a Service of Prayer and Healing)
Luke 8:42b-48 (NLT)
By John Gill

When you look up the word “broken” in the dictionary, this is what you find:

Verb:

past participle of break.

Adjective:

1. having been fractured or damaged and no longer in one piece or in working order.
2. having given up all hope; despairing.

Among the synonyms listed are: shattered, fragmented, crushed, ruptured, separated, destroyed, wrecked, damaged, maimed, crippled, defeated, overwhelmed, demoralized, discouraged, ruined.

I wonder if anyone here this morning can identify with any of these words? Every person here today understands what it means to be broken, at least to some extent. It’s just inevitable that, for each of us, there will be times in our lives when we face illnesses, challenges, tragedies, threats, and disappointments – any one of which have the potential to “break” us. Usually, we can handle these trials in life OK – we can weather the occasional storm that threatens us, because usually those storms pass, and we can hope to return to wholeness once again. But sometimes, it seems life just has a way of “piling on” one challenge upon another, until we become so desperate and hopeless that we wonder if we can ever be made whole again.

Has anyone besides me felt that way during some season of your life? Are you in one of those desperate and hopeless seasons right now?

If so, our scripture and worship service this morning is just for you!

The woman in the miracle story that was just read knew what it was to feel that her life was broken beyond repair. Of course, she had a physical ailment that vexed and troubled her, and for which she had sought healing. But her brokenness went far deeper than that. Yes, her illness was the presenting issue – but because of the nature of her illness, every aspect of her life had been shattered – to the point that, life for her had become a curse. Until Jesus came along, of course.

In what ways was this poor women’s life broken? In many ways.

First, she was **physically** broken.

The scriptures don’t give us too much info to go on, but tell us that she had suffered for 12 years with “constant bleeding,” or as the King James Version says it, an “issue of blood.” Obviously, this woman must not have been bleeding-out from an external wound, as she wouldn’t have survived 12 years. The text seems to be telling us that she was bleeding slowly – internally. Most scholars suggest what is being described here is vaginal bleeding that never ceased – a 12 year long menstrual period. So, she had a serious chronic physical ailment that plagued her.

But we can also assume that she was **emotionally** broken. A non-stop menstrual period for 12 years! Now, as a man, I can't imagine what this must be like, but all you ladies certainly can. This woman would have been continually anemic, as she lost blood faster than her body could replace it. Scripture tells us that throughout all those years, she had sought someone – anyone – who could bring her a cure, without any luck. Just imagine how discouraged she must have been. She was emotionally broken.

She would have also become **economically** broken. She had spent all her savings on doctors that were unable to cure her. Just like today, a devastating medical diagnosis can easily lead to bankruptcy. It is likely that this woman is now a beggar.

Now, if we are right in our diagnosis of her medical ailment, then we can surmise a great deal about other areas of her life that were also devastated. If she was married, her **marital** life would have been broken (or at the very least, strained). In the Old Testament, it makes clear that a woman going through her monthly period is considered "unclean." She and her husband could not engage in intercourse during those days. In fact, while she was bleeding, he couldn't touch her or even sit on a cushion she had sat on. When a woman completed her period, she had to go through a purification process in order to become touchable again.

Do you see how this woman's married life would have been impacted by her illness? She and her husband would not have been able to engage in lovemaking for 12 years – and if he was a religious Jew, he would have refrained from ever touching her – for 12 years! So, her illness easily could have destroyed her marriage and family life.

It also would have left her a social outcast in the village. Not only was her husband not to touch her, no one in the village would, either. So, her **relational** life was broken. She would have become a social outcast – an "untouchable." And because people assumed that illness was the result of sin, they would have had nothing to do with her. Can you imagine the isolation and loneliness she must have endured?

And of course, as an "unclean" person, she would not have been able to participate in the religious life of the Jewish people. So, her **spiritual** life and her relationship with God was broken, as well.

This woman was desperate. She had tried everything to be healed so she could return to the life she had once known – but to no avail!

Have you ever been there? Has some part of your life been so broken that it impacted other areas of your life – like falling dominoes? Have you ever become so broken that there seemed to be no hope? Then you can understand what motivated this woman to act that day when Jesus passed through her village.

No doubt, she had heard about Jesus, the miracle worker – a holy man of God who had the power in his touch to bring healing and wholeness. She had just about given up hope – but resolved to make one last desperate attempt. She knew she had to get to Jesus.

But, as an untouchable who was unclean, how could she get close to Jesus? She didn't dare approach this holy man directly, as she felt unworthy and embarrassed about her condition. In spite of her hesitation, she conjures up her nerve, and moves toward Jesus. But before she could get there, Jesus has been summoned to another place, to another person in need of his attention and his touch. Jesus

begins to move out, and so this woman presses through the crowd to reach him. And she is almost too late. All she can do is grasp for his clothing – the “hem of his garment.” And instantly, she is healed!

Now, I want to stop right here for a moment to share with you some information about what exactly it is that this woman touches, bringing her healing. Some translations say she touched “the hem of his garment” or “fringe of his cloak.” And technically they are correct. But something much more powerful is going on.

Literally, the women touched the “tzitziyot” – the braids or tassels of Jesus's “tallit.” A tallit is a Jewish prayer shawl. In Jesus' day, the tassels would have been affixed to an outer garment, today it has evolved into the prayer shawl you may be more familiar with. (You may have observed Orthodox Jewish men who have these tassels hanging from beneath their black jackets.)

Here, I have a tallit that a person in one of my churches gave me as a gift. Historically, in Jewish tradition, observant males would wear, as part of their clothing, a garment with tassels – four in total, one on each corner- that would remind the man of his covenant with God and to obey the Commandments of God – these tassels are tied with 613 knots, representing the 613 laws of the Jewish scripture.

In the Book of Numbers (15:37-41), we read: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Speak to the Israelites and say to them: Throughout the generations to come, you are to make tassels on the corners of one's garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. You will have these tassels to look at and so will remember all the commands of the Lord, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes. Then you will remember to obey all My commands, and will be consecrated to your God. I am the Lord your God.'"

On the collar of the tallit is embroidered this prayer: “Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to wrap ourselves in the tallit.” When a Jew engaged in his prayers, he would hold his tallit over himself like a tent to pray. You may have observed this way of praying at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.

This is probably what Jesus meant in Matthew 6:6 when he instructs us not to pray ostentatiously on the street corner, but to “go into your prayer closet in private” (under your prayer tent). This tallit is actually the “mantle” wore by Elijah (I Sam. 15:27) and passed down to Elisha (I Kgs. 19:19). John, in his Book of Revelation, describes the victorious Christ as wearing one (Rev. 19:11-13). And, it may actually be what John is referring to when he says that the victorious Christ has his title written on this thigh, the part of the body where his tassels would hang and touch: “On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: king of kings and lord of lords.” (Rev. 19:16)

THIS is the garment that this poor desperate woman touches! She was reaching out, not only for Jesus, but to make a plea to God himself! And what she touched was the very power of God, and she was healed!

Now, that would be a wonderful ending to the story, wouldn't it! She reaches out in faith, and is restored to health! If the story had ended there, we could rejoice with the woman, and then follow Jesus as he goes on his way to raise a little girl from the dead.

But Jesus does just let this incident pass. He turns to confront this woman. Why? Does Jesus want to reprimand her for “stealing” his power? After all, in every other miracle story we have in the Gospels, Jesus always initiates the actual healing. Is Jesus upset with her? No.

Then, why does Jesus stop to confront her? Because he knows that her healing is not complete. Yes, she has been healed physically. But what about all the other brokenness in her life? They need healing, as well!

So, what does Jesus do? He insists on knowing who touched him. She is afraid, and hesitates – why? She had hoped not to have to air her dirty laundry in front of all her neighbors in the village. She had lived in the shadows of life for so long that she wanted to stay there. But Jesus would have none of that. So, he forces the issue. She confesses, and begins to apologize for being so brash as to try to “steal” a touch. In the process, she testifies to the healing. Jesus doesn’t reprimand her – he praises her for her faith!

And then, Jesus completes the healing. He declares publicly before all her family and neighbors that she is now healed. The tradition was that in order to be declared well and no longer “untouchable,” you had to present yourself to a priest and be certified as “clean.” In his words, Jesus certifies that this woman is now made whole again. Her marriage is restored. Her role as a member of the family is re-established. She is no longer shunned by her community. And she is now free to practice her faith once more!

You know, it’s not by accident that in Greek, the same word can be translated “to heal” or “to save,” or “to deliver, or “to make whole.” The Savior had brought salvation to this woman that day! All because she made the decision to reach out and touch Jesus when he passed through her village.

So, I ask you again: Is there something in your life that is broken? Do you need to be healed, delivered, saved, or made whole this morning?

As we have seen in this passage, there are many ways we can be broken. But, praise God, there is One who has the power to heal and restore and make whole.

We have a Savior - who has the power to Save.

Amen.