

The Touch

By Dana Buck

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind Him (Jesus) and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

Luke 8: 43-44(NIV)

The early morning rays of sun appear for all to catch
Warming up the rooftops, most composed of tile or thatch

A single figure hurries nigh, and so our tale begins
There, moving through the narrow streets, a boy, wiry and thin

His movements seem so purposeful, his urgency, a tell
Upon his shoulder sits a jar of water from the well

He rushes single-minded, like a man escaped from prison
For normally he does this chore before the sun has risen

If he's seen, derision and embarrassment unfurl
As he labors at a task performed by women and by girls

He scolds himself for sleeping late, his indolence is cursed
Not here by urge or whim or choice, but here because he must

This task is for his mother, now a widow many years
And all of them defined by isolation and by tears

Her suffering is silent, but he knows the pain she bears
For he alone lives with her in their room beneath the stairs

A slow, persistent bleeding is what renders her unseen
By pharisaic custom that has labeled her unclean
No friendships, no companions; all her social bonds recanted

Denied the simple pleasures other women take for granted

His rife responsibilities are like a burden worn
For her ill condition started on the day that he was born

Discounted and pitied for the portion life has brought her
It falls to him to fetch their food, their firewood, their water

He earns some coins of copper at the stable cleaning stalls
While she laments within her world, defined by her four walls

He turns the final corner, makes a beeline for the door
Thankful that their neighbors haven't started morning chores

Entering, he sets the water by the wall for storage
Then ambles to the table for a bowl of morning porridge

His mother sets a steaming bowl and piece of bread before him
Then plants a kiss upon his head, so proud and thankful for him

She asks him, "What's the weather like? It's not too windy, is it?"
"Your Great Aunt Ruth should come today to make her monthly visit"

"It's hard to tell this early" starved, he answers between bites
He knows his Aunt's appointments are her one and best respite

"Well, I dearly hope she makes the trip" her anxiousness revealing
"Perhaps she's found a doctor who can bring about my healing"

He tries to hide a heaving sigh, this search for diagnosis
Has only led to futile cures, placebos in large doses

Quacks and seers and healers with assurances so sunny
That only leave despondency and cost them so much money

He does admire her fortitude, her never giving in
The hopefulness she always finds brings hopefulness to him

She tidies up the breakfast plates, he stokes and banks the fire
Then mother sits, as her condition causes her to tire

When in a blink and all at once the quiet home erupts
As Great Aunt Ruth's "Hello my dears!" rings out and fills it up.

“My oh my, the roads, the dust, the awful smells” she rants
“Caleb, don’t just sit there, shake a leg and help your Aunt”

He chuckles as he moves his feet and hurries toward the door
A voiced decree from Great Aunt Ruth is not to be ignored!

“Oh, my boy, you’ve grown so tall.” She gives his nose a tweak
Then hugs him and deposits a wet kiss upon his cheek

He takes the several bags that she has hanging from her arms
While his mother’s buoyed and brightened by her Great Aunt’s boisterous charms

“I brought some meat and vegetables, I thought that you could stew them”
“And some clean cloths, for Rachel dear, I know how you go through them”

Mother thanked her shyly, eyes cast down and growing wetter
Great Aunt Ruth inquired “Are you feeling any better?”

“No change” she said, then added in a brave attempt to cope
“But God has not forgotten me. With God, there’s always hope”

“It’s funny you should mention having faith and trust in God”
“For I have news of something rather interesting – and odd”

“It seems there is a Rabbi who has burst upon the scene”
“He’s made quite a reputation for himself, this Nazarene”

“Oh, the stories that we’re hearing – he turned water into wine”
“And cast a host of demons right into a group of swine”

“The bridegroom was ecstatic. With the wine, he flipped his wig”
“But not so much he farmer with his herd of demon pigs”

“But, be-that-as-it-may, the miracle most people see?”
“Is the healing of the sick, this seems to be his specialty”

These words caught her attention, Caleb’s mother said, “Oh dear”
“Aunt Ruth, will this new Rabbi ever come and pass by here?”

“Who can tell?” She touches Rachel’s anxious face and stills it
“I only know, my darling, it will happen if God wills it”

Listening intently, Caleb feels his anger rise
For he sees the hope and desperation in his mother's eyes

How many times must vain belief and wishing be rehashed?
Raising expectations, just to see them cruelly dashed

Bitterly he utters in a voice annoyed and nervous
"What's this enchanted rabbi's compensation for this service?"

"How many silver coins will guarantee his magic trick?"

"Does he extract a rabbit from his hat, then heal the sick?"

Aunt Ruth inclined her head, and moved to where her nephew stood

"Young man, your ire and sarcasm don't do us any good"

"I know you've witnessed countless efforts just to see them fail"

"It's hard to let your optimism and your hope prevail"

"But God is not uncaring and he doesn't need reminding"

"He consummates his purpose by His will and in His timing"

Caleb and his cross demeanor made her poor heart ache

"We must hang on to faith, if only for your mother's sake"

"I love you dear Aunt Ruth, and heaven knows, I love my Mother"

His negative emotions he then tried to check and smother

"I didn't mean to mock your faith; commit a mortal sin"

"But neither can I just stand by and see her hurt again"

"This Rabbi may be above board; his power may be legit"

"Or he could be another fake, another counterfeit"

"Either way, I won't be part of it." His heart felt like tanned leather

"If God has got a miracle, let Him put it together"

With that, young Caleb kissed Aunt Ruth and closed the door behind him
His Mother said, "That breaks my heart, it's guilt that's so maligned him"

"He blames himself for my complaint; it steals his sense of worth"

"And thinks a curse was allocated to me through his birth"

"Why can't I make him understand, it's naught to do with sin"

"And to have him as my son, I'd gladly do it all again"

Both women pause in stillness at this mother's sacred truth
Then Rachel's tears are gathered in the arms of Great Aunt Ruth

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In turbulence and contemplation Caleb walks the streets
His mind, a troubled battlefield where faith and fear compete

How can he feel a thing for God or glorify His name?
When the one that he loves most still lives in unrelenting pain?

How many times has he requested all that's foul and grim
Would evacuate his Mother and instead descend on him?
He sees his path as paved with apathy, failure and bareness
Completely lacking happiness, a touch of grace or fairness

His wandering soon brings him to a low wall made of stone
He sits to rest his weary feet and think his thoughts alone

It's then a voice behind the wall "Hellos" this lull aside
A seated man there leans against it on the other side

Not wanting conversation, Caleb rises somewhat shaken
"I apologize, I didn't know this quiet spot was taken"

The man's reply, it startled him to his frustrated core
"It's ok, I think that you're who I've been waiting for"

Caleb's furrowed brow communicated his confusion
"This man" he thought, "must labor under some-kind-of illusion"

"I'm sorry sir, for you must have me mixed up with another"
"That so?" replied the man, "Then tell me, just how is your Mother?"

"You know my Mother?" Cautious and suspiciously he asked
Seeking now to see this puzzling transient unmasked

"Not personally" the man replied, "I can't say that she's known"
"I only am aware of her through things I have been shown"

"What things?" Asked Caleb, very nearly faint and overcome
Not sure if he should seat himself or turn and blindly run

“I’ve seen a suffering woman, I don’t even know her name”

“I’ve also seen her son, who has assumed misguided blame”

“I’ve seen a cry for healing and for proper restoration”

“Seen years of felt abandonment, despondency, frustration”

“I’ve seen faith sorely tested, seen conviction bruised and broken”

“Seen confidence evaporate; heard muttered curses spoken”

“This cavalcade of heartbreak passed before the Father’s view”

“He showed it all to me, so I could tell it all to you”

Caleb slowly sat upon that wall of hardened stone

“Why would God to you these images and narrative make known?”

“Are you some-kind-of prophet? A clairvoyant divinator?”

“Special messenger from heaven? A divine prognosticator?”

“How can you relate these details you can’t possibly have seen?”

“What do you know of existence that’s been labeled as unclean?”

A knowing laugh ascended from the far side of the wall
As the man got to his feet and then stood up clear-eyed and tall

“You parcel out your words as if they were a bitter tonic”

“And question if I grasp unclean? I find that so ironic”

“Not long ago, my life was misery; my reason dormant”

“I lived among the tombstones, knowing only pain and torment”

“I cut myself with sharpened stones, I howled and moaned and cackled”

“And could not be restrained, no matter firmly chained or shackled”

“I curried fear and terror; was despised throughout the region”

“And held unholy darkness that I only knew as legion”

“If a man were ever saddled with a rank impurity”

“A helpless, hopeless circumstance, that wretched man was me”

“Yet deep inside I never lost my hope for saving grace”

“And daily cried to God to bring me from that awful place”

Caleb sat there blinking, overwhelmed by what he’d heard
Awestruck as he whispered, “tell me how your break occurred?”

“A man arrived by boat. I didn’t know him, what he does”
“But those who lurked inside of me, they all knew who He was”

“I sensed their apprehensiveness, their fear and controversy”
“They all addressed Him *Son of Man* and cried to Him for mercy”

“He spoke in His authority, with forcefulness and clout”
“And in the name of God most high, he made them all come out”

Recognition came to Caleb as his memory revolved
“Tell me, with these demons, was there somehow pigs involved?”

The man began to laugh, a pleasant sound to take to heart
“How come those who know this story only seem to know that part”

“Yes, my savior cast those demons in a nearby herd of swine”
“And I was free and spotless in my spirit, heart and mind”

Caleb, thoughtful said, “I’m glad things turned out well for you”
“But that’s no explanation why you know the things you do”

The man sat next to Caleb, “Well, I really must confess”
“I’m not completely certain, but I think that I can guess”

“Whatever brings your Mother pain” he stated with assertion
“It must have bred long-suffering and feelings of desertion”

“I know that when my body and my mind were so invaded”
“I doubted God had heard my desperate cries and I felt jaded”

“But now I see my season as a wretch and a pariah”
“Was used by God to demonstrate the power of the Messiah”

“I think that God, who caused my final healing to occur”
“He also sees your Mother, and will do the same in her”

The man then paused and heaved a sigh, his voice grew low and warm
“I’m also here for you,” and he touched Caleb on the arm

“You’ve forgotten God’s steadfastness due to those unkind and phony”
“And just needed a reminder from an honest testimony”

Caleb dropped his head, stirring emotions growing stronger
“Well, God had better hurry for I can’t hold out much longer”

With that, the man stood up and said, “I pray you’ll soon rejoice”
And left Caleb gently weeping in the echoes of his voice

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Great Aunt Ruth prepared herself to rise and take her leave
“Remember dear, next time I’ll bring some wool and we can weave”

Rachel, thankful for their time, was fending off her pain
Knowing there’d be weeks before her Aunt could come again

Walking to the door, Aunt Ruth embraced her stricken niece
“I’m praying for you dear, that your affliction soon will cease”

“In the meantime, I’ll send word, no hesitation or delay”
“If I hear the healing Rabbi makes a journey down this way”

Then moving ‘cross the threshold and beyond the open door
Her Great Aunt Ruth leaves Rachel just as lonely as before

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In the days and weeks that pass, mother and son press on ahead
With Caleb tasked with earning coins to buy their fish and bread

One morning he arises from the scanty breakfast table
And tells his Mother he has work today down at the stable

“Be careful” she admonishes and wraps him in his coat
Then watched him walk away with her emotions in her throat

“Oh God, please keep my boy, he carries such a heavy load”
“I see his growing angst and fear one day he will explode”

“I ask nothing for myself, my expectations have grown dim”
“My entreaty is for Caleb; God, please show yourself to him”

With the house now to herself, she tidied up as best she could
Poured a basin full of water on a table of rough wood

Preparing now to bathe, she piled her clothes upon the floor

And saw that mocking stain she'd seen a thousand times before

Stoically she finished in that room as stark as truth
And wrapped herself in linen binding brought by Great Aunt Ruth

Tired, and with feelings raw, she lay down on her bed
As melancholy took its turn, while hope and courage bled

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A clatter from the doorstep disconnects her from her nap
For someone's loudly calling through a quite insistent rap

She gathers her awareness, runs her fingers through her hair
And hurries 'cross the room to see who's loudly knocking there

Opening the door, a girl is standing on the stoop
With sparkling hazel eyes and braided hair done-up in loops

"I'm sorry to disturb you, but I'm here to share a message"

"I promised I would memorize and recite every vestige"

"A woman gave me silver coins and set my feet to running"

"And tell you that she says the healing Rabbi, he is coming!"

"The ruler of the synagogue, his little girl is sick"

"He's asked the Nazarene to come to town and come on quick"

"He's trailing just behind me" said the girl, small and petite

"The woman said his entourage would walk right up this street"

"I don't know what this means but she insisted that I blab it"

"Rachel dear, your chance has come, make sure you firmly grab it!"

With that, the little urchin did a courtesy, turned and ran
Holding two bright silver coins tucked in her joyous hands

A bolt of pure adrenaline cascades through Rachel's body
She looks down at her clothing, faded dull, thread-bare and shoddy

"I cannot meet the Rabbi wearing this past-mending dress"

"But I haven't many options, nothing better, I confess"

But then a thought transforms her mood to merry from a mourner
As her eyes rest on a dusty trunk shoved back into a corner

She rushes to the doleful chest, forsaken and forgotten
And searches with her fingers to find something at the bottom

Scattering the contents, making quite a hurried mess
She stands and lifts a garment that once was her wedding dress

Holding this soft relic from a life she knew before
So affected, she can barely feel her feet upon the floor

“Two days made me so happy. One, when I became a mother”
”And, when I was a bride” she said, “Oh yes, that is the other”

Her heart is filled with sentiment she struggles to compose
Then, controlling her exuberance she quickly changed her clothes

The last part of her outfit is a shawl; white, trimmed in red
She draped it ‘round her shoulders, pulled it up atop her head

She knows the risk she’s taking, leaving home where things are private
For she’s gambling on a plan and very well may not survive it

“Because I am unclean, no contact may there ever be”
“I must not touch the Rabbi and the Rabbi can’t touch me”

“For if we did, he’d be required to pause and purify”
“Keeping Him from healing and the girl would surely die”

“I must devise a way – to this my very life condenses”
“For I’ve seen women stripped and stoned for much lesser offenses”

“If he’s endowed with power to regenerate and heal”
“Perhaps it isn’t limited to hands, what he can feel”

“If I can gain proximity and not be caught, condemned”
“I’ll barely brush his garment, I’ll just touch His robe, its hem”

“One slight caress, one grazing of a sleeve or fold or cuff”
“I have faith that this accomplishment will be enough”

Whispering “amen,” she slightly cracked open the door
And stood with watching eye to take the chance she’s waited for

The sound of many voices soon came wafting to her ear
She swallowed hard, denying her uneasiness and fear

Stepping through the door with her bright shawl about her head
She saw the nearing crowd and felt a heightened sense of dread

For this is not a party moving up the street in peace
But a roiling mob of followers, one hundred men at least

Her heart beats like an anvil, but her step's light as a feather
As she slips into the sunshine with a whispered "now or never"

She can barely see the Rabbi through the shawl used to disguise her
It's her one and only safeguard from the men who would despise her

She hears the man whose daughter lingers at the point of death
Exhorting Him to hurry with each apprehensive breath

With weaving steps, she navigates, maneuvers through the crowd
Her eyes don't leave her quarry even though her head is bowed

The throng is paused, the narrow street is filled right to the top
The press of people causing the parade to slow and stop

"Now" she thinks, "this mob is concentrated to its core"
"This is the golden moment and the chance I've waited for"

She's at the Rabbi's back but several men move in and screen him
So, dropping to her knees she shoves her trembling arm between them

Flailing in the emptiness, she only feels the air
And her mind begins to fill with a descending, cold despair

It's then she thinks of Caleb and his spirit decomposing
She cries aloud, determined to embrace the Rabbi's clothing

Powered by a mother's love no obstacle can stem
Her fingertips touch fabric and they close around the hem

Immediately she feels as if she's just been struck by lightning
The sensation is so peaceful, not discomforting or frightening

And suddenly she knows to the foundation of her soul
That her body has been healed and what was broken now is whole

God had not forgotten her, she felt Him even now
Like the keeping of a promise, the fulfilling of a vow

“I’m free” she thought, “free from that malady that fiercely clutched me”
But joy turned into terror when she heard “Somebody touched me”

The very air around her seemed to concentrate and freeze
As she tried to be invisible down there upon her knees

She heard another voice say, “Well, of course you have been touched”
“Were lucky, in this mob, to not be pulverized and crushed”

“No” she heard the Rabbi say, “it wasn’t folks congealing”
“Someone sought this rendezvous specifically for healing”

Suddenly the crowd went silent, everyone stepped back
Exposing Rachel in the center of the milling pack

Men soon recognized her and their stern expressions shone
While others bent to fill their hands with jagged rocks and stones

“Rabbi! Please have mercy!” Her entreaty broke the stillness
She quickly told Him all about her long contest with illness

“I knew I couldn’t touch you, I would not make that mistake”
“I also knew that just your robe could my affliction break”

“So, now I kneel before you here in dust and dirt and clod”
“And testify that I’ve been healed by one who’s sent by God!”

Everyone just held their breath and all looked for a clue
Especially the Pharisees, what would the Rabbi do?

What he did was broadly smile and raise her from her knees
“Daughter, faith has made you well. May you now go in peace”

With a nod he turned, continued down that road of sand
The only sound was falling stones -- released by humbled hands

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The day of Rachel's healing, now a week or so ago
Have brought changes to her life and set her once dim heart aglow

She traveled to the synagogue and by the priest was seen
Who verified the miracle, proclaiming she was clean

She now is free to visit with the women at the well
To whom she is a hero. What a story she can tell!

The greatest gift that she acquired throughout this act of grace?
Was the staggered, thankful, happy, loved-filled look on Caleb's face

This morning on her countenance she wears a little smirk
As Caleb bolts his breakfast and prepares to go to work

She stops him in his tracks when she, in joy, has this to say
"You've got a little trip to make, there'll be no work today"

"Don't worry 'bout the stables or the coins we may be missing"
"I've taken in some sewing, so your job? We'll be dismissing"

"It's time for you to study, spend some time with learned men"
"And also run and jump and play and be a boy again"

She saw the look of gratitude, the smile on his face
As he wrapped her in a bear hug and affectionate embrace

"And now about that trip I want you very much to take"
"It's more than just a visit, it's a pilgrimage you'll make"
"My Rabbi, he is teaching on a hill outside of town"
"And I want you to attend and know the savior I have found"

"I packed you up a lunch, it's not as fancy as I'd wish"
"Just five small barley loaves and two left-over, fresh-caught fish"

Handing him the bag which he then hung around his neck
She walked him to the door and gave his rosy cheek a peck

As he departed, she called out, responding to a hunch
"If others there are hungry, please be sure to share your lunch!"

Devotional Thoughts

Stories like this one from the gospels take on such a deeper meaning when we understand the cultural nuances of the times. Without that understanding, this is simply a story of an ill woman who sought out Jesus for healing. But, it's so much more than that.

According to Jewish law, a menstruating woman was considered unclean and had to be separated socially until a time of purification had expired. Any man who touched her during her period (especially a Rabbi) would then also be considered unclean until a time of purification.

Jesus was on his way to minister to the deathly ill daughter of the ruler of the synagogue. One can only imagine the risk this woman was taking if her actions prevented Him from attending to this girl (she was healed, by the way). What an act of desperate faith.

For this woman, menstrual bleeding wasn't something she dealt with each month, it was an ongoing condition that lasted twelve years. In healing her, Jesus demonstrated the incredible power of faith in our lives. And, God's timing for her healing was used to demonstrate and announce the arrival of the Messiah.

God always has a plan.

Are you waiting for healing or an answer to prayer? Trust in God's perfect timing.