

July 1, 2018
Deuteronomy 10:17-21
Mark 5:24b-34
“Fluency in Love Stops the Bleeding”
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Mark 5:24b-34

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, ‘If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.’ Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my clothes?’ And his disciples said to him, ‘You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, “Who touched me?”’ He looked all round to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’ *Words of God for the people of God. Let us pray. The Grass withers and the flowers fade, O Lord but your word endures forever. For this, we give you thanks. Amen*

Internet language-translation programs have come a long way in the last few years. Using an app on your phone, it is now possible to have a simple conversation with someone who speaks a different language when neither of you understand any of the language of the other.

I say “*simple* conversation” because a lot of the translations are still rather wooden. The programs are unable to pick up nuances between languages in order to convey meaning when there is no good equivalent from one language to another. With that in mind, there’s a fun little game you can play with these programs. You run a phrase through the translation engine, going from English into various foreign languages and back again, just to see what comes out in the end. It’s kind of like the old parlor game of “Telephone” (in which people whisper a sentence from one person to another). What you get out is definitely not what you put in.

Try for example, “Live long and prosper.” Fans of the original *Star Trek* TV series will recognize this phrase as the preferred greeting of people from the planet Vulcan (home of Mr. Spock).

Going from English to Spanish and back again results in: “Alive long and prospers.”

Put “Alive long and prospers” back into the translator and go this time from English to Dutch and back again. You come up with: “Living long and blossoms.”

Next is English to Portuguese and back again. This yields “Live long flowers.”

Going from English to Italian and back then gets you, “I live long flowers.”

Finally, from English to French and back again: “I live a long time flowers.” That’s a far cry from “Live long and prosper.”

Trying again with the familiar proverb, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink,” yields an even stranger result. After the sentence has been filtered through four or five languages, the result is this nonsensical statement: “It takes is able to a horse irrigate, but you do not be able to the reason of beverages.”

The point is that language is an indicator of the way a people and a culture think. Truly communicating with a stranger from another culture takes time and attention – even if you learn the language. It is a humbling endeavor. One must wipe one’s mind clear of all previous assumptions and claim a primary attitude of not-knowing.

Both of today’s texts are about how the faithful are to treat the stranger. Deuteronomy is quite clear: “You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Not “Watch out for the stranger”; not “Tolerate the stranger”, but what? “Love the stranger.”

It is one thing to do something kind for a stranger from a sense of duty or so we can pat ourselves on the back; it something else altogether to develop love for the stranger. There is nothing wrong with kindness. But kindness is general. It happens because I either believe it is what I should do or I believe one deserves it for being human.

Love, however is quite specific. I have to find something *in* the other to love that is unique to that person. Kindness is what Jesus was displaying as he walked among the crowd. Love is what he showed to the hemorrhaging woman. Kindness is a kind of generic language all its own. Love makes the effort to learn the specific language of the beloved.

I often wonder where that leaves us Americans – land of the free and home of the brave. As the dominant power in the world, we have the luxury, literally of learning only one language. Our general attitude is: “The rest of the world learns English why should we learn another language?” Meanwhile, in Europe, over 60% of the population is bilingual. In the US it’s only 25%. But if you take away immigrant families, that percentage drops to less than 10%. That meets the definition of a monolingual country. And so we are.

In a recent article in the Daily Texan, Lauren Franklin wrote:

“This lack of foreign language education for children persists to this day, despite much research suggesting that bilingualism has a significant positive effect on children’s linguistic, cognitive and educational development. The benefits of bilingualism are not just cognitive: Adi Raz a professor of Hebrew at the University of Texas, Austin says that knowledge of a foreign language provides huge cultural benefits.

“We don’t just teach language but also culture. By doing so we emphasize the importance of understanding the ‘other,’” Raz says. <http://www.dailytexanonline.com/opinion/2013/10/06/americans-suffer-from-inadequate-foreign-language-education> “Americans suffer from inadequate foreign language education.” The Daily Texan, October 6, 2013, Lauren Franklin.

Well if it is true that *encouraging* bilingualism emphasizes the *importance* of the other, then it stands to reason that *discouraging* it emphasizes the *unimportance* of the other. Hence *loving* the stranger is seen as foolish. In fact, I would argue that, as Americans, we are taught in subtle and no so subtle ways that to pay too much attention to caring for the stranger is foolish. It is best to take care of our own. As a rule, we Americans are good at general kindness but poor at demonstrating specific love. Because love is hard – love requires effort – love requires giving away power – love requires real sacrifice – love requires at the very least, an effort to understand.

In my training as a therapist, I learned that if I can't find something in the person seeking therapy from me to love, I will not be able to help them, period. He or she remains little more than a problem to be solved, a broken object to be fixed.

From time to time I have counseled people whose first language is not English. My greatest strength as a therapist is the ability, using words, both to articulate what is happening to the person, and to provide alternative meanings with a touch of grace. Being the typical English-only American myself, when I am confronted with one whose first language is not English it takes that strength away. I have to listen harder and check all my assumptions about possible experiences for this person at the door.

Being a real healer rather than just a treater of symptoms is as much about fluency in love as it is about fluency in science. But of course, that is not what clinical psychologists and especially psychiatrists are taught. They are taught the bell curve of “normal” psychological functioning and learn to treat anyone falling outside of that 80% mean, outside the fat part of the bell curve as having a mental illness. Psychologists learn some form of cognitive behavioral therapy to help “abnormal” individuals change their behavior and rely on psychiatrists to prescribe meds to deal with unwanted feelings so that, if possible, their patients can fit into that 80% mean. If so, they believe they have helped their patients.

But what if there is nothing *really* wrong with the individual? What if their symptoms instead are a hint that there is actually something wrong with a culture that would treat overly sensitive persons as if they are crazy? What if it is, in a sense, a language problem? In other words, what if the way these persons process and understand reality is just different? What if these persons see things that others miss that they just can't let go? What if they are just more emotionally sensitive to a general warped way people relate or don't relate to one another that has a profound effect on them, but that others don't seem to even notice? In other words, what if their soul speaks a language their culture doesn't understand?

It just so happens that the Hemorrhaging woman in our text today was just such a person. I firmly believe that that woman's problem was emotional, psychological, and spiritual and that the bleeding was just a symptom. In fact, I did a little research on hemorrhaging with unknown origin and I discovered something fascinating. It's a real thing and it's called psychogenic hemorrhaging – that is hemorrhaging that has a psychological rather than an organic origin. Here is what I found from an abstract written originally in Dutch in the United States Library of Medicine:

“Psychogenic ‘purpura’ (that is bleeding just under the skin) consists in the spontaneous appearance of recurrent bruising; it is a reality which is still unexplained. *Most often women with an underlying emotional disorder are affected.* In addition to cutaneous ecchymoses and hematomas (that is bruises) they may have menometrorrhagia, (or bleeding of the uterus) hematuria, (blood in the urine) epistaxis (nose bleeds) and gastrointestinal bleeding – in addition to many other complaints encompassing multiple organ systems. Cutaneous bruising is heralded by a burning or stinging sensation followed after a few hours by local warmth, puffiness and erythema, (redness of the skin) most often with some itching. The pain subsides when the ecchymoses (bruises) appear a day later or earlier. And get this: *Blood coagulation and hemostatic tests remain normal in all these patients. ...*”

In other words, physicians generally are unable to treat this medically.

The abstract continues. “There is virtually no scientific information on the interaction between the nervous system and hemostasis or blood coagulation. *The only therapeutic approach in patients with psychogenic bleeding is psychiatric – and get this – with particular attention to the sociocultural background of the patient and his family.* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/2053421>; United States Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, National Center for Biotechnology Information

It is therefore my contention that the woman of our text suffered from psychogenic hemorrhaging. Think about it. What was sociocultural life for a woman of the first century like? She was considered by the law to be, not a person, but the property of some male. Her identity was not her own but belonged to a father, brother, or husband. Most women had learned to cope with this. But what if this woman’s soul just flat out refused?

From my practice as a therapist I have learned that psychological healing and wholeness does not happen without genuine love and connection with another that meets two criteria: 1. A full recognition by me of the other as unique and therefore beautiful and worthy of attention and connection and 2. The ability of the other to accept that gift from me as real and as nourishing.

This sounds simple and really, it is. In fact a lot of folks can live without this. Shoot, I will go one further. Most people living in the United States today *do* live without this and don’t even know of their lack. But for the more sensitive, they are not only aware, they are painfully aware – so much so that their heart positively bleeds for connection. And the super-sensitive? - why, they don’t just bleed metaphorically – they bleed literally.

Such was the case with the hemorrhaging woman in Mark. Her heart was literally bleeding for connection. Her language was the language of love in a monolinguistic world that only understood the syntax of power. Physicians couldn’t help because all they did was try and fix her. 12 years of this. Can you imagine?

And then one day she gets a glimpse of Jesus. She sees how different he is. He looks, not at the outer person, but straight through to the soul. Finally, someone who speaks her native tongue – not with words alone – but by who he is. He positively exudes genuine love from the very pores of his skin. So something in her knows immediately. **Even superficial contact with HIM will assuage her anxiety.** “I must touch him,” She thus tells herself. “I must have contact with him. I feel like he already knows me better than anyone I have ever met even though we have never met

face to face. So maybe, just maybe, if I can touch even his garment – whether I am healed of my malady or not – my heart will stop aching.”

So, wan and pale, this stranger of a woman – so strange we do not know her name to this day – this woman uses every ounce of the small reserves of energy she has to push through the crowd – to touch, Jesus if she can, but the hem of his garment will do.

And so she does. And when she does, Jesus knows instantly. The text says that he perceived that power had gone out of him. Yes, the power of love – and it has been extracted by faith – trust in the depth of Jesus’ ability to understand the language of love. Jesus feels this because it is unusual and palpable. I don’t think there is anything supernatural going on here. In fact, I’ll bet some of you have felt what Jesus felt too. It happens when someone seeking solace has touched on that loving source that is in you that comes from God.

I have felt it. It is a powerful exchange. It happens when we are fully present with another human being who appreciates and takes in the love that is here – no matter how different that person.

You know, for the most part we all have to admit that Trinity is mono-colored, mono-linguistic, mono-racial and mono-cultural. It’s a happy place the way it is. There is little motivation to change – me included. But what if, like Jesus, despite our relative homogeneity, we are yet fluent in the one language that matters most of all– the language of love. What if we have the ability to lovingly share our power, like Jesus, by being fully present with people – even those who are quite different from us but we have just not had a lot of chances?

It is after all what Jesus did. Though he was a Jewish male who spoke Aramaic and would have also learned Hebrew in the home, he spoke the language of love. He recognized that power had gone out of him because he could tell when someone was trying to converse with the love that was in him. And what was the result? A miraculous inner and outer healing. The other is lovingly em-powered and it is that empowering itself that provides the cure. This strange nobody becomes a sister to Jesus himself. And it is this that stops the bleeding.

A rabbi once asked his disciples to define that moment we call dawn when the morning prayers should be said.

One disciple said very reasonably: “It is dawn when you can tell a horse from a donkey.” Another said: “Ah, yes, but that is not good enough – it is dawn when you can tell an olive tree from a fig tree.” And the rest all offered their best guesses.

At last the rabbi said: “You are all correct. But for the dawn that really matters it will truly be sunrise only when you can look a stranger in the face and see your sister or your brother.” Lord Carey of Clifton, the 103rd Archbishop of Canterbury, "Justice and peace," *Princeton University Chapel Website*, November 9, 2003, <http://web.princeton.edu>.

Indeed.

Let us pray. Gracious God, enable us to stop the bleeding all around us by offering not just kindness but love to the stranger so that we may indeed be sources of healing. Make us experts in

the language that matters - the language of love – that always is expressed in specific and unique ways because that is the way you made us. So make us as interested in the stranger as we in the friend. For who knows we just may be transformed by their love.

Now bless these gifts that they may break down barriers to learning to communicate using love. We pray this in the name of Christ, Amen.