

Today in the gospel of Mark, we have a story wrapped within another story. Both are stories about freedom. We hear of a young girl, sick unto death, before that story is resolved, we encounter a woman enslaved by an embarrassing, even humiliating disease. In both of these lives, Jesus becomes the great liberator, the tender emancipator, the strong champion of freedom.

Jesus again crosses the lake. The moment they touch dry land, a leader of the synagogue named Jairus falls at Jesus' feet, begging him to go with him. From all we can tell, his precious daughter, his darling girl, is near death. Without hesitating, Jesus goes with the man, making his way through the sea of bystanders.

But then something strange happens. From somewhere in that curious crowd, a nameless woman who had suffered from a bloody hemorrhage, comes up behind Jesus, reaches out her hand, and lightly touches his clothes. At once, two things happen: the woman is healed and Jesus stops. He asks "Who touched my clothes?" The disciples don't know what to say. "Do you see all these people around you? How are we supposed to know who touched you?"

At that moment, the woman – sheepish and scared – identified herself, kneeling at Jesus' feet, confessing her deed. With total acceptance, Jesus speaks: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." By just grazing the hem of our Lord's garment, she is healed. And in that touch, she found a new and profound freedom. But the first story continues.

Friends suddenly appear from the house where the little girl is sick telling the fretful father, "Your daughter is dead. Why

trouble the teacher any further?” But Jesus was not so easily put off. Throwing propriety, even caution to the dry wind, he says to the father, “Do not fear, only believe.” So off they go – Jesus, the father, and a few of his disciples – off to the house with every confidence that death will not win.

When they get to the ruler’s house, there is already a great commotion, as no doubt some mourners had already arrived to comfort the family. When Jesus tells those gathered that the girl is not dead, but only sleeping, they laughed at him as if he were mad. The Lord of life goes in to that darkened room, takes the little girl by the hand, and summons her to life. “Little girl, wake up!” Mark tells us she got up “immediately” and began to move about the house. Jesus offered her the touch of freedom and, in that touch, she found her life’s independence.

What is this touch of freedom so powerfully glimpsed in these two stories? For one thing, **this touch of freedom is the freedom to choose healing over shame.** Whatever modern medicine would call the disease that caused such awful bleeding in the older woman, its root in any language would be shame. In that first century, Jewish culture held to the belief that bleeding made a person unclean; it bordered on shame.

Shame can be like the bloody disease endured by that woman long ago. Something in our past haunts us, bleeding the very life from our souls. If whatever-it-is were not so ugly, so embarrassingly painful, we would confide in someone we trust and finally stopped bleeding. It takes courage to choose healing over shame. Know for certain that Jesus passes by today. If you will but touch him, there, you will find freedom from the shame that enslaves.

Another insight into our lives these stories offer is **this touch of freedom is the gift of life that speaks to our fear of death.**

The little girl who was sick-unto-death, who Jesus said was only “asleep,” reminds us that our Lord walks in to every room filled with the threatening, ominous air of death and there, speaks life. The men and women who laughed at our Lord found out the joke was on them. Deep within us is this gnawing, at times immobilizing, fear of death. This fear terrorized the woman who touched our Lord’s robe and stalked the family of the little girl. When this same fear stalks us, Jesus speaks of life. And when he does, death cowers.

Finally, **this touch of freedom awakens us to life.** As he did in that tiny house long ago, Jesus speaks our name, “Little darling, wake up!” “Beloved son, wake up!” “Cynical soul, wake up!” “Discouraged friend, wake up!” The risen Christ is Lord of life and death. He passes by, daring us to touch the hem of his garment. And in that touch, we find lasting freedom. He takes us by the hand and in so doing, stares down death as the great imposter. The touch of freedom Jesus gives frees us from the fear of death.

This week, when you fire up the grill and perhaps enjoy a gathering of family and friends, when the fireworks are lit and songs of freedom are sung, remember with me that the touch of freedom began long ago, deep in the heart of God. When God sent our Lord Jesus Christ to walk among us as Lord of life and death, God rang the bell of freedom. The touch of Jesus is the touch of freedom that rings and brings us life.

Adapted from GraceWorks © 2006.