

# The Touch

At age fifteen, I was given in marriage to an older man, a friend of my father's. On my sixteenth birthday, I gave birth to a baby boy but the delivery was very hard and my child died. It was then that the bleeding started. In the early months following my baby's death, I thought that the bleeding might be the result of grief. Not only had my child died, something in me had died too—the hope of being a mother and good wife.



Initially my husband was understanding and sympathetic. He even sought the advice of a doctor who recommended a concoction of herbs that only made me sick to my stomach. After about six months though, my husband's attitude changed. The constant bleeding made intimacy between us impossible. The stench of dried blood and sweat enveloped me in an odorous cloud that made him cringe whenever I walked into the room. On most days I felt weak and unable to fulfill my household duties. I avoided social and religious gatherings and mainly stayed at home alone. Eventually my husband sent me back to my father and my father demanded my dowry back. My husband refused to pay because he had already spent the money.

My father wanted to know what sin I had committed to warrant such a condition. I said I was innocent but he refused to believe me. Only after my mother's desperate intervention did my father allow me to return to his household. He refused to speak to me from that day on and he forced me to live alone in a small shack on the back of the property. I was kept alive by daily offerings of food brought to me by my mother or little sister after my father had fallen asleep each night. Darkness became my friend.

Eventually my mother heard of other women in the community with my condition. Some had reportedly been helped by a visit to a doctor in a neighboring village. Over the next twelve years I made numerous futile visits to those medical quacks who took my money, stole leering glances at my private parts, and proposed procedures that only made me sicker than before. I was ready to give up. Some girls I knew had committed suicide and I reluctantly began to consider that option myself.

Then one night something strange happened. I had a vivid dream. In the dream, I was on a journey home though the home was someplace I had never been to before. But I knew it was safe there. As I followed the road up a steep hill, I came to a fork in the path and stopped to ponder which way I should go. Just then a young man appeared. I told him I wanted to go home but I didn't know which course to take. The young man said, "The fork to the left leads to the witches cave. The one to the right leads to the baker's house." Then I awoke. I lay in my bed for the next hour brooding over what the dream could possibly mean. Shortly after sunrise, my sister brought me grapes and goats milk. As we were eating, she mentioned she had heard rumors that a healer named Jesus had spent the night in the village. Over the years I had been to my share of traveling healers. Most were unemployed actors trying to make a fast shekel. But then she said something interesting that caught my attention. She said, "He was born in Bethlehem, the city of David." In my language Bethlehem means, "House of Bread."

I thought, "Follow the road to the right; it leads to the baker's house...Bethlehem, House of Bread. What does that mean?" Slowly the thought entered my mind, though I experienced it as more of a pressure than a clear voice. It said, "Go to the man, he will help you?" Then another thought came, "If you go, you will be ridiculed again. It has happen before." Then I sensed the first thought again, "Go to the man." Back and forth my mind jumped. Finally I said out loud to myself, "I am going!" I quickly washed, put on clean clothes and wrapped my face in a scarf so that only my eyes showed. Then I walked to the village square.



When I arrived, I saw a crowd of men gathered around a slender man with a noble face and kind eyes. He was talking with a ruler from the synagogue who was on his knees pleading for help. I couldn't hear what was being said, but I could tell that the man with the kind eyes was listening carefully. I assumed that man must have been Jesus. I cautiously approached the crowd and stood in the back trying to figure out what to do next. One man standing nearby lifted his foot to examine the bottom of his sandal to see if he

had stepped in something. I tightened the scarf around my face and thought, why did I come here to expose myself and be embarrassed in front of all these men?

All of a sudden the religious ruler stood up and everyone, including Jesus, began walking towards the village gate. My heart sank. My chance to ask for help was about to walk away. The thought came to my mind, "If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed." On impulse, I began to push my way through the back of the crowd towards Jesus. As I did so, the men around me stopped to check the bottom of their sandals. I was then able to quickly pass them and get to within a few feet of the healer. "Touch his robe and you will be healed," said the thought that came from some deep place within my being. "Touch his robe. " So I did. I reached around the man directly in front of me and touch the robe of Jesus without ever being seen.

Instantly a warm tingling sensation surged through my body starting with my outstretched finger and flowing to my toes. The incessant cramping and pain I had felt in my womb for the past twelve years suddenly stopped. I knew immediately that the bleeding had ceased and that I had been healed. I fell to my knees and began to weep tears of joy. Meanwhile, one man behind me stumbled over me as I knelt in the dirt. Others nearby crinkled their noses as they scampered past to keep up with the crowd.

"Who Touched Me!" shouted the voice of the healer. The crowd stopped dead in its tracks. "Who touched me?"

I heard his followers standing nearby say to him, "Master, everyone is touching you. Look at this crowd pushing and shoving. They all want to touch you." But Jesus kept looking. I wanted to hide but I knew he could see me with those kind eyes. So I stood up at the back of the crowd with my heart beating fast, my knees trembling, and my head bowed down. I could feel him looking in my direction. Slowly the crowd

parted in front of me and I stumbled forward and knelt down before him. To my surprise he too knelt down and said in a gentle voice, “Tell me what just happened.”

So I did, but before I knew it, my whole story came tumbling out—dead son, constant bleeding, husband and father who rejected me, dark nights in the shack, countless doctors who hurt me rather than helped me, twelve long years alone. I don’t know how long it took me to tell the story, but he never once interrupted. Though we were surrounded by a crowd, he watched me with those kind eyes and listened as if I were the only one on the street that day. At the end, he grabbed my hand and helped me to stand. Then in the presence of all he said, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over.”

Just then a servant ran up to the ruler and said, “Your daughter has died. There is no need to trouble the Teacher anymore.” My heart sank when I thought of another dead child. But then I realized, “No the Master is here. Lord, have mercy on this man and his family.”

While pointing to me, Jesus turned to the ruler and said, “Don’t be afraid. Just have faith like my friend.” Jesus then wished me well and excused himself while he and the crowd went with the religious ruler to his home. I watched the crowd depart and the village square become empty. When I looked around, I saw my mother and sister standing under a tree nearby. I ran to them but before I could explain what had happened, they embraced me and exclaimed, “You are healed! We can see it in your face.” And so I was.

In the years that followed, my life changed in ways I did not expect. I wish I could tell you that my husband and father welcomed me back into their lives, but that never really happened. My husband remarried and moved on. My father allowed me back into the house but he never spoke to me. Maybe he was too proud to ever apologize for how he treated me. Maybe he was embarrassed that I shared family secrets with Jesus in the village square. We ended up living with an uneasy silence until he died two years later.

In the months following my healing, I took girls who suffered the same disease I had to see Jesus. Many of them were healed. Surprisingly some of them even seemed to get better after I prayed for them. Word spread and some girls who had been banished from their homes sought me out. My mother and sister joined me in offering our home as a place for them to stay. In the years that followed we had scores of young women visit our home and spend time with us. I discovered that the greatest service I could provide for them was to listen well to their stories. As much as the physical healing was important, emotional restoration was even more so. Like me, their dignity had been stolen, their trust in men shattered, and their hope of ever living a meaningful life destroyed. I learned that by listening well in the same way that the man with the kind eyes had listened to me, I could touch their souls as I had been touched.

### **Author’s Note**

I wrote the above story in an effort to help myself find an intuitive connection to the story found in Mark 5:24-34. It is the work of my imagination and therefore not true, though I believe Mark’s gospel account is true. Faith in God is more than adherence to a set of theological beliefs, though it includes

that. It is more than submission to a moral code, though it includes that too. Faith is trust in the God who loves us. His love is meant to engage our conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings. The process of imagining and writing is a spiritual discipline that I have found helpful for my journey with Christ. Painting, by the way, is another way to do the same thing. I offer the above words and artwork as a sample of what you might do for yourself.

Steve Stuckey

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