



A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

Saved From the Alienation of Sin...

Luke 8:43-48

^{NIV} **Luke 8:43**...And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. ⁴⁵ **"Who touched me?"** Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, **"Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you."** ⁴⁶ But Jesus said, **"Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."** ⁴⁷ Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. ⁴⁸ Then he said to her, **"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."**

There was just something about Mary Mallon. It's not that she was particularly unpleasant. She had a round friendly, Irish face and a steady temperament. But Mary had a secret, unknown to anyone around her. You see Mary's large, rough Irish hands contained a touch of murder.

Now I should explain. Mary never stabbed or strangled anyone. Yet, she is known to have killed at least three people and to have injured thousands of others. Mary's forte was poison. But for all the damage Mary did she was never arrested nor did she ever really believe that she had done anything wrong. But to this day, her name strikes terror in the hearts of New Yorkers.

At the turn of the century in New York City, Mary Mallon was a cook. And she was good at her craft. Her specialty was ice cream. Yet it was her trade that was the problem. Every dish that Mary made contained more than its partakers knew. Every dish contained a bit of Mary herself.

To onlookers it must have seemed that Mary was the unluckiest person in the world. For every time she took a new job, in just a matter of weeks, everyone there would become violently ill. Sometimes her employers died. Mary would curse her bad luck and move on.

It took a while for the health department to put it all together. Finally, as they researched the history of some of the victims they began to see a pattern. That pattern could almost always be linked to one person, Mary Mallon. They suspected, and were later proved to be right, that someone, probably Mary Mallon, was poisoning people in droves.

They finally tracked her down. After an enormous fight in which Mary fended off the entire health department with only a fork, they took her into custody.

When they did her blood work, even they were shocked with what they found. Mary's body was saturated with typhus. Though she herself was immune to typhus, she was a carrier of the disease. That meant that anyone she came into contact with could contract typhoid fever. It meant that any meal she cooked became a seething bowl of poison. She stayed well but everyone she came into contact with became infected.

Now the really fascinating thing about Mary is that they could have cured her. They had the cure but Mary would not take it. She obstinately refused. The health officials did not know what to do with her. Eventually they isolated her on Brother's Island in New York. But the public outcry was so great they decided to let her go on the condition that she would do no more cooking.

Within a month typhoid fever, which all but been eliminated, began to break out again. Mary, it seems, had found her way back into the kitchen. When they found her she was taking a bowl of soup to one of her ailing friends. This time they quarantined her Brother's Island and threw away the key. She remained there in isolation twenty-three years until she died. She was angry, embittered and lonely. She refused to receive visitors and always ate alone. This time the public went along with the decision. They were glad she was gone. They even made up a name for her.

They called her Typhoid Mary.

Children even made up songs about her. The first line was **"Mary, Mary, what do you carry?"**

Now, the reason I tell that story is because the woman in our passage this morning was the same kind of outcast, the same kind of pariah, the same kind of social leper as Mary Mallon. All those who knew her shunned her.

Luke tells us,

^{NIV} **Luke 8:43**...And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her.

At first reading, we might not get that from the text but let me explain it for a moment. Under Jewish ceremonial law, anyone with such a hemorrhage was considered unclean. This woman had been hemorrhaging for twelve years. Now I want to maintain a measure of decorum here so let me ask you to listen with discernment. This woman most likely was suffering from the devastating effects of a cycle gone awry. It may have been endometriosis, but whatever it was it was relentless.

According to Leviticus 15, which I am not going to read for propriety's sake, any such woman was unclean. Simply put that would have meant that anyone she touched or anything she touched was unclean. Any place she sat on or bed she lay on was unclean. Now that is easy for us to say and impossible for us to imagine.

That means that she could not touch the husband of her youth. She could not wash his clothes or make his food. She could not hold his hand. Her children could not sit on her lap or hug her neck. There would have been no tender kisses, no loving embraces. She could not even brush against her family without rendering them unclean. She lived in a world of perpetual, unrelenting alienation and isolation.

Now, of course, today when we hear of such things we say to ourselves, "I'm so glad I did not live in a time ridden with such ignorance and superstition." In our society today, we don't think anything renders a person unclean. No action, no

word spoken, no behavior (no matter how vile), renders a person unclean in our sight. But in biblical days they pondered long and hard the holiness of God. They recognized that such a condition was symbolic but it was symbolic of the fallen state of man. God was deemed holy, pure and undefiled. As a result, any person coming into His presence had to strive to be clean. Under the law this woman was unclean, perpetually unclean. And that uncleanness isolated her from her family and from her God. But unlike Mary Mallon, she knew it and she longed to be clean.

Luke tells us that she could not be healed by anyone. But Luke was a doctor and focused on her medical condition. Mark tells us how it affected her life.

^{NIV} **Mark 5:25**...And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶ She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse.

She longed to be clean. She suffered much trying to become clean but she could not. When you read the commentaries and examine the kinds of remedies they some doctors proposed, it just makes your heart ache with compassion for this woman. She tried everything, she spent all the money she had in the world and not only had she not gotten any better, she had gotten worse.

But returning to Luke, he writes:

^{NIV} **Luke 8:43**...And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

So this poor woman was out of options. She was alone, isolated and impoverished. And then she heard that Jesus was passing through her hamlet. He was her last, best hope. Luke tells us that she came up behind Jesus and touched the fringe of His garment. Now again when we read that, it easy to go too fast. I think there are a couple of things worth noting.

First, she came up behind Jesus. I think Luke is trying to tell us that she didn't want to be noticed. There was the issue of shame, of course, but there was also an issue of danger. Taking the chance of defiling the whole town in reaching Jesus could have gotten her killed. But where could she go? There was the issue of shame and the issue of danger but there was also the unrelenting issue of blood.

Secondly, Luke tells us that she touched the fringe of His garment. I think Luke is describing the ceremonial garment that all good Jewish men wore. It had four tassels hanging from its lower corners and they were to remind its wearers of there covenant obligation to obey the law.

You see Jesus was a stickler for the law. He kept all of the law even the most minute details of the law. He kept it in purity though all those around Him could not. The woman reached out in desperation, in the press of the crowd, and just touched the fringe of His garment. And wonder of wonders, Luke tells us:

^{NIV} **Luke 8:44**...She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

She was healed and she was healed straightway and she knew it. I'm sure as the crowd pressed on, she was happy to let it go. She was content to disappear in the

crowd. She was healed; she was clean. She could start her life again. Her thoughts no doubt turned to her family, if she still had one. But then Jesus spoke.

^{NIV} **Luke 8:45... "Who touched me?"** Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, **"Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you."**

Her face turned crimson. She was exposed. She wanted to hide and for a moment she thought she was saved. One of his disciples named Peter, objecting to Jesus' question, had spoken up. And while they were all denying it, Peter said, **"Master, the multitudes are crowding and pressing upon You."**

But Jesus would not let it go.

^{NIV} **Luke 8:46...But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."**

I love this part of the story. I can almost see Peter in frustration shouting out. **"What do you mean somebody touched you? Nobody touched you on purpose. For heaven's sake Lord, let's keep moving or we'll get trampled."**

But Jesus stopped. **"No, someone did touch me. I felt healing virtue go out of me. Who was it?"** Of course, Jesus knew who it was and now the woman knew that He knew.

Luke tells us:

^{NIV} **Luke 8:47...Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.**

I love that passage. My heart is stirred with compassion for the woman. She came forth and prostrated herself and she was terrified. She may have been afraid of what the crowd would do but I am certain she was afraid of what Jesus would do.

She had been so brazen. She had passed her defilement on to Him but somehow He had passed healing on to her. Would He reprove her? Even worse, would He resent being defiled and take the healing back? But there in a moment of desperate fear she found herself just pouring it all out. She spoke of the years of isolation and defilement. She spoke of the years of alienation from her family and from God. She spoke of how she had had come to the decision to try and touch Him. She had put all her trust...all of her hopes on Him. And now just by touching the hem of His garment, if only for a moment, she had been made clean. I suspect she told her story in a fountain of tears. Finally, when everything had come out, when there was no humiliation, no shame left to share, she looked up at Jesus.

His response was simple.

“Woman, you have put your faith in the right place. You are clean and you are clean to stay. Go in peace.”

Now my friends I want to tell you this story is not an illustration of the gospel; it is the gospel.

When we are converted what happened in this story is exactly what happens to us. Our sin, our alienation from God, our isolation is all passed on to Christ. It is

imputed to Him. That is, it is put on His account and hidden in the blood of the cross. But that is not all. His righteousness is imputed to us. The cumulative value of all His perfection, all of His law keeping is imputed to us. Our sin goes to Him and His righteousness comes to us. The way that happens is through our faith. The whole transaction is apprehended by our faith. That doesn't mean that there is any merit in our faith. Our faith is nothing more than our open palm reaching to receive the gift that God gives. It is not the quality of our faith anymore than it was the quality of this woman's reaching out to touch the hem of His garment. Imagine her saying to Jesus, **"You know I deserve to be healed. Did you say see the way this hand reached out to touch You?"**

It wasn't the touch; it was the person touched.

It isn't our faith; it is, rather, the one we believe in.

Now, because of that I have a word from the Lord for all those who have placed their faith in Jesus.

If you have placed your hope in Jesus. I want to tell you all is well with your soul. You may be alienated from your family. You may have lost friends along the way. But, brothers and sisters, you are at peace with God. I know that is true because we have His own promise.

^{NIV} **John 6:37**...All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

Again He says.

^{NIV} **Hebrews 13:5**...Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "**Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.**"

It is that peace that allows us to live in this world. It is that peace that gives us the strength to live righteously. To you God has said, "**You are no longer enemies but friends. You are no longer aliens but sons.**"

To you I say, "**Rejoice and be glad.**"

But if you are here this morning and have never placed your trust in Christ, I have a word from the Lord for you as well. Your life may be at peace. You may have friends in abundance. You may not know the pangs of a bloodied conscience but brothers and sisters you are aliens with God. You are wondering aimlessly through life in a state of perpetual uncleanness.

Now you may be thinking, "**I am not in any need. I am a dignified, moral man, or I am still a youth. Or I am a proper lady. I am not unclean.**"

To you I would say just this, "**Mary, Mary, what do you carry?**"

And I can tell you the answer. You carry the cumulative weight of all your law breaking. Every lie, every impure thought, every sin has mounded up rendering you perpetually, obstinately unclean. You sin renders you a stranger and outcast before God. But I would also tell you this. There is cleansing. There can be peace. Cast yourself on Jesus. He has born the penalty of all your sin. Put your trust in Him and God will reach down from heaven and declare you to be clean. He will clothe you in the righteousness of Christ.

Now you may be thinking, **“My sin is too great. I have done things that God can never forgive.”** To you I would say, **“God has shown Himself to be gracious to all manner of sinners. Your sin is not so great that He cannot wash it white as snow.”**

Let me give you just one example.

John Newton was born in 1725. His father sent him to sea at the age of eleven. By the age of nineteen when he was press-ganged into the Royal Navy, John Newton was an experienced sailor. Nicknamed the **“Great Blasphemer”** by his fellow shipmates, Newton stayed in trouble. Once, he was flogged for deserting ship and eventually left the Royal Navy by being exchanged for a crewmember from another ship. That new ship was a slave ship.

Newton got involved with a slave dealer and worked for him for a while. Eventually he ended up being treated as a slave himself. During that time, the other slaves showed much kindness to him. After a while he escaped his slavery. Having experienced the suffering of slaves first hand, one would think that he would have been finished with it. But the human heart is wicked. John Newton ended up as the Captain of a slave ship, transporting slaves from Africa to the West Indies. He became the most reprehensible, defiled, and ostracized kind of man in the world.

On March 10, 1748, his ship the Greyhound was in a terrible storm. All the sailors on board were at the bilge pumps for days. When Newton was too exhausted to go on, the other sailors lashed him to the helm and told him to keep the ship on

course. He stayed tied there for a day. He later said he had time to reflect on his life and after doing so he had cried out without really meaning it "**Lord have mercy on us**".

It was a turning point in his life. John Newton realized that He was lost in sin and was blind (could not see the truth of the Gospel). He asked God to break him out of his alienation. He asked God for mercy to save him from his sins. God in grace answered his prayer and forgave his sins. He was always amazed that God would forgive anybody who was such a disgusting sinner.

Over the next 50 years, John Newton had a remarkable change in his life. He began to study for the ministry. He was instrumental in banning slavery from Britain and became a minister. He wrote many poems and verses. When he was eighty-two, he wrote: "**My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.**"

Newton even wrote his own epitaph. It read:

*JOHN NEWTON, Clerk
Once an infidel and libertine,
A purveyor of slaves in Africa
Was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior
JESUS CHRIST
Preserved, restored, pardoned
And appointed to preach the faith
He had long labored to destroy,
He wrote one verse that I am particularly fond of. It read:
I am not what I might be,
I am not what I ought to be,
I am not what I wish to be,
I am not what I hope to be,*

*But I thank God
I am not what I once was,
And I can say with the great apostle,
"By the grace of God
I am what I am"*

But for all his lines of verse, it is his hymns for which Newton is most remembered. We sang one earlier, Let Us Love and Sing and Wonder. In a moment after a time of reflection, we'll sing his best-known hymn. And as we do, I ask each of you to sing heartily unto the Lord for it is through His redemptive work on the cross that we have been saved from the alienation of sin.

Let's pray.