

Women Coming to Jesus --- The Old and the Young Come

Mark 5:25-43

GENERAL INTRO

What a joy to be here. To be here with you. My connection to this group goes way back. I mean way back. I was born on January 23, 1956. And before I was even one month old, I received this document.

**Picture of Certificate on Screen**



Honorary Baby Membership ... Women's Society of Christian Service. My mother ... life-long Methodist. Preacher's wife. Was absolutely devoted to this organization. I have memory upon memory of groups of women meeting in the parsonage living rooms. So I'm happy to be here with you ... Women of Faith, United Methodist Women, the Women's Society of Christian Service.

But it's also a great joy to be with you ... The Western NC branch of that group. Many of you have heard me tell this before but I tell it often because I want the women --- the lay women of our conference to know

just how much power they have. .... I credit this group .... With a major boost to the breadth of my own ministry ....

And finally it is a joy to be here in this sacred place. Lake Junaluska is very special to my family. My parents had a home here from the time I was 8 years old until just a few years ago. I've spent many wonderful times here. Our whole family has. In fact, I brought Daddy with me so he could be back at the Lake. (Introduce Daddy)

I tell you friends, I've been blessed to preach in some incredible places and I am thankful for each opportunity but at the top of that list would be Lake Junaluska and the women of the Western NC Conference have made that possible many times in the past 35 years. I am grateful.

It is a joy to be here.

### INTRO TO SERIES

When Darlene contacted me about speaking, she had already chosen the topic. *Women Coming to Christ*. I like that. I like to be given a topic or a scripture when I'm asked to preach or speak. Darlene --- well basically gave me both. She knew three Biblical women she wanted to be included and we worked together to add some others. So I did not pick this topic but I was immediately excited about it. *Women Coming to Christ. Women Coming to Jesus*. Which is not just the title of my messages. It is actually the title of this event. *Women Coming to Jesus.....* It is in fact a description of what we are doing here ---- right? We are coming to Jesus. Take a look all around you .... And you will

see .... Women coming to Jesus. That's what we want to do, right? But it's not always so easy. We have the best intentions but .... Well ... There are so many things that get in the way. My hope is that spending some time with these Biblical Women Coming to Jesus will help us discover new ways to overcome the many distractions in our own lives, renew our commitment and improve our effectiveness in actually being women who are coming to Jesus too.

### BASICS

So, how are we going to do that. Well, first we are simply going to spend a little time in the presence of some women we meet in scripture. Now the truth is, many of us have grown up with these women. And that's the first hurdle we have to overcome.

- Fred Craddock
- Case five ... my brother told him Bible stories at bedtime... Goes to VBS. Not going back. I already know everything there is to Familiarity might be the biggest hurdle longtime church folk have to overcome **IF** scripture is going to be for us the transformative word of God that it is intended to be. But we are going to work on that together. I'm going to try and give you or remind you of some details about these women that are often overlooked to kind of break through that familiarity. And then I'm going to attempt in my messages to encourage each of us to dare to ask what I believe is the question that we too often

fail to ask when it comes to Bible Study. There are some questions that we rush to answer and should.

1. What happens in the scripture? Who is present? Who is being addressed?
2. What is the context? What happens before? What happens afterwards? What was the cultural circumstance?
3. What would this text mean in that context? What would it mean to those first hearing it? Those first reading it?
4. What does that message mean in our context and time and culture?

And then comes the missing question. Most of time the dismissal bell rings before we get to this question. Time runs out on the clock. The demands of the day require our attention. And that's too bad. Because this might be the most important question when it comes to receiving scripture as the transformative word of God. Here it is?

5. If I take this teaching seriously, how will I need to change today? What am I doing that I need to stop doing? What am I not doing that I need to start doing? What relationships need to change and how? What changes do I need to make in the way I speak, the way I spend my time, my money? How will my attitude need to change?

And with that question and honest answers comes the chance for the words on the page to truly become the word of God --- the

transformative Word of God --- for you and for me. We will change.

Because that's what transform means right? Change.

So .... If this time together with all these wonderful people in this wonderful place is what I believe it can be, is intended to be then each of us will change. In some way we will leave Lake Junaluska a different person .... We will change. Why? Because that's what happens to ----

*Women Coming to Jesus.*

So let's get started.

### SERMON INTRO

We begin with two women ---- one very young, one I presume to be pretty old. They are coming to Jesus for two of the reasons most everyone will come to Jesus at some point in life. One is facing disease. The other is facing death. Disease and death function like main characters in this story. --- Threatening Giants --- that are an inevitable part of life. Even my 4-year-old grandson knows that owies just cannot always be avoided. In fact, it was the unavoidable scrapes and bruises of childhood that prompted this grandma to write a song .... For these sweet boys.

### ON SCREEN



Song .... That's what Gran Jan said ....

### **That's What Gran Jan Said**

1) No cuts no scrapes, no knocks on the head

No falling on the steps, no falling off the bed

No bumping of the nose, no stumping of the toes

That's what Gran Jan said

That's what Gran Jan said, That's what Gran Jan said

No falling out of trees, no boo boos please

That's what Gran Jan said

2) No bites no stings, no twists no tears,

No tripping on the walk, no stumbling on the stairs

No pokes no pricks, no fighting with sticks

That's what Gran Jan said.

That's what Gran Jan said, That's what Gran Jan said

No skinning of the knees, Don't get hurt please

That's what Gran Jan said

But as Lochlan says ... sometimes owies just happens. It's part of life. Disease and Death – they are part of life, too..... And in many ways they seem to travel hand in hand. Disease draws it greatest strength from the threat of Death. And Death uses the pain and disability of Disease to worm its way into life. It is through Disease that Death reaches out from

the grave into the land of the living.

As I observe disease of all kinds -- physical, mental, emotional, spiritual -- it seems to me that disease is often like a living death. Life, as we understand it, is snatched away from us. We are confined to bed, others make decisions for us; we are humiliated by the inability to control our own bodies let alone the life that swirls by us. Oh, life continues to occur all around us --- but remains just out of reach, like some beautiful but elusive butterfly. Disease is like death because--- it separates us from the living.

### TEXTS

The woman we meet in today's text was herself caught in just such a living death. Disease controlled her life. We find her story nestled in the midst of another story --- a young woman's story. Together, the two stories bear a remarkable witness to the power of God over both disease and death. And as we read this, I've no doubt many of us will hear an echo of sorts sounding from our own lives. I've chosen the Gospel writer Mark's version.

### ON SCREEN

*Mark 5:21-34. 21 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. 22 Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet 23 and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." 24 So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. 25 Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. 26 She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. 27 She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 for she said, "If I but*

*touch his clothes, I will be made well." 29 Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. 30 Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" 31 And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?" " 32 He looked all around to see who had done it. 33 But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."*

Let's stop here for a bit. Let's spend a little time with the bleeding woman. I think she has something to teach us. Why is this woman coming to Jesus?

She has been bleeding for 12 years. She's spent all her money, tried all the doctors, attempted all the known remedies, but still she bleeds. And as bad as that would be in any time and place, it was particularly bad in that culture. You see, a bleeding woman was considered ritually unclean. She was confined to her home. She could not worship. She could not even be in public. She was *unclean* and after 12 years of such a life, she was by many standards, a living corpse. Through her Disease, Death had reached into life to lay its icy hand upon her shoulder.

Is it any wonder that she attempts merely to touch Jesus? She cannot publicly address Jesus. To do so would be to risk severe punishment, let alone the horrible embarrassment. Unclean women were not allowed to be in the presence of any men, let alone a holy man. In fact, she was breaking the law, just by being in that crowd. But that's how desperate she was. Can't you just see her---trying to mix in with the group, hoping against hope that no one recognizes her? Her veil over



her face, head down, picking her way through the crowd like a child at a parade --- until finally she sees Jesus face to face and then she knows. She knows --- what before she has only hoped. Now she knows. --- She knows that coming to Jesus was the right thing to do. Jesus has the power she needs.

### POWER --PRAYER

And that, friends, is the first step toward winning in *our* battles in life --- including the battles against disease and death. The first step is realizing that we need to come to Jesus. And that won't happen until we recognize that the power we need lies in Jesus. Not in ourselves, not in the doctors, the medicines or those we love. The power we need for this battle comes from God alone. Now don't get me wrong --- one of the greatest gifts of God to humanity is the art of medicine ---hospitals, doctors, nurses, medicine, therapy. All of these are marvelous channels for God's great healing power. I've always known that but primarily because of what I've observed. Now, after open heart surgery last July, I know it because of personal experience. The art of medicine and those who practice it are gifts from God. Still the power of healing does come from God.

Well, this woman realizes she needs that kind of power and she comes to Jesus --- but when? As a last resort. Now there could be all kinds of reasons for that, but the point that I want to make is that far too many of us come to Jesus only as a last resort. We try any and everything first, depending upon ourselves and others before we finally turn to the one who has the power to really help. And you and I are as bad as anyone else. It's amazing really, we go to church week in and week out to praise an all-powerful God and then ---when we find

ourselves in the midst of life's greatest struggles --- we often fail to recognize that power even when it is so near at hand.

You've said these words yourself, I'll bet. I know I have ... "*Well, all we can do now is pray.*" All we can do? ... Friends, please, believe me --- hear this --- Prayer isn't the last thing ... Prayer's the first thing. Or should be. Why? Because prayer is the quickest way for anyone to come to Jesus. Disease, Sickness, Pain --- They draw their greatest power from the feelings of futility and fatigue they bring with their attack. But God has already provided a weapon to use against that futility and helplessness --- a way to come to Jesus. Prayer.

Folks, Prayer is the first work of the church --- not some last resort weakly offered in place of real help. The powerful church and the powerful Christian begin all things with prayer knowing that while we can do very little on our own, our God can do everything through us. Prayer should be the church's first concern.

Most of our local churches have some kind of structured prayer ministry. A prayer chain of sorts. Prayer and healing services. All important. But any structured prayer ministry of a church, no matter how effective is just scratching the surface. The real prayer force of the church is to be found out there in the prayers of all our people. I have learned far more about prayer *since* I became a preacher, than I ever learned *preparing* to be one. I've learned from the lay people. You are the ones who really seem to understand this power. Let me tell you about a couple of women who taught me a thing or two about coming to Jesus through prayer. An 82-year-old woman asked that her church pray for the grandnephew of her insurance salesman. Let me tell you something ... that request came as the fruit of her witness --- even to the

guy who came to collect her insurance payment. When she encounters a need, she has no problem with powerlessness; she knows the prayers of her church make a difference. Those prayers help people come to Jesus.

A young divorced mother of two faces a liver biopsy--- tests show an undetermined problem with the liver. After months of prayer and an anointing with oil at our altar, she asks the Doctor to redo those tests before the biopsy. He agrees ...There are dramatic reversals. The doctors decide to wait --- 3 months more all is normal. And the doctors say – *“We are not sure what has happened, but we don't want to interfere.”* Her response is simple: *“My church has been praying.”* The prayers of her church make a difference. They help people come to Jesus.

Prayer is the Church's answer to powerlessness, hopelessness, futility and fear --- all the weapons that disease uses against us. Prayer is how we can come to Jesus and prayer is how we can help others come to Jesus. So you tell me--- If we can't get the people in our churches praying ----- why in the world are we worried about prayer in the schools? And why do so many wait so long? The first step in our victory over Disease and Death is recognizing that the power we need for that victory lies in Jesus. The second step is realizing that we can access that power through prayer. That's one important way to come to Jesus.

## FAITH

But this woman did not just come to Jesus. She came to Jesus with --- faith. And Jesus himself said that made the difference. Remember? *“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”* Many of us are quick to expect God to act, while we are

unwilling to act on our own. Jesus makes it very clear that it was his power, coupled with the woman's faith, which made the healing possible. That's why Jesus called the woman before the crowd. "*Who touched me?*" Not to chastise; not to embarrass. No.... Jesus calls her before the crowd so that she and the others might know that her faith has been part of her healing. This was not magic. Not all who pressed against Jesus were healed. That healing power might have flowed through Jesus like an electric current ... but it took a woman with faith to receive it.

Once we recognize that the power we need begins in Jesus, that's when our journey of faith begins. The woman who bleeds, the desperate father of the little girl who is ill --- they do not wait. Don't you see? .... It is not their despair that takes them to the feet of Jesus. .... No! It is their faith that brings them to that point. And friends, if we are to break the power of disease and death in our lives, that's where our faith needs to take us too--- to the feet of Jesus.

And here's something else really neat. According to this text, **we** can act in faith on **behalf** of others. Remember, when Jesus encounters this woman, he is on his way to Jairus' house to help the man's sick daughter. Let's pick up that story at verse 35.

### ON SCREEN

*35 While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" 36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." 37 He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. 38 When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. 39 When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but*

*sleeping." 40 And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" 42 And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. 43 He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.*

Again, there is the recognition of power in Jesus. No small act of humility for the leader of the community synagogue. And, he does not hesitate. ... He doesn't call Jesus over to the side and talk to him privately. Oh no. Jairus makes his request in the very midst of the crowd. His faith has brought him without shame to the feet of Jesus.

But there is a little something more to this part of the story that makes it so appropriate for us in this gathering. You see Jairus is not acting on his behalf. He comes to Jesus on behalf of his daughter. And admittedly, I'm reading between the lines here, but I do not believe Jairus is acting alone. I believe he is there in part because of the child's mother. If I am completely honest --- it's not in the text, mind you --- but I suspect the mother sent him to get Jesus. That's why I chose this version of the story instead of the one we find in Matthew. (Matthew 9:18-26). Matthew fails to even mention a mother. (That makes me wonder how many other women were overlooked.) As many of you know, Mark is the earliest of our Gospels and the writer of Matthew had Mark as one of his sources. So we know Matthew made a choice to leave this little tidbit out of his Gospel ---

### **ON SCREEN**

*Then he (Jesus) put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was.*

I'm so glad that Mark included that eyewitness observation. Why? Because I think it tells us something extremely important about the character of Jesus. Imagine what the Mother has just been through. Her husband has left to find this "miracle man" they've been hearing about—their last hope. She is caring for the dying child, hoping and praying that he returns soon, wondering what could be taking so long, desperate to prevent the death that seems inevitable. And then, while her husband is still gone, the child dies. It's too late. Grief consumes her. I'm so thankful that our Lord recognizes her need and takes her with him when he goes in to bring her daughter back to life. I think that says something very important about our Lord. And so does this --- another little tidbit that we only get from Mark.

### ON SCREEN

**41** *He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!"*

The simple translation --- "little girl, get up"--- misses the sentiment in that phrase. It's as if Jesus is saying ... "little one" or "sweetheart" as he tenderly calls her back from death.

Don't miss this, friends. When these women come to Jesus – the desperate and grieving mother and the little girl on her death bed --- Jesus not only meets their need --- he does so with tenderness and compassion. I don't know about you but that makes me love Jesus just a little bit more. And it's yet another reason to come to Jesus when we find ourselves in battles too big to fight on our own.

### CONCLUSION

Three women who come to Jesus. An older woman who comes on her own. A middle-aged woman – the mother-- who (I think) sends someone for Jesus. And a very young woman who comes to Jesus through the efforts of others. Together they offer us an insight that is incredibly important as we begin our time here together.

There are many different reasons to come to Jesus and many different ways to come to Jesus. But the important thing is to simply get there .... To be sure that we too find our own place among the many women coming to Jesus. *In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen*