



Walk | Read | Pray | Join | Commit
The Jesus Manifesto | Week 3 | Isaiah 61:3 | Mark 5:25-34

Collect

Have each person write down something interesting they've done on a note card (e.g. skydiving, have lived in five different cities, drank a gallon of milk in five minutes — the sillier the better).

Put the note cards into a hat, give it a nice shake, and have each person draw a note card they will then read aloud.

The reader must then try to guess "who done it" and why they came to that conclusion.

The aim of this exercise is to find ways in which we identify ourselves from the rest of a group.

Context

We all have ways in which we identify ourselves from others. Often, these things are negative or speak of a lack; 'I'm not like them', 'I don't have what they have', 'I would not do it that way'. Fortunately, we are in a time in history in the West where whilst these narratives go on in our minds, there is less patience for them as physical barriers to achievement or progress.

This is only a recent move; in the time of Jesus there were many more things that presented as physical obstacles to access or development. Whether it was grief, pain, physical ailments, or socio-economic backgrounds, all of these became barriers to access certain social privileges as well as spiritual opportunities.

Read Isaiah 61:1-3 & Mark 5:25-34

In the time of Isaiah, the people of God were longing for the physical restoration of the city of Zion (modern day Jerusalem). They would have identified as being in a prolonged state of mourning for what could be. One of the ways in which mourning was identified in Hebraic culture was placing ashes in the head of the mourners as a reflection of the dust from which humanity was born and the dust to which humanity will return (Genesis 3:19).

In the time of Jesus (some 500 years later), illness, disability and even menstrual cycles prohibited access to holy place and holy people. It was thought that even the touch of someone who fit into these categories could make someone 'unclean' and therefore in need of ritualised cleansing.

Discuss: Is there anything today, that you think stops someone from worship, bible study or prayer whether internal struggles or physical things?

Content

The woman in the reading from Mark's gospel has lived for over a decade in obscurity, because of an illness. Due to attempting to pay for healing, she is now also living in poverty.



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Both illness and poverty had such an impact on everyday living in first-century Jerusalem. For a Jew, this would have meant that you were prohibited from entering the temple. The illness made you unclean and the poverty meant you wouldn't be able to bring anything to sacrifice or contribute financially to the ministry of the temple.

This woman is desperate. She hears of a wandering healer called Jesus and finds out he is coming to her town. Where usually she would have to stay on the outskirts of social occasions, and even shop in the market at a less popular time of day, she weighs up the options: stay on the outskirts and continue life in pain and obscurity, or risk everything. She charges through and grabs the hem of this rabbi's cloak.

The hem of a cloak had significant cultural importance. Modern Jews often wear tassels (called tzitzit, pronounced "zeet-zeet") for the same reason. The hem was used in contractual agreements by imprinting the corner of the robe in to clay and symbolised authority and familial relationship. Also, the decorative hem used was a reminder of God's commands (see Numbers 15:37-39) and as such symbolised the holiness (otherness) of the people of God.

As this woman grabs the hem of Jesus cloak, she is saying 'whatever happens, you have authority over my life and I need to belong again.'

Discuss: How does this understanding of the hem change your perception of the story? Remember David cuts off a corner of Saul's cloak in the cave, what significance does this bring?

Challenge

How does Jesus respond to the woman?

What challenge does this bring to our own response to need around us in our lives?

The Isaiah reading ends by saying "...They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour."

How is this concept brought to life in the gospel reading?

Connect

We all struggle with things that keep us back from wholeheartedly throwing ourselves at the feet of Jesus. Share with one person, one area in your life that you find difficult to let go of but keeps you back from being 'all in' with Jesus 24/7.

Pray:

- With one another that we would know the loving way Jesus looks at us, like he looks at the woman in the story from the book of Mark
- For those we know who have long term illness and suffering