

Faith: Courage to be Vulnerable

Mark 5:25-34

November 6th, 2016

Rev. Dr. Jeong Park

Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

I will give you a heads up before I humbly preach the words of God. My message is about faith. Certainly I will be carefully examining today's Scripture reading and find relevant spiritual insight. If you have a different definition of faith, you might be still confused or disagree with me. It is okay to be different. I want to use John Wesley's spiritual wisdom when he disagreed with one of his colleagues, George Whitefield in the 18th century revival movement. They had a heated debate on Calvinistic theological views such as perfection (whether sinlessness is attainable in this life) and predestination (whether God foreordains people's eternal destiny).¹ John Wesley concluded, "We agreed to disagree".

Let me be clear about a couple of my points: First, what is faith? Christian faith doesn't mean to acquire Harry Potter's magic wand that you can easily transform something into your wishful object. Rather it means the courage to be vulnerable by confessing your limitations honestly before God. Second, faith is your intentional choice to be connected to the divine and belong to God. It is solely your voluntary action out of your deepest desire and eagerness. We Methodists believe that the Holy Spirit always goes ahead of us and gives us guidance and assistance. But it requires you to open your hearts, minds and put your trust in God. Lastly, Christian faith doesn't manipulate your souls. It should not make you feel guilty and shameful nor force you to confess that you are a wretched sinner. That is not the point of Christian faith. At least it is not the "good news" that Jesus proclaimed. Good news is not about shame, guilt or fear but it is all about full acceptance, forgiveness and restoration. Vulnerability is the *only* key word to help us connect to the divine. Vulnerability means to acknowledge and accept your sense of imperfection. We live in a world where we have to be perfect, otherwise we feel unworthiness and shame. Being vulnerable requires us to take heart and have the courage to embrace imperfection and humbly reach out to God. Truly, faith is all about courage. Paul Tillich (August 20, 1886-October 22, 1965), German American theologian and philosopher defined faith as "Courage to be". Therefore, if you want salvation, you should have faith to be vulnerable before the divine.

Today's Scripture reading is about a woman's encounter with Jesus, the

¹ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-38/wesley-vs-whitefield.html> Accessed Nov.4, 2016

incarnation of the divine. This woman had trouble with the flow of blood for twelve years. Notice that she desperately sought to touch Jesus' own body or at least his garment because she believed that 'being in touch with' Jesus would bring her blessing of healing. It is about connection with the divine power. When Jesus looked at her act, he gently said to the woman, "Your faith made you well." How will faith cure her sickness and illness? I don't know whether Jesus cured her disease through his magical or medical intervention or not. But I can confidently tell you that Jesus the divine blessed the woman to be free from her disease and restored her. She was deeply healed and fully restored by the connection with Jesus. Simply speaking, she received salvation in Christ! Please, don't get me wrong. I don't mean to say that faith has no power to cure human sickness, but in our story faith plays a significant role to connect a desperate woman's need to a source of healing. Jesus affirmed that her faith made her well. *This* faith is not psychological confidence but the courage to be connected with God in spite of her vulnerable state. If you were in her shoes, dare you come out and reach out to Jesus?

There are many and great different definitions of faith. John Dewey, an American philosopher simply made his own definition, "To me faith is not worrying." Martin Luther King, defined, "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." An early Christian Father, Saint Augustine said, "Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe." Yes truly faith gives us power and confidence and it really helps, especially when we have to deal with life challenging situations and must to go through. Faith as confidence can give us psychological confidence to go beyond our limitation and capacity. But this is not the one that we found in our Scripture story. Jesus introduced us to a different kind of faith to heal our body. It is the courage to be vulnerable. A woman's courage made her well. Notice that the woman initiated and bravely came out of the crowd. For her, faith was simply the courage to be her genuine self as a child of God. She did not stand not as a shameful woman culturally bound and socially marginalized. She stood before the divine Jesus spiritually as she was. We need *this* courage to move forward in life!

Imagine if you were this woman, would you have felt confidently stood up before the divine one confessing your honest heart? Sickness and illness were regarded as signs of God's punishment in ancient Jewish culture. This woman must be keenly aware of her cultural bias toward her reality. But she bravely reached out to Jesus as a vulnerable being. This truly touched Jesus' heart.

BRENÉ BROWN, a professor at the University of Houston graduate

college of social work emphasizes the importance of vulnerability in life. She says, "Vulnerability is the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experience." She illustrates:

Vulnerability, I think, you know, when I ask people what is vulnerability, the answers were many. Sitting with my wife who has Stage III breast cancer and trying to make plans for our children... sending my child to school being enthusiastic and supportive of him and knowing how excited he is about orchestra tryouts and how much he wants to make first chair and encouraging him and supporting him and knowing that's not going to happen. To me, vulnerability is courage. It's about the willingness to show up and be seen in our lives. And in those moments when we show up, I think those are the most powerful, meaning-making moments of our lives even if they don't go well. I think they define who we are.²

Vulnerability is neither weakness nor psychological unstableness, but it should be rather your courage and willingness to be seen in your lives. The woman in our Scripture story has been ill for twelve years with chronic bleeding and been regarded as unclean, sinful and an isolated person. But she never gave up and tried to be in touch with Jesus among many people. Can you see her tenacious will and courage to be seen in her lives? She finally made it 'touch Jesus' the divine body.' This is what it means, "Your faith made you well." She was not afraid to show herself as she was. Jesus accepted her vulnerable heart and restored her illness to life. Faith is the other side of courage to open our vulnerable hearts and use it to make a connection with God.

Do you have faith? Let me ask you in a different way. Do we have courage to be vulnerable before our God? And are we able to come and stand before God as we are? When we come to God as we are, God will accept us and give us strength. Faith is a genuine connection between our hearts and God's heart. A person of faith is the person who is able to come to God as they are and continue to trust in God no matter what hardship and difficulties are ahead. Our life is like a boat journey on the sea. There are many storms, strong winds and big waves which threaten us and take us down and stop our journey. A person of faith will keep his/ her focus on God and firmly stand up and continue to move forward. We are not afraid nor feel dreadful because we are connected with God. Go to God as you are! Simply speaking, it is *Immanuel*, so to speak, *God is always with us*. I hope that all of us will have *this* faith. Amen.

² <http://www.onbeing.org/program/brene-brown--the-courage-to-be-vulnerable/transcript/7257> Accessed October 30th 2016