



Proper 13, Year B – June 28, 2009

Mark 5.21-43

A Homily preached by the Rev'd Canon M. Ansley Tucker

I have known five dogs well in my life. But it is the third I want to tell you about. He was a black American cocker Spaniel, and CanAm champion with a perfect head and a crooked gait. Registered in the Canadian Kennel Club as The Dandy Diplomat (don't laugh — there are only so many names of 25 letters or fewer which haven't already been used), but he was known to *me* as *Trouble*. Trubby came to us a little past his first birthday, having been recently repossessed by the breeder on account of maltreatment.

It seems he had belonged to two farmhands who had decided that they really liked dogs, so they got ten. Trouble — and here you must understand that a cocker spaniel is a house dog — was consigned with his companions to the great outdoors. After dark, they were herded into the garage, except on the very coldest of Ottawa winter nights, when they were allowed the high privilege of basement living. We believed that Trubby had been beaten. At least, that was the only way we could account for his skittishness around strangers, and for the way he would cringe and yelp whenever he saw any man of a small wiry frame approach him.

I think that if Trubby could have told us, his little doggy heart would have been quite glad simply to have been allowed inside where he belonged, to be fed, to be walked, and not to be hit anymore. Trouble would likely have thought that that was enough.

But it wasn't of course. What Trubby needed to be whole again, to be all he could be, to be a pet and not just a four-footed freeloader, was to be loved and to love again. It was not, in fact, simply a matter of having his creature-comforts tended to, but that he should be cajoled, caressed, enticed, and welcomed once again into a trusting relationship with human beings — with those who were to him as gods.

So why do I tell you this story? Because it is a parable of what happens to the woman with a flow of blood.

Mark says, There was a woman who had had a flow of blood for 12 years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not better, but rather grew worse. Now, this woman has heard about the remarkable powers of a rabbi named Jesus. She knows, however, that she could never confront him face to face, could never come right out and tell him her problem, because, well, because — it was embarrassing. In fact, the Law of Moses stipulated that her particular ailment made her ceremonially unclean, and indeed that anyone who so much as *touched* her was also ceremonially unclean. No, the rabbi must not be told the nature of her concern. And so she resolves within herself that she will just sneak up behind Jesus and touch his clothes. Nobody will be any the wiser, (and, she rationalizes, it's only his *clothes* — it's not as if she's hurting him), and who knows, maybe, just maybe, she will be made well. After 12 years of anemia (can you imagine how *tired* this woman was?), she really has nothing to lose... So she does it. And wonder of wonders — can it be? — she knows instinctively and immediately that she has been made well.

This alone would be an amazing story. And Mark could have ended it there. This alone was all the poor woman really wanted or thought she needed. Had she

been able to risk giving voice to the desires of her heart, she would likely have been quite glad simply to stop bleeding, to be allowed back in the house where she belonged — as a clean person, no longer rejected, and not to be hurt anymore. The woman in Mark's story would likely have thought that that was enough.

But it wasn't, of course.

Jesus wheels around and demands to know who it is who has touched him. The disciples can hardly believe their ears. Here is Jesus surrounded by a pushing and shoving crowd, and he wants to know who *touched* him! Funny, isn't it, how the disciples are always busy fretting about the wrong things. Here they are all worried about *how* Jesus could possibly expect to know who touched him. They would have been better advised to ask *why* he wanted to know.

And why does he? Because he is determined to give this woman more than she bargained for. He is determined to give her not just what she wants, but what she really and truly needs. And because it seems to be the way of God, it seems to be the way of Jesus, that he honours even our tiniest and most tentative steps in his direction. Here she is, a woman who was afraid to presume upon his time, his attention, perhaps above all upon his cleanness (how often have we kept counsel about some problem we were having because we thought God, or our friends, or our priest, or our physician were so upright, or so "together" that they couldn't possibly understand or empathise?) She is afraid that she will be rejected — as too unimportant, as a mere woman, as dirt.

She is wrong. "Who touched me?" Jesus will not let her slink away. And so reluctantly she emerges from the crowd, and confesses.

And what happens next?... This woman, this mere woman, this unclean woman who felt sure that she was beneath the teacher's dignity — Jesus calls her *Daughter*. He stops the procession on his way to an emergency, and he calls her Daughter.

That is the miracle. Oh, the healing was spectacular, too. But the real miracle is the restoration of her self-worth. The miracle is that she is received into a personal relationship with one who is her God.

We are not whole; we are not what we can be until we have reckoned — personally — with the place of God in our lives. Oh, we'll survive all right if we don't. Millions do. They live comfortable lives, they are healthy, and reasonably happy. They (I say "they": perhaps it would be more honest sometimes to say "we") have most of what we want, but rather less of what we really need. God wants so much more for us than the quantitative satisfaction of our creature comforts. God wants a relationship with us. God surely does not want simply that we should come skulking into a church to make our desperate requests of him from time to time; nor even that we should go on our way rejoicing at the help we are given; but that we should pause long enough to hear ourselves called back, to hear ourselves called "my daughter," "my son".

This is the miracle experienced by a woman whom no one would claim as daughter for 12 long years. It was the miracle experienced by a dog who learned once again how to love and be loved. It is the miracle that is waiting for any who would so much as touch the hem of the garment of Jesus Christ.

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