

“Your Faith Has Made You Complete”

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Mark 5:24b-34*

“I’m going to die!” Kathy repeated to herself. The words pierced her soul, as she dropped the telephone and replayed the conversation in her mind.

“Kathy, your AIDS test...it’s come back positive!” her doctor blurted out.

In shock she stared out the window. Her worst nightmare had come true. In 1986 she was a nurse working in the emergency room where an accident – related trauma patient was wheeled in. They cracked open his chest to perform internal CPR. Her bare hands were wrist-deep inside the patient; back then no one wore gloves. Despite their best efforts, he died minutes later. Later that night, they found out he had AIDS. Kathy’s heart skipped a beat as she looked down at her hands and remembered a minor cut on her right index finger.

After the dreadful call, she rushed back to the hospital to meet with the doctors. “This can’t be true. Why me? I’m a nurse – trying to help a patient. I’m only 26 years old, I’m not ready to die!” Her mind was racing.

Tests were confirmed. Kathy was the first healthcare worker in America to test HIV-positive from an on-the-job exposure.

Mother and father were supportive. Kathy’s boss said, sympathetically, “Kathy, if this gets out, this hospital will shut down. I’m sorry, but you can’t work here anymore.”

That weekend, she shared the shocking news with her church. She was amazed that some members turned away from her. She heard one say, “You know AIDS is God’s punishment.” Others whispered, “Should we touch her?” They were afraid.

Kathy stopped eating and sleeping. One night she determined she was not going to die the death of AIDS. She would choose how and when she would die. Her mind was racing, with regrets, of “if only...I would have spent more time with family and friends. If only...I would have taken time to find out who I was.” Kathy found herself in a parking lot, sitting in her car, on a dark drizzling night, with a bottle of sleeping pills in her hand. Three knocks on her car window jolted her back to reality. It was Robin, her friend, appearing out of nowhere. “Kathy are you okay?” She rolled down the window and asked incredulously, “How did you find me here?” Tears were now streaming down her face, and she despairingly shook her head, “No. I am so scared and lonely!” Robin climbed into the car beside Kathy. They talked. They cried. They prayed. Her friend repeatedly said, “Kathy, hold on to hope”

Kathy began from then on, to hold on to hope.

Months later, Kathy received another phone call, this time the doctor said, “your tests have come back negative. You do not have AIDS now!”

“I’m going to Live!” She cried. She remembered her regrets and how now she could do something about them. Her life was dramatically changed. Kathy shares, some call it a medical error. She calls it a miracle. To quote Kathy, “Now, anytime I think I can’t handle something and I’m about to throw in the towel, my mind returns to that lonely night in the car when God sent His messenger to stop me and remind me. No matter how difficult the situation, I need only to hold on to hope!”

Thank God for those events, (miracles – if you will) in life, where hope and joy are manifested in the here and now!

Kathy’s plight seemed hopeless. She was close to just giving up, when instead of someone being afraid to reach out and touch her – Robin, a friend touched Kathy’s soul; with hope.

There was another woman suffering with a terrible sickness. In fact she had been dealing with her illness for 12 years! “Twelve years!” (I get depressed if I’m sick for 3 days!) This woman was not one to just sit back and accept her plight. She did all she could do, going to doctor, after doctor, after doctor, spending all she had, but to no avail. And to add insult to injury her illness, was considered an impurity issue. Thus she was not to be socialized with. She was not to be touched!

If you can bear it; consider your own life – bereft of human touch for 12 years – and being sick to boot! How horrible!

Here is this unnamed woman, sick, ill for so long, and yet, never has she given up hope – that her life can change! Things can be different! This woman could have “thrown in the towel” years earlier! She could have said, “No more!” “Hope is an illusion!”

But, no she held on to hope!!

Now, she had heard about Jesus, and she thought, “If only I can get close enough to just touch his clothing, I will be restored to health.” She didn’t need to bother him; impose herself on him. And being accustomed to not being touched, she reasoned she would do the touching. Here is a woman, a person of great stamina and faith! She, the “untouchable”, weaves her way through the crowd. She is intent and focused. She pushes past the large and small, and finally reaches Jesus. She reaches out and touches the “hem of his garment” and she is made well.

How wonderful!
What next?

Jesus, touched and grabbed by this crowd, buffeted here and there – stops, and (I love this) asks, “Who touched my garments?”

The disciples are incredulous. They see the hundreds grabbing at Jesus and Jesus asks, “Who touched me?”

More than “touch” is going on here. Faith, strong faith is being shared on a non-verbal level. The woman, healed and now fearful falls down at Jesus’ feet. She never thought this would happen. No need to bother him. But, this story is expressing the power of faith.

But, she had no reason to fear, not when meeting Jesus.

Jesus hears her story. And, my friends, this is the only place in the gospel where Jesus calls someone, “Daughter.” (A particular intimacy is felt here, for a woman who has not been hugged, hand held, for over 12 years!)

Daughter, your faith has made you well...

Kathy came close to giving up on hope. Robin her friend – arrived at the right moment, and reminded her to “hold on to hope.” Whether we live or die – hold on to hope! The woman in Mark’s gospel continued to hold on to hope, even through the untouchable 12 years for her illness. Jesus recognized her touch of faith, its strength and power.

Most of us thankfully will never go through what this woman had to endure. Think of her, and her faith, when times get difficult, and life seems in chaos. Consider, spiritually, if only I can get near Jesus, and merely touch his clothes my life will be different.

My friends, like Kathy, like the woman;

Hold on!

Hold on to hope!!

Amen.