"For Most of History, Anonymous was a Woman"
A Sermon Delivered by Rev. John Balicki
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There is something very freeing about being anonymous because nothing is expected of you; nothing is getting back to anyone, and no one cares. - Dolly Wells

I just miss - I miss being anonymous. - Barack Obama

For most of history, Anonymous was a woman. - Virginia Woolf

How are you with anonymity? It used to be churches were a good place for anonymity – at least in large urban or suburban churches – you could slip into one of the back pews - no one knew who you were or really even cared – just a little quiet time with you and the Divine. Our newcomers quickly discover it sure ain't like that here! Or maybe there are certain times you just don't want to be recognized. You've gone to a workout at the gym or you've been working in the garden or on a home project all morning and you're a little sweaty and disheveled and you just want to slip into Hannaford and pick up those couple things you need and . . . of course you bump into that person you least want to see you like you are.

For most of history, Anonymous was a woman. - Virginia Woolf

Our gospel today features, of course, a woman, actually two of them but we'll get to that later, who was trying to remain anonymous (love that picture on the bulletin cover – now there's real anonymity) and like many women in the Scripture she was so anonymous nobody remembered or cared to find out what her name was, and, of course, her plan completely failed – instead of remaining anonymous, she is brought out into the spotlight in front of the great teacher and healer she so desperately sought. But let's dive deeper into some background.

Here's how Debie Thomas describes our anonymous woman's condition:

this daughter has been bleeding for twelve years. Her condition renders her ritually unclean, which means she can't enter the synagogue, the heart and soul of her religious community. She can't touch or be touched by anyone without rendering them unclean, too. By the time she approaches Jesus, she has spent every penny she owns, enduring much under many

physicians, but her bleeding has only worsened. The woman's very body — its femaleness, its porousness — has become a source of isolation and disgrace. She's an outcast, an embarrassment, a pariah. Lonely beyond description.

Given this context, it's clear that what the woman does in approaching Jesus is a desperate and stunning act of civil disobedience. She knows she has no business polluting the crowds with her presence. She knows she's forbidden to touch other people. She knows that even her fingertips on Jesus's cloak will defile him. But she touches him, anyway.

A miracle occurs but Jesus invites more. He insists on more. He insists that the woman, terrified though she is, comes forward and tells her story. Her "whole truth."

Jesus knows that this daughter has spent twelve long years having other people impose their narratives on her. Their interpretations, their assumptions, their prejudices. He knows that she's been reduced to caricature. Shamed into silence by bad religion. Denied the spiritual nourishment and empowerment that is her birthright as a child of God. She needs someone to listen, to understand, and to bless her "whole truth" in the presence of the larger community.

So this is what Jesus does; he invites her to bear witness, to find her voice, to speak publicly and confidently about her story and God's. "Daughter," he says when she at last falls silent. "Daughter, go in peace."

But she is not the only woman in this story. There is a daughter (also unnamed), twelve years old and near death or already gone. A daughter of a man (named, Jairus), who is a synagaogue leader – the kind of man who is an enforcer of religious taboos, who must wait, his daughter in a perilous situation while this healer spends time with an unclean woman, maybe he learns something about the danger of religious taboos. The importance of women's voices. The healing power of compassion.

But the daughter, near death, in a coma, a time of dreams. Alyce MacKenzie speculates on the dream this girl had as she later recounts it to her father:

"I had the strangest dreams today, Daddy. I dreamed that a woman had been bleeding since the day I was born. I dreamed she went from doctor to doctor. Each one took more of her money and she felt worse. In my dream, she is stooped and old-looking. I dreamed a man came in a boat and that people gathered around him. Then, I dreamed that you ran up to him and fell on your knees and begged him to make me well. I knew it was a dream because you would never do that in real life! So he followed you to our house.

"I dreamed, as he followed you here, that the woman came out of nowhere. She was pale, trembling, crawling across the road to touch the hem of his garment. When she did, she stood up, was healed, and disappeared into the crowd. But he called out: 'Who touched my clothes?' When he said that in my dream, I felt a jolt of energy as if I was underwater and had been released to swim to the surface, and she came back and knelt before him and told him what she had done. He told her that her faith had made her well. I dreamed that, as I was lying here sleeping, she was healed."

And then the healer came and she was healed, "Little girl, get up". Both were healed because deep in the heart of Jairus and the unnamed woman, they knew Jesus could bring healing and they sought him out. In a Gospel where the disciples never seem to get Jesus, never seem to figure out his divine identity, Jairus and the woman with the 12-year flow of blood are better models of faith than the disciples.

We don't know anything more about the woman and the little girl. We don't know the kind of livea they went on to live. We do know that they had new life because of the proactive faith of her father and the woman herself.

There are people in our lives and in the world who dream of healing and resurrection and a new life but are not currently capable of actively seeking it. Depression, illness, poverty, loss of faith, loss of voice. . . there are many conditions that can immobilize us. There are still too many situations in the world today where named men deprive unnamed women of their own rights to healing and wholeness: it's been two years since the universal right to abortion has been taken away, threats exist now to in vitro fertilization and contraception. Named men fail to provide unnamed women with protection from domestic violence, with day care needed to allow them to work, with adequate health care.

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On behalf of ourselves, our loved ones, the anonymous ones who have no voice, can we seek the healing touch of Jesus? What is "asleep" in us that Jesus might awaken? Can we push past our desire for anonymity and push toward grabbing hold of God's boundless compassion? What hierarchies, taboos, and skepticisms stand in our way? What is our "whole truth," and when will we find the courage to tell it?