

## Where Does It Hurt?

Sermon 104 | Greystone Baptist Church | June 20, 2021

Mark 5:21-43

Don't be fooled by me.  
Don't be fooled by the face I wear  
for I wear a mask, a thousand masks, masks that I'm afraid to take off,  
and none of them is me.

Pretending is an art that's second nature with me,  
but don't be fooled,  
for God's sake don't be fooled.  
I give you the impression that I'm secure,  
that all is sunny and unruffled with me, within as well as without  
that confidence is my name and coolness my game  
that the water's calm and I'm in command  
and that I need no one,  
but don't believe me.  
My surface may seem smooth but my surface is my mask,  
ever-varying and ever-concealing.  
Beneath lies no complacency.  
Beneath lies confusion, and fear, and aloneness.  
But I hide this. I don't want anybody to know it.  
I panic at the thought of my weakness exposed.  
That's why I frantically create a mask to hide behind,  
a nonchalant, sophisticated façade,  
to help me pretend,  
to shield me from the glance that knows...

These words are from the beginning of a poem called, *Please Hear What I'm Not Saying*, by Charles C. Finn. Though the words were penned in 1966, they are just as relevant today as they were 55 years ago. There is no denying that there is a pandemic of pain sweeping through our country. This is a pandemic that started long before March of 2020 and though there may be some promising treatments, there is no organized, widespread vaccine distribution effort. Rather, I would suggest that because this disease of pain has been ignored, suppressed, denied and masked for so long... it has infected us all, almost to the point of no return... unless somebody (or a bunch of somebodies) gets brave enough to unmask and bold enough to confront the pain with the healing balm of love.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is met by two people who are filled with pain. First is Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, a man with power and connections that could protect him from certain kinds of pain and fear. On the outside, he probably seemed proud, confident, and respectable. Maybe he was the envy of the town, folks might assume he had everything in order. But the day he burst through the crowd surrounding Jesus, he was a broken man, filled with pain and worry that his daughter was so sick, she might just die.

Filled with paternal desperation, Jairus throws himself to the ground, laying at Jesus' feet and begging: *Come and heal my daughter!*

In this moment his masks were ripped off. There was no more room for pride and propriety. There was only humility, vulnerability, and truth.

No sooner than Jesus set his feet toward Jairus' house the crowd begins to grow. It takes on a life of its own as so many people join the procession that Mark tells us the crowd is "pressing in on" Jesus (v.24). The momentum and promise grow as Jesus makes his way toward the young girl who is quite possibly on her death bed.

The wonder builds: *Will he get there in time? Even if he does, will he be able to heal her?*

And then all of a sudden the action is interrupted when Jesus stops and speaks: *Who touched my clothes?*

A woman breaks through the now-still crowd, knowing she is the one who has caused this untimely interruption. Perhaps she thought her presence or maybe even her touch could be masked by the crowd as they pressed on toward Jesus and toward Jairus' house where the girl lay in waiting. Now the mask was pulled away as Jesus could feel the power flow forth from his robes to her body. She has been healed. Her. The unnamed woman, known only by that which makes her unclean and the gender that places her on the margins of power. It was she who was brave (or was it brazen?) enough to break all the rules, to draw near to the crowds or ordinary people, daring to make them unclean by association, daring to show her face unmasked, daring to believe that she too might be worthy of the healing and hope that Jesus was said to offer. It was she who risked revealing her lifetime of pain. It was she who demanded liberation even while Jesus was on the way to Jairus' house.

*Didn't she know there was a little girl whose daddy got in line first?  
Didn't she know her disruption might cost someone their life?  
Didn't she know it wasn't her turn?*

The narrative focus shifts and all of us – ancient and modern readers of this story – are now laser focused on this woman. The one who was suffering from illness. The one who had exhausted her resources seeking the medical attention that her body required. The one who was alone in her suffering. The one who was rendered unclean, unworthy, and unwelcome because of something over which she had no control, something that could have happened to anyone... And now we are all staring at her, because she interrupted the story that was unfolding, the one about the time Jesus healed the young, innocent, daughter of the respectable man named Jairus.

Now we are all looking to her for an explanation, layering onto her pre-existing conditions the burden of justifying herself. *Why did she act so selfishly, demanding that her needs be met now? Before Jairus' daughter? Before everyone else?*

Can't you just hear the questions rising up amongst the pressing crowd?

Can't you just feel the anger growing amongst them as their gaze turns from Jairus' house to the woman who dared to interrupt the scene?

Eckhart Tolle says that, "Where there is anger, there is always pain underneath."<sup>1</sup>

His words remind me of a story that Ruby Sales tells about a conversion of sorts in her younger adult years. If you don't know the name Ruby Sales, I encourage you to google her and learn a little more about who she is and where she's coming from. That way your only glimpse of her isn't filtered through my lips.

Sales was a young person in the height of the Civil Rights Movement and she is a self-proclaimed child of the Black Church and black folk religion – two very different things according to her. Early in life Sales went to a rally, advocating for equality for black Americans. A novice, she felt confident she'd show up with her friends and stand in the crowd for a couple of hours before change would come. She remembers standing in the crowd waiting for liberation to come. Instead, they were surrounded by horses and state troopers as a counter gesture to those who'd come to protest the inequality they were experiencing. She remembers that she "kept looking up to the sky, waiting for the Exodus story to happen to [her]. And it didn't happen. [She] expected God to appear and some chariot to open up in the sky, because [she] couldn't imagine that [they] were so right, and God would be so wrong... In [her] 16-year-old mind [she] couldn't imagine that. And so [she] lost religion that day."<sup>2</sup>

The pain of feeling abandoned by God, unanswered, unheard, and unseen led to her departure from religion, from God altogether. A child of the church, filled with the pain of this world and all its unanswered cries for justice, Ruby Sales left God behind and picked up the masks of materialism and Marxism. "If it wasn't economics and it wasn't race, then it didn't exist," she remembers about her early life<sup>3</sup>.

But then one day she was getting her locks washed at the salon and the locker's daughter came through the door. The young woman had been hustling all night and her body bore the scars of her experience. She was high on drugs and covered with sores when she burst in and interrupted the scene.

Sales remembers that as she observed the locker's daughter entering the space, she heard a voice saying to her: *Ask her: Where does it hurt?*

And so Ruby looked at the locker's daughter and asked: *Shelley, where does it hurt?*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1034915-where-there-is-anger-there-is-always-pain-underneath>

<sup>2</sup> Ruby Sales with Krista Tippett on *On Being: Where Does It Hurt?* <https://onbeing.org/programs/ruby-sales-where-does-it-hurt/#transcript>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

The question opened a floodgate of sacred storytelling as difficult memories, traumatic experiences, and accounts of impossible situations poured out of her mouth. Things she had never told her mother before were shared on that day, in that sacred salon, simply because one faithful person who had sworn to leave God behind dared to open her mouth and ask the question: *Where does it hurt?*

As a result, three women encountered God's healing power in that moment.

All of them bore the pain of broken relationships, unrealized dreams, and divine disappointment. All of them covering that pain with facades of strength, power, and yes, sometimes even anger.

All of them desperately needing to be seen for who they were,  
desperately longing to give voice to their pain

Ruby the pain of feeling abandoned by God at the demonstration

Shelley the pain of abuse and trauma in her past

and Shelley's mother, the one who was washing Ruby's locks when all of this unfolded, the pain of a mother who could not and cannot protect her child from the pain of life in this world

Each of them was desperately waiting for someone to give them permission to lay down their masks in order to be known, welcomed, and healed through the power of love.

This experience changed Ruby's perspective on God as well as her course in life. As Shelley began to speak her truth, Ruby realized that there was so much unvoiced pain in this world that no system of government, no political policy, and no amount of sound economic theory could heal the brokenness that exists in our world. We are all broken. We are all suffering pain about which many will never know. And we are all in need of the kind of healing only God can offer – be it on the way to our house, in the touch of a garment, or in the company of friends bold enough to ask: *Where does it hurt?* and gracious enough to listen to our response.

Like the crowds in Mark's Gospel that were pressing in on Jesus, anxious for him to get to Jairus' house, we can get so focused on our one little thing that we too often forget that others are hurting too.

Some suffering personal pain, loss, and grief as relationships change and life comes to an end.

Others suffering the systemic pains of poverty, prejudice, and inequality.

Each of us finding ourselves in the crowd pressing on Jesus to heed one cry or another... unless of course we are more like Jairus, falling at Jesus' feet begging for a miracle... ... or even still maybe we are like the woman daringly reaching out and claiming healing where it is needed most.

But friends, whether we are in the crowd with our eyes open waiting to see who is going to be healed today...

or whether we are more like Jairus, bearing the burden of personal pain...

or whether we are like the woman, suffering longstanding systemic oppression and marginalization...

the *good* news is this: there is enough healing power in Jesus to go around.

And there is always enough time to stop and ask the question: *Where does it hurt?*

Don't be fooled by me.

Don't be fooled by the face I wear

for I wear a mask, a thousand masks, masks that I'm afraid to take off,

and none of them is me.

Pretending is an art that's second nature with me,

but don't be fooled... (the poet continues...)

The nearer you approach to me

the blinder I may strike back.

It's irrational, but despite what the books say about man

often I am irrational.

I fight against the very thing I cry out for.

But I am told that love is stronger than strong walls

and in this lies my hope.

Please try to beat down those walls

with firm hands but gentle hands...

Who am I, you may wonder?

I am someone you know very well.

For I am every man you meet

and I am every woman you meet.

So rather than reacting in anger or letting our assumptions lead us to our own conclusions

about our friends or our foes, maybe we could allow ourselves the interruption and take

the time to ask: *Where does it hurt?*