

Never Alone

A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC,  
Lexington

June 26, 2022

Rev. Reebee Kavich Girash

Let me tell you that the sermon I'd intended - on the fruits of the Spirit and bicycling - was just about finished Friday morning...and I hope to preach it next week.

I'm going to change our reading for today.



Beloved - Linda Crossan, 2000<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=55303>

Crossan, Linda. Beloved, from *Art in the Christian Tradition*, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=55303> [retrieved June 25, 2022]. Original source: Linda Crossan, Second Presbyterian Church, Nashville, TN.

## Mark 5:25-34

<sup>25</sup>Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. <sup>26</sup>She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. <sup>27</sup>She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup>for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” <sup>29</sup>Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. <sup>30</sup>Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” <sup>31</sup>And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” <sup>32</sup>He looked all around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup>But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup>He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

### *Prayer*

I wonder what it would be like to bleed for twelve years. To hemorrhage, which is not just a little trickle, but a flow

of blood, some translators say. She is bleeding profusely. Perhaps she can barely stand.

“She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.”

Perhaps she can barely stand but she presses on toward Jesus.

This is a woman who is poor - in part because she has spent all her resources seeking wellness.

She is poor, but not in spirit.

This is a woman who has endured much under the care of many physicians. She does not have access to the medical care that she needs.

She will not give up on her wholeness and healing.

This is a woman who is on the margins of her community - considered unclean because of her bleeding.

She comes right up to the center of the crowd.

This is a woman of great determination and persistence.

She reaches out for healing.

This is a woman of deep faith.

This is a woman who knows what she needs in order to be well - she reaches out to touch Jesus' cloak even though she is not supposed to - and she is healed.

This is a woman upon whom God has mercy.

This is a woman Jesus treats with compassion rather than judgment.

She "fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.

<sup>34</sup>He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

My colleague Rev. Jennifer Stuart says this: Jesus' "witness is deep, his love profound. She is restored to life in her act of reaching out in hope. Highly conscious of *her* touch, Jesus

moves towards her. There is a giving and a receiving that opens up new paths of liberation. ”<sup>2</sup>

And so she is healed, and so she goes in peace.

But this story could happen today. This is a woman who is not named - and perhaps today that means she could be anyone with a uterus. Any of us who finds ourselves bleeding, and under the judgment of external authorities who would condemn our bodies or control our choices.

I wonder what it would be like to bleed for twelve years.

I wonder what it would be like to try procedure after procedure, in an effort to conceive...and when the pregnancy does not progress, to be told I could not have medical treatment to stop the bleeding. (That is the case as of Friday in several US states.)

I wonder what it would be like to have seven children and not be able to afford to feed them all, and be told I must

---

<sup>2</sup> –The Ordination Paper of Rev. Jennifer Stuart, First Church Cambridge, 2015

have an eighth, with no healthcare, no diapers, no childcare, no paid leave.

I do not have to wonder what it would be like to be a teenager, raped and pregnant, because someone in my family told me her story.

I do not have to wonder what it would be like to see myself or my child in the list of people whose rights and dignities and loves will be judged next, because we were listed out in print on Friday.<sup>3</sup> One of the justices said explicitly that he believes birth control, same-sex marriage, and LGBT relationships fall to the same logic.

I wonder what it would be like *to have all the answers to everyone else's complicated choices*. I like judging, you know. But then I think of Jesus, who was so wise and so compassionate that he rarely sat in judgment. Mostly, when he judged, he judged the folks who had gotten judgy, folks who prioritized righteousness over compassion. Let the one of you who is without sin cast the first stone. If I follow Jesus, it is toward liberation, letting the oppressed go free, not judgment.

---

<sup>3</sup> Clarence Thomas' Concurring opinion in Dobbs: "In future cases, we should reconsider all of this Court's substantive due process precedents, including *Griswold*, *Lawrence*, and *Obergefell*. Because any substantive due process decision is "demonstrably erroneous," we have a duty to "correct the error" established in those precedents."

I wonder what it is like to feel alone, and judged, without options or choices, without safety, fearing for the future.

And when I wonder what that is like, I remember that this is where courageous faith comes in.

For we are not alone. We are never alone. When someone says, you are unworthy; you should be ashamed; you are unclean - Jesus pauses to hear their story; Jesus says, go in peace, and be healed.

We are not alone. We are never alone.

Jesus sent his followers, two by two, dozen by dozen, church by church, so that no one has to be alone.

Do you know that before Roe, a thousand pastors and rabbis walked in courageous faith, non-judgmentally, with women seeking reproductive health care.

In 1966, a pastor was asked by a mom to help her teen daughter find a safe abortion.

It was the beginning of the Clergy Consultation Service - a network of clergy who "acted from conscience to defy abortion bans. They were horrified at the way laws in all

50 states limited women's freedom and left only dangerous options for ending a pregnancy — brutal back-alley abortions or self-harm to induce miscarriage.

“All of these faith leaders' Christian and Jewish traditions shared a core belief: Care for people in need took precedence over obeying what they considered unjust laws.

Ministers, rabbis, and some nuns and priests worked...in CCS for six years before *Roe v. Wade*. They offered all-options counseling and, when requested, referrals to safe but still illegal abortions. After *Roe*, as interfaith advocacy on women's reproductive issues continued, today's Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice evolved.”<sup>4</sup>

The United Church of Christ was there at the beginning of the Clergy Consultation, works with RCRC now, and in our General Synod resolutions has consistently supported reproductive rights and reproductive justice. This is the group from which I sought training twenty years ago, and continue to support.

I tell you this so that if you or someone you love needs to speak with a clergy person for non-judgmental, all options counsel, you know that I am available.

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://rcrc.org/drawing-courage-from-pre-roe-clergy-activism/>



I tell you this also, as in the next months and years we pray about how new cases and rulings will unfold.

There was an unnamed woman, so determined to be well that she touched Jesus' cloak. And he called her daughter, and he did not reject her or judge her - he healed her and offered her peace.

You are not alone. You are never alone. Even this week.  
You are not alone.  
Amen.

*From May - A Word from Pastor Reebee on the week's news*

Tuesday, we awoke to surprising headlines: a leaked opinion from the Supreme Court indicating that Roe v. Wade is likely to be overturned. I do not presume to know what your response was to this news, but because of its

significance, I want to reflect both on my own personal response and what I have heard from congregants, friends, and colleagues. My own response was one of anger and fear, grounded in the experiences of members of my family dating back to the 1940s, and continuing through the experiences of friends and family throughout my life. Many of the folks I've heard from since Tuesday also expressed anger, shock and fear. Their fear extended past abortion rights to concerns about the future of other rights, such as same-sex marriage, gender-affirming healthcare, and privacy more broadly. I also heard from folks who were supportive of this draft opinion and I want to clearly acknowledge that people have different and thoughtfully held opinions on this matter. This topic is very, very tender. If this week's news has evoked in you a strong response and you would like to be in conversation, please reach out.

The United Church of Christ has a congregational polity which means that neither the national nor regional bodies speak on behalf of all members of the United Church of Christ. Individual members and local congregations hold a diversity of opinion on social issues (witness the fact that less than half of UCC churches nationwide are ONA, as an example). However, the wider UCC through our conferences and through General Synod does speak to our churches with prophetic witness, and the UCC also advocates on the regional and national level on issues of

concern. In line with historic votes of the UCC's national General Synod meeting, the national setting and our conferences advocates for reproductive justice. One highlight that I noticed in these posts is the concern for poor women who already struggle to access comprehensive medical care. You can read responses from the UCC this week at these links:

<https://www.ucc.org/d-c-policy-advocate-continue-the.../> |

<https://www.ucc.org/reproductive-justice/> |

<https://www.sneucc.org/.../responding-to-the-potential...>

Many of you know that I received training as an all options clergy counselor from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. I mention that here so that if you or someone you love needs to speak with a clergy person for counsel, you know that I am available. I also want to note that when I advocate on social issues (for example - homelessness prevention, climate action, reproductive justice), unless I am drawing on a vote of the Council or congregation, I do so as an individual clergy person rather than representing Pilgrim Church.

We are in a time of very intense news from every corner – public health, war abroad, and this news – in addition to tender personal matters each of us is holding. I pray that we might all offer one another compassion, tenderness, and a listening ear.

Pastor Reebee