

**Andrew Miller** explores the healing of the woman suffering from menorrhagia

# DIVINE TRIAGE

**N**ow when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped (Luke 8:40-44, see also Mark 5:22-29).

The chronic anaemia of this woman with dysfunctional uterine bleeding would have been severe enough to compromise her activities of daily living. So, as others before her (Mark 3:10), she touched the tassels of Jesus's cloak. So far, so good. She instantly recovers, and Jesus continues to the life-threatening emergency. Or does he...?

*'Who touched me?'* Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, *'Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you.'* But Jesus said, *'Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.'* Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. (Luke 8:45-48, see also Mark 5:30-34)

This poses the first riddle – why did Jesus force this woman to reveal herself? This took some time, during which the emergency at Jairus' house became a fatality. Later Jesus needed to bring her back to life, causing unwelcome sensational publicity. To resolve this we need to explore the second riddle - why was this woman not rejoicing that she had indeed been 'instantly healed'? Why was she terrified of owning up to this life-changing experience?

Because of her menorrhagia, this woman had been religiously unclean (Leviticus 15:25) for years. The law clearly stated that this affected all the furniture she used (Leviticus 15:20-23), severely restricting her social life. She would have been unable to join in the life of the synagogue and the festivals at Jerusalem (assuming she had enough energy to get uphill to them); indeed, in many Orthodox churches today a menstruating woman is excluded from the Eucharist. It would have caused major marital problems with her husband (Leviticus 15:24; Ezekiel 18:5-6), so she might well have been divorced. This is why she surreptitiously touched Jesus' cloak from behind.

Therefore, as well as the physical limitations caused by this condition, her family, social and religious life would have been

profoundly compromised, explaining her desperation in ruining herself financially to seek any medical help. This was then a common, major, life-ruining condition for women, hence there were several suggested rabbinical remedies; all were expensive.

The effect of this apparently minor medical illness was therefore catastrophic. Jesus realised that physical healing was not enough for her - her damaged psyche and emotions needed attention too. He therefore insisted that she be located to be forced to emerge and look Jesus in the face.

Jesus said five remarkable things that she needed to hear: *'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering'* (Mark 5:34). But why remarkable?

**1. Daughter:** in all his dealings with women this is the only time Jesus is known to have said this, and even in his many healings of men he only once said 'son' (Matthew 9:2).

**2. Your faith:** although some commentaries commend her great faith, in reality Jesus was her last desperate hope; she needed to have this tiny spark affirmed.

**3. Has healed you:** A much better translation would be 'has made you whole'. Instead of using either of the two common words for physical healing (one already used here transliterates as 'therapy'), Jesus unusually chose the word 'save' - embracing soul and spirit. On at least three other occasions Jesus chose the same words to bless and affirm the transformation that had happened in a person's life: a sinful woman, a Samaritan leper, and a blind man (Luke 7:50; 17:19; 18:42).

**4. Go in peace:** Jesus is only known to have said it once before, to another woman excluded from society (because of immorality - Luke 7:50). Now this woman could at last experience real peace, not just both with her family and society but more importantly within herself.

**5. Be freed from your suffering:** this last word is rarely used for sickness, instead being translated 'scourging' (as in John 19:1). Not only was Jesus blessing her physical healing, but he also fully acknowledged how devastating her 'suffering' had been.

This is why Jesus felt compelled to stop. This is the ultimate expression of whole-person medicine.

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