

April 12/13, 2008
Handling Stress from Overload
Luke 8:43-48
Rev. Susan Bresser

Sung to the tune of “His Eye is on the Sparrow”
*Why should I feel discouraged, why should the raindrops fall,
Why does the sump-pump stop working, and flood the family room and hall?
When Jesus is my portion? My constant friend is He:
His thumb is on the umbrella opener, and I know He covers me;
He opens the umbrella and I know He covers me.*

*I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free,
He might not personally clean out the basement,
but I know He covers me.*

*I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free,
Jesus is kinda like a shop vac
And I know he watches me.*

We have started a new sermon series called STRESSED: Dealing with Life at the Boiling Point. Scott started us off last week sharing with us that we can turn to God in times of stress and crises. I need to be reminded of that as I – and many others – face the challenge of a wet basement.

We all live with stress ... no one is immune. That almost brings me a sense of peace ... knowing that we are not alone. We all face different challenges. When we feel overwhelmed or unsure how to meet the demands placed on us, we experience stress. In small doses, stress can be a good thing, because it can be a motivator ... a push to help you stay focused. But we all know what happens when stress becomes a threat ... when our physical and emotional well-being is compromised.

If you have a lot of responsibilities and worries, you might be running on stress a good majority of your time. The problem with the stress response is that the more it's activated, the harder it is to shut off. Instead of leveling off once the crisis has passed, our stress hormones, our heart rate, and our blood pressure remain elevated.

As you know, stress is highly individualistic. What you consider stressful depends on these factors: your personality, general outlook on life, problem-solving abilities, and social support system. What you consider stressful might not faze your neighbor at all or vice-versa.

The top four stressors in most of our lives are:

1. Environmental – Your physical surroundings ... like water in your basement.
2. Family and relationships –Marital disagreements, dysfunctional relationships, rebellious teens ...
3. Job – In our career-driven society, work can be an ever-present source of stress. Work stress is caused by job dissatisfaction, an exhausting workload, insufficient pay, office politics, and conflicts with your supervisor or co-workers.
4. Social/Society – financial pressures, discrimination, unemployment, isolation, lack of social support.

We all live with this, you know?

So what do you do when we're stressed? Most of us have coping skills and techniques that we have learned in order to survive. Some of us have to work very hard at walking away or keeping very clear boundaries. Sometimes stress symptoms don't go away. When people experience trauma, sometimes it's hard to recover. Persistent and severe reaction to trauma and stress is called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Stress ... we all live with it.

If you really want to talk about stress, pay close attention to our scripture story. Please hear these words from the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Luke:

While Jesus was on his way, people were crowding all around him. In the crowd was a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. She had spent everything she had on doctors, but none of them could make her well. As soon as she came up behind Jesus and barely touched his clothes, her bleeding stopped. "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. While everyone was denying it, Peter said, "Master, people are crowding all around and pushing you from every side." But Jesus answered, "Someone touched me, because I felt power going out from me." The woman knew that she could not hide, so she came trembling and knelt down in front of Jesus. She told everyone why she had touched him and that she had been healed right away. Jesus said to the woman, "You are now well because of your faith. May God give you peace!"

Bleeding for 12 years. According to biblical scholars, we are to assume that the woman's bleeding is associated with her menstrual cycle ... only there's no cycle ... just continuous bleeding. 12 years! Can you say STRESS?

According to Jewish law, she is unclean. Anything she touches will be unclean. Anyone who touches her will be unclean. She has lived in a continual state of impurity for 12 years.

It's been 12 years since she has been to worship. It's been 12 years since she has had any physical contact and another human being. She can't prepare her family's food (even if she had a family), she can't run a household, she can't shop in the market, she can't be a wife, she can't be a mom. She's been isolated for 12 years. For all practical purposes, she is as good as dead. Talk about stress ...

Do you think she's desperate? She is ... desperate enough to push through a huge crowd ... if she can just get close enough to see Jesus. She's just close enough to touch the bottom of his cloak, the hem of his garment. She feels something. He feels something. And he stops. "Who touched me?"

This story is a part of larger story of healing. Jesus is on his way to the house of a man whose daughter is dying. So he's on a mission. He's probably very focused, moving ahead ... and the crowds are pushing in. It's loud, noisy ... He's probably relying on the disciples to clear a path for him. It's probably very chaotic and busy and close. If you're claustrophobic this might not be the day for you to meet Jesus.

Have you ever been to Lambeau Field on a game day? Miller Park on opening day? There are crushing crowds ... crowds that gather to get a glimpse of someone famous. That's how it was when the woman pushes her way through to see Jesus.

You all have them ... stories of touching someone or something and how exciting that was. You've probably said this before: "I'm never going to wash this hand" ... because of who or what you touched.

I touched Mikhail Gorbachev. (I also touched Lambeau Field, but not Brett Favre ...) But I did touch Gorbachev. Remember him? At the time he was the President of the Soviet Union. He was visiting New York City, on his way the United Nations and I lived in New York, saw a huge crowd near my subway stop, and pushed through. I'm short, so I have to push through a crowd to be able to see what's on the other side ... "excuse me, pardon me." Gorbachev was walking down 3rd Ave, alongside a motorcade; surrounded by secret service agents ... I believe they're called the KGB. I stuck my hand out and he shook it. What makes this even more interesting, is that after he shook my hand, the KGB pulled him away from the crowd and practically threw him into a vehicle ... once the car door closed, the vehicle sped away. Ummm, I imagine he felt my power. I'm sure he sat in the back of the limo saying, "Who touched me? Who was that woman?" I remember going back to my office, saying "I just touched Mikhail Gorbachev."

The unnamed woman in our story isn't curious, she's desperate ... and she touches Jesus. And she doesn't even really touch him. She touches his cloak. She actually touches the fringe his garment ... the knots on his prayer shawl. According to Jewish law, he is now unclean ... because you see; her impurity has transferred to him. And what about her? She's healed.

She simply touches the fringe and because of her faith, BECAUSE OF HER FAITH, she's free. That right there ... that little piece ... that little piece is everything. It means that my impurities, my uncleanness, my stress, my overload of stress, my sinfulness can be given to Jesus and I, too, can be free.

The woman in the story represents us ... you & me. On those days of overload, when we're sick and tired, when nothing goes right and we're desperate, there's really only one thing that can save us. There's really only one thing that will bring peace – and I define peace as wholeness. We might have to resign ourselves to crawling, but once we push through the barriers, there's Jesus. And even if there are a million others surrounding him, there's a space for you and for me to reach out and experience his touch, because there's plenty of Jesus to go around.

Jesus might not personally clean out the basement, but he gives me strength and wholeness to do it. Thank God for that. May it be so with you, too.
Amen.