

WHO IS THE WOMAN IN MARK 5?

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my children,
Tashanda, Jhamir, and Ahmed.

My prayer is that in witnessing my journey
you will know that nothing is impossible.

And to my mom, Bessie.

Thank you for your love and support,
and for showing me what perseverance looks like!

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Grace and Peace!

Rochelle

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation

Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Matt	Matthew
Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke
Rev	Revelation

ABSTRACT

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WHO IS THE WOMAN IN MARK 5?

Under the direction of DR. ANGELA N. PARKER, Ph.D.

This study explores the potential impact the woman in the Mark 5 biblical text weighs on Jesus's ministry. The research gives texture to a character that is often used as an object lesson of faith in the scope of biblical exegesis. Using redaction criticism and a Womanist discourse the research finds the woman to be a critical element of the inclusion of woman and other marginalized persons in Jesus's ministry.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

My first driving interest in the woman in Mark 5 came as a result of an exegetical exploration of this text for a Gospel of Mark class. I had heard many sermons preached from this text mostly from the theme of faith. But as I interrogated this text further I discovered different nuances and connections that inspired this poem/spoken word:

Who Am I?

Twelve years I've suffered from this flow
Doctor after doctor I go
Looking for someone to make me whole
Can anyone help me?

Wait... Look across the sea
Could it be? Yes, it is He?
The one who heals and makes unclean spirits flee
He just healed the man Legion at the Gerasene
Can He, would He...do the same for me?

Should I, could I approach Him with my issue?
Would He turn me away? I am but a woman of unknown condition.
If I ask, it would set off such a commotion.
But if I stay here I will remain in this position--unknown, tired, weak, in complete
isolation.

I can't wait, I won't be oppressed any longer.
I will move forward, amongst the crowd I will wander.
With every step I take I grow stronger...wait...
Is that Jairus coming forward?
What could he want from the healer?
He is a leader and keeper of order.
To his knees he falls and begs life for his daughter.

Surely if I ask now he will pass me by
For twelve years she's lived; for twelve years I've died
But what have I to lose, I just have to try
If I just touch the hem of His garment I know I won't die
Surely God this healing I seek you won't deny

Pressing through the crowd I must go now
Down on my knees, I hover close to the ground
With his entourage of followers my vision is quite dim
Nevertheless, my hand stretched forward I reach for His hem
I close my eyes and surrender to my fate
One last push, no longer can I wait

One touch, instantly 12 years of pain were erased
Before I can retreat, He turns towards my face
“Who touched me,” He says. My heart skips a beat.
Afraid and trembling I cannot stand to my feet
Humbly I fall admitting to the deed.

To my surprise He extends out His hand
Daughter, He says, your faith has made you well again
Nothing I did deserved such an honor
Twelve years I bled and now He calls me Daughter

Right here in this crowd He stopped just for me
For me He stopped and healed my disease
If there was any doubt in the power that made me whole
Jesus took the time to mark His control

Daughter, that’s the title Jesus gave to me
Respect me for who I am! Who am I?
Daughter of the King; the Most High!

After writing this piece I was determined to study her further because this unnamed woman warrants more than to simply be left behind.

Who is the woman in Mark 5? That is the burning question that spawned interest into the study of Mark 5:24-34. Her story ends just as quickly as it begins. As an interruption to Jairus’s request for the healing of his dying daughter, this unnamed woman makes a connection with Jesus unbeknownst to anyone except Jesus. Within these ten verses this woman is called out from a crowd of mostly men. But there is much more to this woman’s story than being an object of faith. Yes, after suffering for twelve years faith propels her through the crowd, but Jesus calls her out—as his daughter.

For twelve years her focus was on her condition and its stigmatization, but this brief encounter with Jesus changed that. Such a transformation is without question life-changing. But what did she do after she was healed? No canonical writing captures the after effects of her healing. Most other Gospel healing narratives were given side notes to illustrate how their healing changed their outcome, but nothing was offered for this woman. Just prior to her story, in Mark 5:20, we read how the Gentile Gerasene demoniac began preaching at the Decapolis, yet her story ends within these ten verses. This woman's transforming experience should not be deemed as a random healing on a street in Capernaum.

Thesis Question and Sub-Questions

The primary research question is "Who is the woman in Mark 5:25-34 and what is her significance to Jesus's ministry?" This woman was made whole and given the title "Daughter" (Mark 5:29, 34), yet she is most often introduced in sermons as a woman with an issue and not a woman healed. She deserves more than to be left standing in the middle of that Capernaum road, dematerialized and forgotten. She is granted a familial relationship to Jesus by Jesus himself.

The following sub-questions will assist and support the research for further development of the primary research question: first, "How does the Mark text differ from the other synoptic Gospels, Matthew 9:20-22 and Luke 8:43-48?"; second, "How does intersectionality expand the purview of the Mark text?"; and third, "How can a Womanist lens expand the purview of this reading?"

Assumptions and Limitations

The research will not attempt to uncover what happened to this woman after her powerful exchange and transformation, but it will address the significance of her encounter to Jesus's

ministry and ministry in general. The two-source hypothesis will be assumed for this research, accepting Mark as the first written Gospel.¹ It will also emphasize Jesus's humanity and his ministry to the marginalized, but it will not diminish his *dunamis* power (a miraculous power unique to God).

Methodology

The methodologies used for this research will be redaction criticism and intersectionality through a Womanist lens. Redaction criticism will be applied to address sub-question one in Chapter 2, examining how each author assembled traditions into their final composition. In Chapter 3, the research will explore intersectionality, a term first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw,

¹ Most scholars believe what is often referenced as “Markan Priority,” which dates the Gospel of Mark as the first written Gospel and supports the two-source hypothesis. It is believed that Mark was written in the 60s using an original source, most likely Peter, and Quelle (Q), while Matthew and Luke were written in the 70s or 80s, both using Mark and Q along with their original sources (see Gary M. Burge and Gene L. Green, *New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament Within Its Cultural Contexts* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 140-42; 244-45).

to identify the woman's social location.² Womanist theology will be the primary method used to examine the practical application of this Mark text in Chapter 4.³

² In 1989 Kimberle Crenshaw wrote an article entitled, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: a Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Racist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 (1989) 1: 139-67. The article's focus encapsulates the problem within the social justice system that disregards the multidimensional, or intersecting, experience of African American women in particular. In one case Crenshaw references, *DeGraffenreid vs. General Motors*. Emma DeGraffenreid and four other women, filed a lawsuit alleging hiring discrimination against African American women—citing both race and gender. The case was dismissed on the grounds that it must be viewed on the basis of either race or gender, but not both (See *DeGraffenreid* 413 F Supp at 143). Crenshaw purports that these cases were dismissed based on "single-axis analysis," and in essence marginalized the distinctive experience or intersections of African American women being both black and female. While the research will not present the woman in Mark 5 specifically as a black women, we will observe her social location—history, experience, gender—in this patriarchal setting. Greater detail will be given to intersectionality in Chapter 3.

³ According to Emilie M. Townes, "Womanist theology employs materials by and about Black foremothers as resources for contemporary reflection that provide a conscious background for God-talk. Rather than assume the universal claims of traditional theologies, womanist theology acknowledges that all theological reflection is limited by human cultural, social, and historical contexts. These limits are not negative, but merely representative of our humanity. Rather than restrict, these limits can serve as a challenge to explore the particular ways in which any group having similar characteristics (e.g., age, denomination, ethnicity, sexuality) experiences divine activity in life. These differing perspectives need not ultimately separate but can enrich us as we acknowledge the limits of what we know in listening to the voices of others. Ultimately, womanist theology points us to the largeness of God and the various ways in which human beings often seek to confine God." Emilie M. Townes, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 57 (2003), 3-4: 159-76.. One of the Black foremothers of whom Townes references is Alice Walker. In Walker's book, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden* (New York, NY: Harcourt, 1983), xi-xii, the first of a four-part definition of a womanist is: From womanish. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious.

Chapter Outlines

Following the introductory chapter, the research will focus on the three sub-questions listed above.

Chapter 2: A Comparison and Exegesis of the Text

Chapter 2 will examine and compare this unnamed woman's portrayal by the authors of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. As mentioned we will assume the two-source hypothesis for this research, which presupposes that the first written Gospel was Mark. While approximately 93% of Mark can be found in the other two synoptic Gospels (only 31% is not found in either),⁴ the social location of these authors significantly impacts their application of the Mark text in their reflection of Jesus's life and ministry. Using redaction criticism the research will explore the juxtaposition of this woman in the parallel passages—Mark 5:25-34, Matt 9:20-22, and Luke 8:43-48.

The research will then investigate the Mark passage specifically. Mark's storytelling detail "privileges" the reader with dramatic effect that provides insight to the reader that characters in the narrative fail to understand.⁵ My exegesis of Mark 5:25-34 will explore the intercalation of this woman's encounter with Jesus with that of Jairus and his daughter (Mark 5:21-24; 35-43). It will also consider a relationship between these two unnamed woman. I will also explore one verse within the Passover passage (Exod 12:1-28), as a possible connection

⁴ Gary M. Burge, and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament Within its Cultural Contexts* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 140.

⁵ Burge, and Green, *New Testament in Antiquity*, 230.

between Jesus and the woman. Exod 12:13, which reads “The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you...” What appears to be a simple touch of the fringe of Jesus’s cloak was not so simple but a powerful, perfect, exchange that healed this woman of a condition she was plagued with for twelve years.

Chapter 3: Intersectionality

The events and conditions of one’s life are seldom shaped by just one factor. Intersectionality analyzes the complexity of human experience and examines how these diverse factors work together to influence decisions, issues, and social problems.⁶ In Chapter 3, I will bring my exegesis to a contemporary conversation on intersectionality as interlocking oppressions to women. Because intersectionality embraces complexity, it questions how intersecting power relations of class, gender, and race shape institutions, organizations, and society.⁷ The woman in Mark 5 represents every affliction, oppression, or opposition to heterosexual, white, male privilege that dominates this world.

Chapter 4: Applying a Womanist Lens

So, what are the practical applications of this Mark reading? This is the question I will address in Chapter 4 using a Womanist lens. St. Clair, and others, emphasizes the tridimensional oppression (race, class, and gender) associated with African American women.⁸ This involves

⁶ Patricia Hill Collins, and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality: Key Concepts* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016), 2-3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸ Raquel A. St. Clair, *Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 12.

the dismantling of binary oppositions, power, privilege, and domination that was present in the socio-political structures during Jesus's time and today as well. When humankind chooses domination over dominion they begin to build and sustain trickle-down hierarchies and policies with negative effects transferred onto those "beneath" them. We must take a radical, bold, and persistent approach, much like Jesus's ministry, and quite frankly, like the woman in Mark 5. A critical interpretation and application of this biblical text can alleviate the perpetual cycle of these interlocking, tridimensional oppressions.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The breaking of interlocking oppressions exposes a ministry that is inclusive of all. Presupposing an outcome of this research would render that the woman of Mark 5 exemplifies Jesus's ministry of inclusion. Jesus not only healed this woman, he gave her a voice, an audience to hear, and a restored inheritance.

CHAPTER 2

A COMPARISON AND EXEGESIS OF THE TEXT

The story of the hemorrhaging woman is found in all three synoptic Gospels. There is no mention nor reference to her anywhere else in the Bible, and there is very little research or speculation regarding her elsewhere. She is thought to have a place in legend according to Herbert Lockyer. He writes that the primitive church named this woman Veronica, and it is believed that she lived in Caesarea Philippi.¹ Regardless of her name, this woman had a miraculous encounter with Jesus, she was healed of a twelve-year disease, and yet she still retained the label of the woman with an issue of blood. Matthew, Luke, and Mark each place her in the middle of the healing/resurrection story of Jairus's twelve-year old daughter. But she is more than a sidestep, boxed in, limited, happenstance healing on the way to Jairus's daughter. While her story was significant enough to the synoptic Gospel writers, each writer's omission or inclusion of detail impacts the exegesis of the text, the portrayal of the woman, and, in some instances, curtails the telling of her story to meet his objective.

The Woman According to Matthew

The Matthean version, the shortest account of this woman's story, is found in chapter 9, verses 20-22:

Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to

¹ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Men/All the Women of the Bible Compilation SC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 221-22.

herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.” Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.”²

”The Gospel of Matthew was written in the first century CE to a Greek-speaking Jewish-Christian audience.³ Matthew presented a very crisp, clean version—she touched, Jesus healed, and the crowd moved on. The language was short and precise, classically Matthean, with minimal details, but fully understood by the original audience.⁴ A particular focus for this Gospel was Jesus’s coming to fulfill, not abolish, Old Testament law (see Matt 5:17).

Michael Joseph Brown, in *True to Our Native Land*, identifies five themes that run throughout this Gospel. Brown finds, first, a particular emphasis of Jesus as teacher rather than preacher.⁵ He says the purpose of “The Beatitudes” or “Sermon on the Mount” text of Matt 5:1-11, as well as the “Great Commission” in Matt 28:16-20 are wisdom teaching moments in Jesus’s ministry.⁶ Second, Brown says there are less, and shortened, miracle stories in

² All scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

³ There is a difference of opinion among scholars as to the exact date of the Matthean text. Some believe it was written in the 80-90s CE, while others date the text origination prior to the 2nd destruction of the Temple. For this paper we will assume the Markan Priority and the later date for the Matthew compilation (see *New Testament in Antiquity*, 140-42; 226—Gary M. Burge, and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament Within Its Cultural Contexts* [2nd ed.: Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020], 140-42; 226).

⁴ Gary M. Burge, and Gene L. Green, *New Testament in Antiquity* (Grand Rapids, MN: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 141, 206.

⁵ Michael Joseph Brown, “The Gospel of Matthew,” in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (ed. Brian K. Blount; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 86.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Matthew's Gospel, often using them as a means of teaching discipleship.⁷ Third, Matthew, more than any other Gospel emphasizes Jesus's Jewish lineage and roots. "Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, sent by the Jewish God, in fulfillment of the Jewish scriptures, who advocates adherence to the Jewish law."⁸ The fourth theme Brown finds is the radical discipleship in Jesus's mission. Jesus pushed the disciples towards a deeper, less superficial understanding of the scriptures.⁹ And finally, in Brown's fifth theme he turns towards a more philosophical view of Jesus's ministry, pointing to "a constant tension between the universal and the particular," stressing the importance of the individual as well as the whole.¹⁰

We will find most, if not all, of these themes in Matthew's version of the woman's story. Compared to the other synoptics, Matthew's three verses delivers, unquestionably, the shortest version of this woman's miracle story. Although not referenced in these specific verses, it is confirmed that the disciples were with Jesus (see v. 19), making this a radical teaching moment for the disciples. The radicalness was how Jesus complied with while also seemingly disregarded Levitical law, Lev 15:25-27 specifically. Matthew succinctly described a scene where this woman, who would be considered unclean, touched Jesus. A superficial reading could interpret this and render Jesus unclean. However, verse 27 of Leviticus 15 says, "Whoever touches these things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening." Given that Jesus did not touch the woman, or her things, one could interpret this as

⁷ Brown, "The Gospel of Matthew," 86.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Jesus being compliant with the Law. But even allowing this touch to some, especially the Pharisees who were closely watching Jesus's movements and activities, could have considered this non-compliant and radical. Given the importance of Jesus's Jewishness to Matthew, this depiction could also align with another Levitical commandment—one found in Lev 19:18b, "...love your neighbor as yourself." This exegetical interpretation would emphasize the importance of the universal Law over one particular commandment within the Law. Rather than focusing on a gender-based, oppressive, impurity acquiescence, Jesus displayed the importance of an ethical application of Law.

The woman touched the fringe of Jesus's outer garment in all three synoptics, but Matthew is the only version where Jesus did not openly acknowledge her touch—nor did he acknowledge the disciples. The disciples were background characters in Matthew's story, unlike Mark (5:30-31) and Luke (8:45) where at least a question is posed and one of the disciples responded. In these three verses Matthew's depiction neglects details found in the other synoptics, but even with this minimalist representation, this miracle cannot be ignored. Jesus looked at her, not past her, and not through her. What Matthew accomplished in his portrayal, although it may not have been his intention, is a restoration of a deeply burdened woman of faith to a kinship bond with Jesus. In three verses, the woman began at the point of probable death to an elevated position of daughter of the Jewish Messiah.

The Woman According to Luke

The woman's story is expanded in the Gospel of Luke, as did Jesus's ministry. Luke's version is just two verses more than that of Matthew, but the content and context of this woman's peril is greatly expanded. Her story unfolds in Luke 8:43-48:

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. Then Jesus asked, “Who touched me?” When all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you.” But Jesus said, “Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me.” When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”

Context is important. The “b” clause of verse 43 explains the woman’s predicament more fully. For twelve years she had gone from physician to physician seeking help, but to no avail. This element was missing in the Matthean text, but present here in Luke (v. 43) and in Mark (5:26). The Luke and Mark versions of the story identify the woman’s health challenge and also recognized that the woman was actively pursuing a cure. This would have resonated well with Luke the physician, his assumed profession, who retained this key characteristic of the woman. This was also described in the Mark text, but not in Matthew who stripped the woman of character.

Luke’s Gospel begins with the birth narratives of Jesus and John the Baptist. Unlike the introduction of the Matthean Gospel, which traced Jesus’s genealogy through the male, patriarchal lineage, the Lukan birth narratives are reflected through the story of two strong women, Elizabeth and Mary. Both women were unlikely characters for a birth narrative. Elizabeth was barren (1:7), and Mary was a virgin (1:27). One older, one younger, and both active agents for their own cause, much like the woman in our focus text(s). Barbara Reid, in *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke*, concentrates on this third Gospel

because it contains the greatest number of female characters.¹¹ One would think that with more references to women than any other Gospel and the presentation of these strong women at the onset of the Gospel in these birth narratives that Luke was “promoting the status of woman.”¹² But, that is not necessarily the case. Schaberg believes Luke’s Gospel represents these female characters as “models of subordinate service.”¹³ She says one must challenge the ambivalence of tradition to appreciate the text as well as “assess its truth and helpfulness.”¹⁴ This is what Reid alludes to as “choosing the better part.”¹⁵ How one reads biblical tradition is vitally important.¹⁶ Although Luke portrayed women in redemptive roles, his intention still was to appease patriarchy. The Lukan Gospel was written to an audience of Gentile believers and imperialistic

¹¹ Barbara E. Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 2. Brown, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 86.

¹² Jane D. Schaberg, and Sharon H. Ringe, “Gospel of Luke,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary* (eds. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; 3rd ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 493.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke*, 143. “..both women and men disciples choose the better part when both do obeisance to God, while taking bold new steps toward wholeness for the entire community. In such a community of shalom the gifts of both daughters and sons would be equally valued and utilized for every type of ministry.”

¹⁶ Ibid., 1.

readers.¹⁷ Luke realized the importance of women to the Church, but limited their role to what was acceptable to empire.¹⁸

This limiting female role is portrayed in Luke's rendition of the woman's story. While the woman activated her agency in pursuit of a cure, she lacked a prophetic voice in Luke's version. Both Matthew and Mark gave the woman a prophetic voice (Matt 9:21; Mark 5:28), albeit to herself; her healing was directly tied to her professed cure. Luke's version leaves room for doubt of the woman's prophetic agency in her healing. The woman's humbling declaration (8:47) can be construed more as an opportunity for testimony, minimizing the active participation in the healing. Luke's portrayal reduced the woman to a more receptive role rather than an opportunity to engage her for ministry.¹⁹ This representation of the woman was not an outright forbiddance of women in ministry by Luke, but it does seem to exemplify avoidance in women's active participation in ministry.²⁰

The Woman According to Mark

One has to ask, if we are going to reduce her story to a mere three verses, as in Matthew, why include it at all? Was it intentional to hide her story's significance, even in Mark? Or better yet, why is it sandwiched between Jairus's request and the actual healing of his daughter—as it is

¹⁷ Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, "The Gospel of Luke," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (ed. Brian K. Blount; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 158.

¹⁸ Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Women in Luke-Acts: A Redactional View," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (3): 442-43.

¹⁹ Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke*, 3.

²⁰ D'Angelo, "Women in Luke-Acts: A Redactional View," 455.

placed in all three synoptics. This technique, intercalating, which intertwines one story with another and enables a better understanding of the other, is more prevalent in the Markan Gospel.²¹ The fact that this woman's interruption gave the literary effect of prolonging the narrative and intensifying the healing miracle of Jairus's daughter should be duly noted.²² There can be no doubt that the woman's faith was great enough to heal. The effect is indicated in her actions as well as confirmed by Jesus's statement (v. 34). One should also note, more importantly, the linkage between these two female characters. This woman had been hemorrhaging for twelve years, just as long as Jairus's daughter had been alive, and they both were dying. This intercalation is told in Mark 5:21-43. The Markan telling is the longest rendering and interpretation and is covered in ten verses that begins at Mark 5:25:

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

We know from the text that the woman had been hemorrhaging for twelve years. What we do not know is the cause of her hemorrhaging. While there is some debate as to the nature of

²¹ Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke*, 136.

²² *Ibid.*

her hemorrhaging, it is generally assumed that it was of a menstruating nature. For the sake of this research we will forego debate and assume this general consensus. Regardless of the nature, the text tells us the woman suffered, sought help from many doctors, and found no relief from her condition. In fact, she was getting worse according to Mark (v. 26). The Luke version does not indicate her condition as worsening.

The woman's life was anything but normal. Her health and financial status were both deteriorating quickly, and her social status was non-existent. With no expectation of privacy in the context of this setting, the woman was an ideal candidate to be judged unfairly, treated inhumanely, and outcast to the fringes of society. Levitical purity laws (Lev 15:25-27) would have forbidden the woman from co-mingling amongst the crowd, let alone touch someone, as this would have rendered them unclean as well. Yet with deliberateness and obvious determination, and fueled with what she heard about Jesus (v. 27), the woman takes agency to act on her own behalf. Jesus had just returned from the Gerasene (Mark 5:1-21; Luke 8:26-39; Matt 8:28-34)²³ where he healed a Gentile demoniac. Surely, if Jesus would and could heal a Gentile, he would certainly have no quorums about healing this woman.

There is no indication that the woman had done anything to violate the systemic and religious norms prior to this encounter. The text indicates that she had exhausted all courses of action available to her. She is given no name, status, or familial association—no one, and

²³ The Gerasene/Gadarenes was a Gentile city east of the Sea of Galilee. The Gerasene/Gadarene demoniac was possessed with a "Legion" of evil spirits. Jesus drove the spirits out of the man and into a herd of 2,000 pigs. Both Mark and Luke place the story of the Gerasene/Gadarene demoniac in the same chapter and immediately before Jairus's approach to Jesus. Matthew, however, places this story in the preceding chapter with the story of healing the paralytic, the calling of Matthew, and Jesus's encounter with John the Baptist's disciples.

specifically, no male figure—to approach Jesus on her behalf.²⁴ But while she is conscious of tradition, the depth of her dilemma pushes her to defy the established system, in what she believed would be an invisible encounter.²⁵

The woman’s hope of invisibility did not remain long, for immediately²⁶ upon touching Jesus’s clothes she was healed (v. 29). All three synoptics indicate the woman touched Jesus’s ἱμάτιον (*himation*), which translates most closely with garment or outer cloak. In Mark, she touches his ἱμάτιον, his whole garment (v. 27), but in Matthew and Luke she touches τοῦ κρᾶσπέδου τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ, the fringe/edge/hem of his garment (Matt 9:20; Luke 8:44). Mark’s inclusiveness of Jesus’s entire cloak, even if this implicates an outer garment, implies a wholeness to the touch. Matthew and Luke limit the boldness of the women and keeps her still at the edge. Matthew and Luke’s description limits this exchange of a power solely to Jesus. These two narrations limit the relationship Jesus sought to restore. Jesus’s intent was to “facilitate access to God,” and to preserve and restore the wholeness and holiness to all.²⁷ The touch, initiated by the woman, and release of power from Jesus was a perfect and intimate exchange and a shift in the paradigm of discipleship to include the oppressed, the meek, the

²⁴ Hisako Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 45.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 42-46.

²⁶ Both Mark and Luke use the word “immediately” (Mark 5:29, 30; Luke 8:44, 47), while Matthew defaults to “instantly” (Matt 9:22) with the healing only after Jesus proclaims her healed.

²⁷ Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke*, 142.

persecuted, and the reviled. The release of power was immediate (v. 30) and symbolic of a God who is waiting and available to all who choose to respond.

The power that left Jesus could be a representation of the Exod 12:13 Passover blood-covering.²⁸ Just like the oppressed Hebrew slaves were saved from the plague by the blood mark of the Passover lamb, the woman of Mark 5 was saved from her twelve-year plague.

When Jesus asks the question, “Who touched my clothes?” (v. 30) he was not seeking a response from the disciples—he was calling the woman. He was officially calling her out from the crowd that was “pressing against him” (v. 24).²⁹ Jesus could have easily let the woman disappear back into the crowd, but he did not. His intention was not to admonish the touch, but to reward her efforts and her faithfulness. One could say she got into some “Good Trouble.”³⁰ The woman did not immediately respond, but one of the disciples³¹ provides a defensive response, essentially deflecting responsibility for the dereliction of duties as Jesus’s first line of defense by his inner circle. She was able to penetrate Jesus’s inner circle and, following in the

²⁸ See Exod 12:13, “...when I see the blood, I will pass over you and no plague shall destroy you.”

²⁹ The Greek word συνθλίβω (*synthlibo*) indicates a tightly packed crowd. The KJV translates this as thronged.

³⁰ “Good Trouble” is a phrase coined by the late Representative and Civil Rights icon, John Lewis. It means to take a stand against laws, policies, and issues that morally oppress individuals. *“Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.”* – Rep. John Lewis, (retrieved 15 March 2020: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/07/18/rep-john-lewis-most-memorable-quotes-get-good-trouble/5464148002/>).

³¹ Luke identifies this disciple as Peter (Luke 8:45)

footsteps of Jesus himself, become a “boundary breaker.”³² Because of her faith, the woman is not only cured of her condition, this “nameless, status less, destitute, and defiled woman is now one of Jesus’s family members, ...[and] she breaks through the barrier between the unclean and the pure.”³³ The exchange between Jesus and the woman was a direct call to the one whose faith activated the blood covering to the least expected—the fringes of society. Her response to the call allowed her to not only reclaim her life, but to reclaim her inheritance as “Daughter” in the Kingdom.

The “Good News” of Mark brings forth a re-vision of power for the oppressed in the first-century Roman Empire. Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark’s version of this story challenges the status quo of ancient patriarchy. Mark, in its storytelling form, puts this woman in a powerful role of active participation to challenge the boundaries of the patriarchal culture.³⁴

³² Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective*, 46-47.

³³ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁴ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Gospel of Mark” in *Women’s Bible Commentary* (eds. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; 3rd ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 480.

CHAPTER 3

INTERSECTIONALITY IN GENERAL

Economic disparities and social injustices are terms we see and hear today and can also be read into the patriarchal systems that go back thousands of years—a system that existed in circa 30 CE. The woman in Mark 5 was facing both of these situations. Her economic state was a result of her condition. Having gone from physician to physician in search of a cure, this woman is left bankrupt and in worse condition from this disease's onset (Mark 5:26). She was most likely isolated because of her condition. For twelve years she had to live under the social stigma of being unclean (Lev 15:25). And since my presumption is her hemorrhaging condition was of a menstrual nature, being female was yet another tag/hashtag that can be add to her condition. Gender, class, age, and social status are a few of the interlocking conditions that give latitude to pull this study under the intersectionality umbrella.

Intersectionality's Roots

As mentioned in chapter 1, the term intersectionality was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989. While grappling with the dismissal of the case of *DeGraffenreid vs. General Motors*, Crenshaw sought an alternative narrative to emphasize the dilemma DeGraffenreid (et al) faced in their failed pursuit for justice in hiring discriminations. The judge disallowed DeGraffenreid to join two causes of action, being black and being female, as it would have given them preferential treatment, or an unfair advantage.¹ Crenshaw believed that this “single axis

¹ Kimberle Crenshaw, *The Urgency of Intersectionality*, (TedTALKS, 2016): retrieved 24 March 2020.

analysis” distorted and partialized the dilemma these women faced.² The term intersectionality presented a framework with which interlocking conditions can be evaluated to see there existed a compounded and oppressive social context.

Framing the problem in that manner raised awareness, which became problematic for the status quo. Crenshaw’s intention was to show that prejudices overlap, and more specifically, Black women are not the same as White women, nor are they the same as Black men.³ There is no controversy in that. But the term intersectionality has morphed in recent years to encompass additional marginalized identities, including sexuality, age, and disability.⁴ Crenshaw herself has reinscribed the term as "a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power" that gives advocacy to frame circumstances to fight for visibility and inclusion.⁵ This re-inscription, however, does not change the concept or context of the term. Interlocking oppressions do not exist only within the scope, context, and struggle of Black women.⁶ Black women just happen to be the initial intersection to which this term was applied. To deem intersectionality applicable to only Black women would render the term exclusionary. Crenshaw’s intent was to define the condition which DeGraffenreid (et al) found themselves, not to create a new category to further

² Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989): 139.

³Bartlett, Tom, "The Intersectionality War!" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 27, 2017.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Why Intersectionality Can't Wait," *Washington Post* (24 September 2015): retrieved 6 December 2020, <https://search.proquest.com/blogs,-podcasts,-websites/why-intersectionality-cantwait/docview/1716172485/se-2?accountid=12381>.

confine them. Whether we give intersectionality's historicity to being coined by Crenshaw or to the labor of early black feminist scholars and activists like Anna Julia Cooper, it will always be rooted in the "black woman." And as Nash reflects, it is a lack of "sustained interrogation of the ways that 'black woman' haunts the unconsciousness of both women's studies and American studies" that poses the greatest challenge to intersectionality's acceptance.⁷ The term itself is open and inclusive to multiplicative intersections and across disciplines.

What Crenshaw offered with this new theory is the possibility of drawing a double (and in some cases, triple)-barrel shotgun to the White-male ego. No longer are the privileged contending with the single-axis arguments, based on just gender or just race, or a "simple" distinction between Black and White. Now, intersectionality is seen as an unraveling of the deep-seat of patriarchy and effectively producing what is considered an acceptable prejudice to White men.⁸ This is the context to which Bartlett's article opines "the intersectionality war," but his take on Jennifer Nash's discourse is incorrect.⁹ Nash's article, "Intersectionality and it's Discontents," is not a treatise to coalesce a war on intersectionality. A war would insinuate a combative and total disagreement with the theory. Yes, there was a decision made on the "Kill the Keyword" panel at the 2014 American Studies Association to banish intersectionality from their collective lexicon.¹⁰ But the prospect of slaying black women for the sake of abolishing a

⁷ Jennifer Nash, "Intersectionality and its Discontents," *American Quarterly* 69, 1 (2017): 125-27.

⁸ Elizabeth C. Corey, "An Acceptable Prejudice" *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion & Public Life* 294 (2019): 9.

⁹ Bartlett, "The Intersectionality War!"

¹⁰ Nash, "Intersectionality and it's Discontents," 117.

term proved more devastating to these scholars and the theory was resuscitated in that same session.¹¹ It is the unease the term intersectionality inflames that is at the root of why some deem this as an intersectionality war. As more non-White, non-male, and even non-heteronormative identities begin to evolve under the intersectionality umbrella the dominant White-male privileged identity begins to feel threatened. It is within this realm of thought that poses the greatest threat to the theory and praxis of intersectionality. Perhaps this is because in critiquing intersectionality it is “envisioned exclusively as a malicious practice undergirded by questionable motives, rather than as a critical practice that advances scholarly conversation.”¹² Perhaps a new approach to intersectionality should be rooted in love rather than defensiveness, moving us past this present impasse.¹³

Intersecting Realities of the Mark 5 Woman

We all have our layers, and the Mark 5 woman is no exception. Her story is typically told as a flat reality—a woman in a dire citation, looking for and receiving a miracle healing from Jesus. But was this just a miracle? Indeed her cure was miraculous, and looking at this healing two thousand years later, after hearing sermon after sermon about how her faith has healed her, one could just take the story at face value and move on. But if we begin to peel back the layers of Mark’s account specifically, we will find a complexity that defies superficial observations.

¹¹ Nash, “Intersectionality and it’s Discontents,” 117.

¹² Ibid., 126.

¹³ Ibid.

Since this woman's story could essentially be extracted from the text altogether, there must be a divine reason that her story remain in the text. Her story was retained in all three synoptic Gospels, and all three Gospel writers agreed on the sequence of events. Therefore, it must have meant, from each Gospel writers perspective, that her story should forever remain canonized in conjunction with, in contrast with, and connected with Jairus and his daughter. The leading verses of this intertwining story sets the tone for the woman's encounter. Juxtaposed within these verses is a reverse correlation between one family and another, or rather one highly respected family and a disenfranchised individual.¹⁴ It pits the woman against the many obstacles that threaten her survival—gender, social status, family lineage, and ethnicity.¹⁵

First Intersection: Gender

There is no need to define or challenge the first intersection—gender. She most definitely is a woman, but she is also a woman with no name and no family connection in historically patriarchal first century Palestine—a society where social spaces are implicitly marked by boundaries, the first being male and female.¹⁶ I will also speculate that she is a Jewish woman. This assumption is based on the given geographical location, Capernaum, and the dichotomy presented in contrast to Jairus in the preceding verses (Mark 5:21-24). Jesus had just arrived back from the “Gentile side” of the Sea of Galilee to the “Jewish side” and was

¹⁴ Mark 5:21-24; 35-43 is the outer intercalated healing story of Jairus's daughter. Jesus had just crossed back over the Sea of Galilee, into Capernaum. The woman's story is introduced just as Jesus agrees to go with Jairus, a Jewish synagogue leader, to heal his dying daughter.

¹⁵ Hakkinen, Sakari. "Poverty in the First-Century Galilee." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, 4 (2016): 3.

¹⁶ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 27.

approached by a Jewish leader, and then encountered this woman among a crowd of, most likely, Jewish peasants.¹⁷ Based on the fact that her nationality was not identified, as is common in biblical texts (i.e., the Samaritan woman in John 4:7; the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7:26, et al.), nor was there a familial connection established to say otherwise, I believe the woman was Jewish.

Second Intersection: Economic Status

First century Greco-Roman Palestine was an agrarian system, with the majority of population comprised of a peasant class.¹⁸ Jewish women in first century Palestine were subjected to both the Hebrew culture and customs as well as Greco-Roman influences and authority—really by male authority period. “[I]n the early Roman Empire, financial resources were...the single most influential factor in determining one’s place in the social economy.”¹⁹ The elite classes which were, of course, ranked above the peasants held all the power. This privileged few consisted of the governing or ruling class, the retainer class, the merchant class, and the priestly class. Below the peasant class came the artisan class, the unclean and degraded class, and rounding out the bottom, the expendables.²⁰

¹⁷ Sheena Orr, “Women and Livelihoods in First Century Palestine: Exploring Possibilities” *The Expository Times* 121, 11 (2010): 541-42.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 541.

¹⁹ Hakkinen, "Poverty in the First-Century Galilee," 3.

²⁰ Here, Hakkinen, in “Poverty in the First-Century Galilee” (?) implores the class designations of Gerhard Lenski in *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984). Lenski identifies four elite classes above the common, peasant class and identifies them as follows: the rulers or governing class (self-explanatory); the retainers (officials, professional soldiers, household servants); the merchants (higher ranking peasants, with some wealthier than the lower governing class); and

With very little historical or biblical information of this woman and her exact status all we can do is explore possibilities. Unlike the ninety percent peasantry class, she had the means to pay physician after physician to treat her condition, albeit to no avail. An increased tax burden placed on peasant families moved their economic mode of stability from self-sufficiency to surplus, with the surplus primarily slated to support the privileged and comfortable lifestyles of the governing/ruling class.²¹ Therefore, I would identify this woman more specifically in the merchant class.²² This would place her most likely in an elite status, the upper ten percent, or minimally, in the wealthier peasant class. But still, as a woman in first century Palestine, it would have been highly unusual to be regarded in the merchant class without any attachment to family—to a male figure specifically. So the question is, how would she have been able to obtain the financial means to support her medical treatment for twelve years? This exploration of possibilities is not relevant to her purpose, but establishes another challenge with her social status, giving yet another facet to her intersectionality.

Third and Fourth Intersection: Social and Family Status

This agrarian culture thrived on the inner-workings of the household and the balance of roles between women and men to maintain the household's economic standing. In the perfect,

the priestly class (self-explanatory). The larger peasant or common class bared the burden of supporting these elite classes. Just below this common class were the artisans with a slightly lower income, followed by the unclean, who were “clearly inferior” to the peasants, and bottoming out the agrarian class system were the expendables—criminals, outlaws, beggars, and itinerant workers, 2.

²¹ Orr, “Women and Livelihoods in First Century Palestine: Exploring Possibilities,” 540; and Hakkinen, "Poverty in the First-Century Galilee," 2.

²² Hakkinen, "Poverty in the First-Century Galilee," 2.

agrarian, first century Jewish household, a family enterprise existed.²³ The wife played an integral role in the household ecosystem.²⁴ She worked hand-in-hand with her husband to maintain their status in society. While the wife's role may have been limited to more of the inner-household functioning (i.e., cooking, cleaning, raising children, etc.) her responsibilities were no less important. Along with these non-public positions came other means of economic resources, which brought additional sources of income into the household—weaving, dough making, shop keeping, and midwifery.²⁵ Performing these various skills took women into public spaces and often into the marketplace. Some women were very successful in these public places, and these activities provided an independent source of income for them.²⁶ They were still limited, however, as access and control to resources were dependent on their bargaining ability and their marital status.²⁷

There is no family history provided for the woman in Mark 5, but circumstances as they are, a woman alone in this environment would have been hard-pressed to maintain a household ecosystem as described above.

²³ John J. Pilch, and Bruce J. Malina, *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers: 2016), 3.

²⁴ Orr, "Women and Livelihoods in First Century Palestine: Exploring Possibilities," 545.

²⁵ Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers: 1996), 186-90.

²⁶ Orr, "Women and Livelihoods in First Century Palestine: Exploring Possibilities," 542.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 546.

A Single Woman, No Family Connection

According to Ilan, the ideal woman in first century Palestine provided only what was asked of them—to produce legal heirs, do housework, remain faithful to their husband, and avoid contact with non-relative males. Any deviation from this was deemed wicked.²⁸ The circumstances described in this text would classify this woman as wicked. Her condition in this patriarchal, agrarian system placed her on a substantially less desired path. The fact that she had, past tense, financial stability, whether from an inheritance or dowry, her condition placed her in a position that was unsuitable, unusable, and deplorable according to first century standards. I would also interject that regardless of her economic source her inability to have children placed her in the worse possible position as a woman in first century Palestine. “Jewish law demonstrates absolutely no forgiveness for the failure to carry out the commandment to ‘be fruitful and multiply.’”²⁹ Her condition made her unable to bare children.³⁰ This opens a few possibilities for her financial source and disconnection from male kinship.

First, the woman could have been orphaned. More than half of families in agrarian societies are broken due to the death of one or both parents, with the life expectancy of a mere twenty years at birth, but rose to forty years if the children survived infancy.³¹ I do not believe

²⁸ Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 226.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁰ Her barrenness is based on my presumption that her hemorrhaging was of a menstrual nature.

³¹ Pilch and Malina, *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, 3.

this to be the case for this woman. The death of one or more parents would have placed her in a perilous situation and the household economic status would most likely have been devastated.

Second, the woman could have been divorced. If her menses began during her early pubescence, around age twelve, and her condition had been ongoing for twelve years, she would have been at least twenty-four years of age, and past the projected life expectancy I might add. Another preface for considering her age of at least twenty-four and perhaps the low-thirties (close to Jesus's age) is it adds yet another intersection to her social location—it points to the agility to which she was able to maneuver through the crowd, not to say an older woman could not do the same. Nevertheless, it was culturally imperative for a father to marry his daughter off soon after the onset of her menses.³² In fact, it was not uncommon for a father to betroth his daughter prior to puberty, as was the case with Mary to Joseph. Part of the marital contract, or dowry, was a monetary arrangement for “the purpose of ensuring the bride’s maintenance in the event of divorce or the husband’s death.”³³ According to the *Mishnah*,³⁴ a man is commanded by the law to “Be fruitful and multiply.”³⁵ Deuteronomy 24:1 says a man can write a certificate of divorce to his wife for anything he finds objectionable. If the woman were married, and essentially barren, preventing the man from fulfilling the law, this would certainly be objectionable and give credence to the possibility of her being divorced. The dowry set aside for

³² Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, (3rd ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 153.

³³ Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 89.

³⁴ The *Mishnah* is an authoritative, written collection of oral traditions of Jewish law.

³⁵ Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 107.

this purpose could have been her economic source. A third possibility could be that she was widowed, but given her estimated age and condition, I find divorce a more likely guess. Although, an inheritance is equally possible.

Identity, Honor, and Shame

It is obvious that there was at some point in her life a family structure and support system which enabled her to sustain a source of income. But, a twelve-year, unclean condition severely limited the woman's ability to be successful in the marketplace, made her unable to bare children, and as a result would have made her an object of shame to anyone to whom she was connected, especially family. There was a dependency on collectivity and family embedded in first century Palestinian culture, which provided a sense of identity.³⁶ Compliance with customs, laws, and traditions were matters of honor.³⁷ Any woman in her condition would have brought no honor to her father and no value to a husband. Her hemorrhaging condition would have transferred impurities to household utensils and anything she touched.³⁸ Therefore, she could not participate in a "normal" operating household, let alone activities that brought in additional income. She was of no use to the family enterprise and, essentially, a hinderance to the economic status. With social status in jeopardy perhaps she was considered a *persona non-grata*, a deviant placed in a "social garbage can."³⁹ Her economic status was going in a

³⁶ Pilch and Malina, *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, 20.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁸ Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 103.

³⁹ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 28.

downward spiral, below peasantry, below artisan, to just above the expendables. She can be conceived as a woman in desperation, one determined not to fail, and one determined not to die. She was facing death physically, socially, and psychologically.

Menstruating women, according to the law, were unclean, and “[t]he fear of impurity from menstrual blood accompanied a woman to the grave. The corpse of a woman who died during her period had to undergo a special ceremony of purificatory immersion.”⁴⁰ This practice at first was initiated simply if a woman died during her menstruation, but it eventually evolved and was invoked out of greater concern for the women’s honor.⁴¹ After twelve years of battling this disease her outcome appeared hopelessly set to undergo this purification practice. Her condition was only getting worse, so it is safe to assume that not only was she alone and segregated, she was consumed with fear that her body upon death would have been subjected to this practice.

Furthermore, as a woman in Hebrew culture it was of great importance to yield to the authority of the patriarchal system, as it was considered ordained by God. Any person in first century Palestine was concerned with their honor rating because honor was the social acknowledgment of worth.⁴² Strict adherence to these traditions was considered honorable. “For a person in a society concerned with honor, there [was] a constant dialectic, a thinking back and forth, between the norms of society” of what a person ought to do.⁴³ The honorable woman

⁴⁰ Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 103.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Malina, *The New Testament World*, 29, 31.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 31.

strived to avoid contacts, or context, which might have exposed her to dishonor.⁴⁴ If my presupposition is correct, that this woman was divorced, and quite frankly, if my assumption is incorrect, this statement by Malina puts her and her honor in a perilous position,

...women not under the tutelage of a man—notably childless widows and divorced women without family ties—are viewed as stripped of family honor, hence more like males than females, therefore sexually predatory, aggressive, “hot to trot,” hence dangerous. Only marriage would restore their true gender roles, but often this is not socially possible.⁴⁵

The culture of first century Palestine had much to do with honor, but honor was not established simply on an individual dimension.⁴⁶ Male honor was concerned with status and entitlement,⁴⁷ while female honor was “embedded within the honor of some male,” defined by “socially acceptable boundaries”—what Malina contend is “positive shame.”⁴⁸ Hence, an honorable woman was inherently born with positive shame, or concern for her honor.⁴⁹ So, the woman in Mark 5 was also contending with the duplicity of honor and shame, which in first century Palestine was gender specific.⁵⁰ “This patriarchal system precluded women from

⁴⁴ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 198.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 48.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 48.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 49.

assertiveness in public life, interpersonally and socially. This corresponds to women's general lack of what we today call 'rights.'"⁵¹

⁵¹ Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, 198.

CHAPTER 4

APPLYING A WOMANIST LENS

What is a Womanist lens? For the purpose of this thesis, the Womanist lens is an exploration of the Mark 5 woman through the scope of “Black women’s tridimensional oppression of gender, race, and class.”¹ I am in no way implying that the woman was black—that would be a long reach. The Womanist lens interrogates the text from a Black woman’s perspective—it embodies a Black woman’s way of knowing. By using a Womanist lens we are able to see the fullness of her character. In the Mark 5 narrative, we can take what had traditionally been viewed as a flat character and give the character depth. As much as Luke can be referred to as the Gospel for women, his narration of this encounter only gives a descriptive view.² Even Matthew, with his minimalist insertion, gives the woman voice through inward speech. Yet Matthew still leaves her character in a “pass-her-by” context. It is only in Mark that we see the woman’s forethought, her intentions, her desires, and her heart. This would put her at the top of what Robert Alter describes as the “ascending scales of certainties.”³

¹ Gay L. Byron, and Vanessa Lovelace, “Introduction,” *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse* (eds. Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 3.

² Reid’s purpose for concentrating on Luke’s Gospel in her book *Choosing the Better Part?: Women in the Gospel of Luke* is that it contains more stories about women. She warns, however, that it is dangerous to exalt Luke as a “friend of women.” Although the numbers are indisputably greater, women do not participate in Jesus’s ministry the same way that the male disciples do. Reid, 2-3.

³ “Character can be revealed through the report of actions; appearance, gestures, posture, costume; through one character’s comments on another; through direct speech by the character; through inward speech, either summarized or quoted as interior monologue; or through statements by the narrator about the attitudes and intentions of the personages, which may come

It is easy to see what was written, what has been preached year after year, decade after decade. The woman in Mark 5 has mostly been viewed as a flat character in this text and in the greater scope of the Bible. She has been used as an object to reflect faith, and we cannot deny the importance of that. But what the Womanist lens does is it affords us an opportunity to view the Bible from the underside of oppression. The Womanist lens challenges oppression head-on. It names oppression, it defines oppression, it calls out oppression, and sometimes it refuses to submit to oppression.⁴ And because the Womanist lens lifts this oppression up out of the text, it allows us to see a fullness of character. The Womanist lens magnifies the woman's character and allows the multidimensions of her personhood to come through. In chapter three I reviewed the intersections of the woman's character, presenting her in her social location. Yes, these intersections defined her—they are descriptive. But the Womanist lens names and liberates her from the oppressive system of first century Palestine. With the Womanist lens I intend to further deepen her character and resist the preponderance that her story is just a story of faith. Her character is a Womanist view of patriarchy.

either as flat assertions or motivated explanations.” Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011), 146-47.

⁴ Mitzi J. Smith, “Race, Gender, and the Politics of ‘Sass’: Reading Mark 7:24-30 Through a Womanist Lens of Intersectionality and Inter(con)textuality,” *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse* (eds. Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 97.

Womanist/Womanism is...

Womanism uses what African American Womanist biblical scholar Mitzi Smith refers to as sass. “Womanist sass,” she says, “is a legitimate contextual language of resistance.”⁵ Sass can be negatively connotated as argumentative, but its purpose in Womanist methodology is to construct a dialog that critically engages a narrative.⁶ Sass refuses to submit to oppressive systems.⁷

Womanism is tridimensional—it is intersectionality in praxis. The term womanist was coined by Alice Walker in her essay entitled, “Coming Apart.”⁸ However, it is most often referenced by Walker’s expanded definition in her book, *In Search of Our Mother’s Garden*:

1. From *womanish*. (Opp. Of “girlish,” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “You acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown-up doing. Acting grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.
2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?” Ans.: “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color

⁵ Mitzi J. Smith, “Race, Gender, and the Politics of ‘Sass,’” 95.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁸ “Coming Apart” was a short story written by Walker. It was published in the anthology, *Take Back the Night* (ed. Laura Lederer; New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, 1980). *Ibid.*, 1.

flower represented.” Traditionally capable, as in “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.” Reply: “It wouldn’t be the first time.”

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.⁹

This four-part definition itself is broad enough to be inclusive of all Black women, yet specific enough to identify how or if we choose to self-identify within any or all of these groupings. Cheryl Kirk-Duggan’s poem entitled, “Delving Deeper Shades of Purple,” illustrates Walker’s definition:

Sprung from the Nile Many thousands coming from
the Continent, Groaning, birthing, giving Her young,
her old into bondage Their cargo: God’s children,
of most noble heritage They stayed their course,
despite walking through the doors of no return.

These saints from whom we inherited much: We honor
and celebrate in gratitude As we delve into the mysteries,
the powers, the tenacities Of these awesome women who
traversed death in many ways So that we might live.

And because they were, we are because they were we
must write And ruminare, and cogitate, and make inquiry
About who they were and who we are and who we will
be: Womanists, queens, priests; mothers, daughters,
sisters, partners; Ordained to delve to research, probe, ask
questions Posit theory, embody wholeness and wellness
Being outrageous: revolutionary women; not trapped
by ugliness. Anointed in many hues of purple: we give
...a testament of hope and faith Royally,
celebrating dignity, honor, love, and possibility.¹⁰

⁹ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1983), xi.

¹⁰ Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, “Delving Deeper Shades of Purple,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society* (ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), Loc. 35.

For a newbie approaching this method of study, I have not yet claimed the title of Womanist, but that is not to say I am unable to advocate through a Womanist lens to engage a biblical text. It also goes to say that it would be an honor to follow in the footsteps of the brilliant, scholarly Black women who claim the title—Katie Geneva Canon, Delores S. Williams, Renita J. Weems, Jacqueline Grant, Emilie Townes, and many others. Not all Black woman choose to identify as Womanist.¹¹ And, “biblical criticism by self-identified Womanist scholars has not always reflected an explicitly Womanist methodological approach.”¹²

While the Womanist methodology embodies a remembrance of “Black foremothers as resources for contemporary reflection,” womanism gives every oppression a voice.¹³ It “brings Black women’s experience into the discourse of all Christian theology from which it [had] previously been excluded.”¹⁴ “Womanist thought is intentionally and unapologetically biased” towards diversity in community and “for love and justice in the midst of oppression.”¹⁵ The Womanist ethic seeks to wage war on any matrix of dominance or oppression. To do so, a

¹¹ Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, 5.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Emilie M. Townes, “Womanist Theology,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 57 (2003): 160.

¹⁴ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), Loc. 226.

¹⁵ Emilie M. Townes, “Introduction,” *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering* (ed. Emilie M. Townes, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 2.

Womanist must be willing to go it alone, but her preference is to have comradery among her peers to affect the greatest change for the community.¹⁶

Tenets of Womanism

From this definition spawned the tenets of Womanist theory and Womanist theology—Radical Subjectivity, Traditional Communalism, Redemptive Self Love, and Critical Engagement.

Radical Subjectivity

Radical Subjectivity entails approaching a dialogue with the objective of uncovering any underlying oppressions. It is a serious inquiry with a deep-rooted desire to understand beyond explanations or understandings traditionally submitted. Such inquiry typically challenges established authority, thereby evoking a response of outrage, confusion, and fear of disrupting the status quo. We are being “womanish” when we embrace agency and challenge boundaries by interjecting a resistant influence to establishment. The silent, invisible but ever-present barrier has been broken.

When a group of black female theological students at Union Theological Seminary in New York first began to voice concerns regarding their inclusiveness in black liberationist theology, they were acting “womanish.”¹⁷ They were claiming an identity and creating a space to engage the tridimensional oppressions specific to Black woman.¹⁸ Being “womanish”

¹⁶ Townes, *A Troubling in My Soul*, 88.

¹⁷ Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

necessitates a willingness to navigate the unknown and an acceptance of the consequences, with the hopes of implementing change. The purpose is not to be argumentative for the sake of defying authority, but to advocate for justice rather than self-victimization.

Traditional Communalism

Walker's second part of her definition carves out space for black tradition. The idea of Traditional Communalism depicts the interconnectedness of the black community and women in particular. Black women are spiritually connected by preference for common culture yet hospitable to diametric differences. Black women understand the force they hold when they stand together and glean from each other's strengths, passions, and tenacity.

Walker's allusion to Harriett Tubman is a reminder of the commitment to freedom, wisdom, and humanity.¹⁹ This tenet rings of Maria Stewart's call to "champion the utility of Black women's relationship with one another in providing a community for Black women's activism and self-determination."²⁰ Not only do Womanists enlist self-agency, they employ agency for community. They yoke their "religious and social perspectives to address the racial, economic, and sexual exploitations" effecting their community.²¹

¹⁹ Townes, "Womanist Theology," 162.

²⁰ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 4.

²¹ Townes, "Womanist Theology," 163.

Redemptive Self-Love

Regardless of anything else, a Womanist loves her unique self, moving to self-protect and self-preserve. Redemptive Self-Love is “a re-affirmation of Black womanhood in all its full creation.”²²

Critical Engagement

A Black woman’s way of knowing, or her epistemology, is different from her White Feminist counterpart. The way Smith puts it, Womanist is Feminist’s sister, not its child.²³ When analyzing oppression the Womanist seeks out a multifaceted problem and undertakes a deeper hermeneutic of suspicion. A Womanist requires a more sharpened critique of oppressed conditions.²⁴

Why Womanist?

So how does this relate to the woman in Mark 5? While Black women and their experiences are at the root of womanism, the inclusive, communal, and multiplicative interrogation within this methodology warrants its application to the Mark 5 woman. The view of her character from a Feminist perspective would certainly uncover the oppressive patriarchal

²² Stacey Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society* (NY, New York University Press: 2006), 142.

²³ Smith, “Race, Gender, and the Politics of ‘Sass’: Reading Mark 7:24-30 Through a Womanist Lens of Intersectionality and Inter(con)textuality,” 96.

²⁴ Townes, *A Troubling in My Soul*, 89.

culture present in first century Palestine, but it would not contend with the intersecting power relations which produce complex social inequalities.²⁵

Like purple is to lavender, we cannot look upon her condition simply in a binary, male versus female context. A White Feminist discourse would have the privilege of engaging the woman exclusively on the basis of gender.²⁶ A Feminist discourse would not undertake the interdependencies of her overlapping oppressions; it would disengage the intersecting power relations of her social existence.²⁷ Most Feminists identify patriarchy, the social structures and ideologies that enable men to dominate and exploit woman, as the primary notion for explaining the most basic and essential difference of humanity.²⁸

The Womanist scope would engage the text with a deeper hermeneutic of suspicion. The Womanist lens would expose the kyriocentric nature of this text. The kyriarchal relations of domination are class-conscious, structural positions categorized by gender, race, class, religion, etc., which are established at birth.²⁹ They are built on elite White male property rights and the exploitation of the dependency, inferiority, and obedience of subject positions within the

²⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 49.

²⁶ Mitzi J. Smith, "Womanism, Intersectionality, and Biblical Justice," *Mutuality* (retrieved 27 November 2020: <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=rlh&AN=116282751&site=ehost-live>).

²⁷ Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, 49.

²⁸ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 115-16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

structural positions.³⁰ It is a matrix of domination—an organization of hierarchal power relations, structured with intersecting systems of oppression (i.e., race, social class, gender, citizenship status, ethnicity, age, etc.) and an organization of domains of power (i.e., structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, etc.).³¹ Although her female biology was a primary cause of her current state, the woman’s condition was not just a matter of gender. Her social location placed her at odds with the “grids of power relations” within this historical setting.³² It is this socio-political challenge to her condition which engenders a closer look at her multiplicative oppressions under the scope of critical social theory.³³

The Womanist Dialogue: Intersectionality Meets Critical Social Theory

According to Patricia Hill Collins, social theories justify or challenge social orders; “critical social theory both explains and criticizes social inequalities, with an eye towards creating possibilities for change.”³⁴ As a Black Feminist Collins uses intersectionality as a lens to examine “how critical analysis and social action might inform one another.”³⁵ Collins

³⁰ Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 118-19.

³¹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 320.

³² Nira Yudal-Davis, “Belonging and the Politics of Belonging,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 40, 3 (2006): 199.

³³ In her book, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, Patricia Hill Collins engages the hypothesis that the foundation is being laid for intersectionality as a critical social theory, but the potential has not yet been realized. She says it is “a critical social theory in the making.” Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Theory*, 2, 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

ascribes to two definitions of critical social theory. The first and most common use would be that of criticizing. Critiquing is the default to which intersectionality has been deemed, especially when discussed within its original conception. In Bartlett's article he notes several negatively expressed connotations and descriptions of intersectionality: it is a quasi-religion, it is identity politics, it replaces "reasoned debate with 'reflexive condemnation,'" it "threatens democracy," it turned from a reasonable observation to a "philosophy that confers prestige on those considered the most oppressed," and, quoting Alan Dershowitz, it is a "'pseudo-academic concept' that advances an anti-American and anti-Israel 'bigoted agenda.'"³⁶ Intersectionality used as critical social theory which undermines, exposes, and deflates privilege, which is a threat to any matrix of domination.

The Womanist dialogue is a threat to the domination of patriarchy and kyriarchy, but it is also a necessary inquiry into the oppression of these systems. The Womanist dialogue is "an analytical sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power."³⁷ The Womanist dialogue offers a less common and more informed characterization of intersectionality as critical social theory—"namely, an entity that is essential, needed, or critical for something to happen."³⁸ The Womanist dialogue, or critical social theory, examines the structures of power that resist change, but it in so doing Womanist dialogue is labelled as problematic because it highlights the problem.³⁹

³⁶ Bartlett, "The Intersectionality War!"

³⁷ Crenshaw, "Why Intersectionality Can't Wait."

³⁸ Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, 9.

³⁹ Crenshaw, "Why Intersectionality Can't Wait."

The Womanist Dialogue and the Problem with Honor

When Malina describes honor within first century Palestine, he defines it “intersectionally.” He says, “honor refers to the intersection of the societal boundaries of authority, respect for those in statuses above us, and gender roles.”⁴⁰ This is a descriptive assessment of honor in first century Palestine from a cultural anthropological viewpoint, using a multiplicative scope of analysis. Those in the dominant groups within these societies—those in authority (typically male), those in higher class status (wealthy), and more specifically the male gendered—have no inclination to change the boundaries established to keep them in elite power, with a few exceptions. The Womanist dialogue requires a deconstruction of these societal boundaries. This tridimensional boundary of honor represents a demarcation of exclusivity which Womanists are all too familiar. Why is intersectionality considered honorable when describing honor, but divisive when extoling such honor to the disenfranchised? One thing the privileged are not privy to is the effects of marginalization. They already belong to the “in-crowd,” that intersection of humanity that beholds power. But when belonging is threatened, when “honor” is threatened, it strikes back.

The Politics of Belonging in Ancient Palestine

“The politics of belonging involves not only the maintenance and reproduction of the boundaries of the community of belonging by the hegemonic political powers but also their contestation and challenge by other political agents.”⁴¹ It involves “struggles around the

⁴⁰ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 46.

⁴¹ Nira Yudal-Davis, “Belonging and the Politics of Belonging,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 40, 3 (2006): 205.

determination of what is involved in belonging, in being a member of a community, and of what specific social locations and specific narratives of identity play in this.”⁴²

The woman in Mark 5 was in the middle of such a struggle. Kinship was the primary institution for acceptance in ancient Palestine. “A person’s identity depended on belonging to and being accepted by the family,” and a person’s success was dependent on a person’s adherence to the traditional rules.⁴³ “[T]hose traditional rules of order [were] rooted in complementary codes surrounding the basic values of honor and shame.”⁴⁴ Malina refers to these, honor and shame, as basic values, but they would only be basic to the one in the dominant position. As discussed in chapter three, in this first century Palestine culture honor was inherently male and shame was inherently female. Therefore, success in life was considerably affected by adherence to male and female roles. The woman’s “success” was dependent on her ability to adhere to the traditional role of women, which was to marry and have children. Her condition placed her in a position where she would not have been “honorable” in society or family.

Because of the kyriarchal nature of ancient Palestine, the woman’s humanity and afterlife was in question. At trial was the woman’s sense of “belonging” that was deeply affected by her excommunication from society.⁴⁵ When faced with insurmountable odds, when normal is

⁴² Ibid., 205.

⁴³ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 29.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Nira Yudal-Davis, “Belonging and the Politics of Belonging,” 198.

abnormal to everyone else, we develop a sense of inferiority—what psychologists refer to as an inferiority complex, and in a kyriarchal society, a social inferiority complex.⁴⁶ This emotional detachment would play into what is called the “politics of belonging.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 39.

⁴⁷ Yudal-Davis, “Belonging and the Politics of Belonging,” 198.

CHAPTER 5

JESUS'S MINISTRY AND THE MARK 5 WOMAN

I begin my conclusion by asking this question, “Was Jesus “practicing” intersectionality as critical social theory and using this opportunity, his interaction with this woman, as a trajectory of change and effectually moving closer towards that ministry of inclusion? Mark’s version gives teeth to possibilities of a deconstruction of “normal” social practices and the social injustices placed on this woman, and marginalized people in general, while Matthew’s diminished contextualization of her story can be viewed as an attempt to rebuild that wall of power, and Luke’s narration took away her voice and the voice of many other women. In this quick analysis, I am inclined to align with Collins’s less familiar definition of critical social theory as an essential inquiry in order to effect change.¹ The woman’s brazen actions and Jesus’s reaction were critical to effect a change in the trajectory of her life, but I surmise it also effected the trajectory of Jesus’s ministry.

“Who is the woman?” poses the question that endeavors the mind to go deeper. The question does not ask what happened in the text. That is the simplest, flat answer. Anyone can read the words written in black and white. But asking the question should push our minds to examine not only what was written but also what was not, and then ask, “Why?”

Gathered From the Research

Matthew emphasized Jewish roots and lineage. He saw Jesus as a teacher, not a preacher. To Matthew, Jesus was the Jewish Messiah who would advocate for the law, not dismantle it.

¹ Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, 9.

Matthew would not have wanted the woman to symbolize anything outside of the customary female roles established in Levitical law. We could almost sense condescension as Matthew introduces the woman. Her appearance in the narrative appears as the most disruptive compared with the other synoptics. Matthew's version of the woman's story does not and would not highlight her significance to Jesus's ministry since his belief was that Jesus's ministry was the preparation for male discipleship.²

Luke gives more context to the woman's condition. He and Mark both imply a little framework to her character. From their narrations we can appreciate her predicament more. The woman had been attentive to her condition, seeking resolution to restore her and, potentially, her family's honor. From the Matthean narrative, the woman could be perceived as a shameless, bloody mess, looking for a quick healing. Coincidentally, or not, Matthew's version is the only synoptic that omits the cluelessness of the disciples. Perhaps this is further proof that Matthew's intent was to evidence Jesus's exclusivity to male discipleship. And although Luke, within his assumed profession as a physician, does show compassion for her dilemma, he staunchly rejects the opportunity to give the woman a voice, leaving her still in a subordinate role.³ Perhaps Luke believed that he could have found a cure if she had sought his professional services...but I digress.

But even Mark's narrative is not fully complete, it still does not give the woman's story the intensity it deserves—but not one of these male writers do. Mark's tale of this woman takes

² Brown, "The Gospel of Matthew," 86.

³ Schaberg and Ringe, "Gospel of Luke," 493.

all of ten verses. Within the entire Bible, all three synoptics combined, she exists in fifteen verses—fifteen out of over thirty-one thousand.

But I will give credit where credit is due. Mark does give us enough context to explore possibilities. Mark adds another layer of compassion in regards to her condition than does Luke. Luke blames her suffering solely on her hemorrhaging condition, but Mark implies her emotional pain. In verse 5:26 he writes, “She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.” She was facing physical pain, emotional drain, and financial strain.

In all three versions, the woman’s story is intercalated between the story of Jairus and his daughter. All three Gospel writers believed these two women’s stories were connected. Each story reasonably could stand on its own, but these stories are tied together, not just because they are intercalated, but also because their stories intersected on three significant variables—they were both female, they were both dying, and by the symbolic number twelve.

Rounding Out Her Story

In these ten verses of Mark we find the woman in the perils of patriarchy. Her actions intentionally challenged the societal boundaries forged against her. The woman of Mark 5 was acting “womanish.” The agency she took for herself embodies the characteristics that resembled those great disenfranchised fighters of Black woman’s past. She took a stand for herself against rules established to keep her oppressed—even when everyone else had counted her out. This woman, no doubt, valued the traditions of honor, but bore the cloth of a societal shame that was stamped on her womanhood. The classification of her impure state left her terrifyingly alone and segregated from her family and the community.

Her testimony should not be kept silent. The woman of Mark 5 was the first woman to speak to Jesus in public. Her voice gave other woman a voice. And most importantly her step forward was by invitation from Jesus. When she was called out, she did not say, “I respectfully decline.” Stepping out of the shadows of normality is not an easy task, but the woman of Mark 5 had not only faith, she had the unction to face the fears that dwarfed her existence.

The woman of Mark 5 stood up against the injustices placed on her by society, and in doing so, she gave strength to others who followed. She could have stayed silent and remained unknown in a crowd, but she chose to face her fears. When called, she answered, and when she answered she knew there would be consequences. When facing fears there is always a battle of the mind begging us to remain where we are, fixated in a place, a prison of sorts, which beckons us to stay. But we are not here to fit into a mold that keeps us systematically imprisoned. When we step out of fear there is such a sense of peace that overtakes everything we have ever known. We are no longer locked down into a position that has kept us bound in human-made dispositions and conditions that demoralize our sense of being. As Thurman says, rephrasing for inclusivity, “...to fear [society], whatever may be [society’s] power over [us], is a basic denial of the integrity of [life].”⁴ Is not every life important? Why is it that the woman in Mark 5 is given just “fifteen verses of fame.”

Yes, it is true that we are not here to be that be all and end all. Everyone cannot be the greatest of all times, that “GOAT.”⁵ And, yes, it feels great to be a first barrier breaker, and to

⁴ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 41.

⁵ The acronym GOAT is used in reference to the iconic boxing legend, Muhammad Ali’s mantra, “I’m the Greatest of All Time.” Hayden Bird, “A Merriam-Webster Editor Explained

celebrate those who do. We have no problem “upping our game” to break walls, ceilings, and chains placed on us by society or defying odds set by human standards and norms. These are great accomplishments and worthy of celebration. In the comradery of human endeavor that is what we should do. But why do we celebrate certain accomplishments and not others? Why is one barrier breaking better than another?

In sports we are celebrated for using God-given talents to reach new heights, but it is questioned when that new height interferes with societal boundaries (race, gender, class, sexism, etc.). These social boundary crossings are often despised, demonized, and become the target of the most heinous demoralizations. When faced with these demon-backed efforts we are put on public display constantly defending actions, both past and present. Talents are questioned. Integrity is questioned. Background is questioned. Birthright is questioned.

In this story we find a woman who had been dealing with a menses problem. I say that not just based on what the majority belief is, but based on the setting of the story and her connection to Jairus's daughter and the twelve years. Could it be that the daughter's issue is due to the onset of her menses, making the condition for which they were both facing death the same or similar? Could it be that the taboo of a woman's menses, a woman's biology, be the reason they were both facing death? If true, this further supports a premise that Jesus could have been dealing with the oppressiveness of Levitical laws and traditions imposed on women. It supports the call of many women, and men, who fight for the equality of not just rights, but for life and the sacredness of all lives.

Tom Brady's Role in 'GOAT' Entering the Dictionary," Boston.com, (retrieved 15 March 2021: <https://www.boston.com/sports/new-england-patriots/2018/09/07/tom-brady-goat-dictionary>).

Conclusion

The fight for her life meant the woman had to disrupt societal boundaries that segregated her from community, but it was a fight she was willing to take on. I imagine she said to herself, “Jesus is healing all of these people, why not me? Am I not human?” She did not have anything to lose, but she had life to gain. Was she afraid? Most certainly. Who wouldn’t be in her situation? By societies standards, everything and everyone she would have touched she would have defiled. She was an unnamed, unworthy, unclean, disenfranchised, disinherited, disgusted mess of a women, according to societies standards—some women included. Society had discarded and disregarded her. It was easy for the woman to be overlooked in the crowd, stepped over like trash in the street. This is what, or rather who, Jesus claimed as daughter.

This woman represents not just the children of Israel, but every speck that society has deemed unclean, unmovable, unusable, and unredeemable. How can we say that God is the God of all, yet deny anyone who does not look like us, talk like us, walk like us, or act like us? How can we say that God is the God of all and the judge of all when we are constantly judging our sisters and brothers based on what we see and not what God sees? How can we call ourselves Christians if we do not mirror Christ? The woman was one of the "disinherited" with her back against the wall.⁶ With nowhere else to go and no one by her side she faced society and its boundaries—boundaries that became her death squad. The woman attempted to “follow the rules,” but what did that gain her? There comes a time when we must decide that the calling is too strong to be concerned about what is considered "normal."

⁶ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 3.

The woman of Mark 5 gives us yet another lens from which to read the Bible. A lens of color and context and nuances that disrupts, a lens that shapes generations to come. She is not a flat, bump on the road character in the Bible that should be remembered simply for being healed by her faith. She should be remembered as one who was given a voice and asked to speak up when no one else cared to listen, see, or value. She should be remembered as the one who had the courage to stand and face adversity when her back was against the wall. She should be remembered by the fact that her faith not only made her body whole, but it restored her to a position of authority where even a woman can stand and speak life before the multitudes.

The woman was the first woman to speak publicly to Jesus. She was given a platform to testify, to confess to a crowd that Jesus, and only Jesus, had the power to heal what money and man could not. The woman is a reminder that every life is worth saving and that every interruption is not a disruption. She is a reminder that one act does not change the trajectory of who we are to become—only a transforming occurrence can change that.

Because her background is not told it leaves an opportunity to evaluate and speculate, to take a flat character and form a narrative that fits many situations, to fit our situations. It magnifies the fact that we do not know everything, and it also uncovers the fact that there are many paths that may lead to the same destination. The woman of Mark 5 opens a window to view the many conditions people face that places them in opposition with the norms of society. No matter who we are, the challenges we face, the conditions that make us different, our lives matter.

Still today we carry the values of honor and shame of first century Palestine. This religious history is embedded in Christianity. We deny our brothers and sisters because of

differences. What if the lesson missed was that we should stand with each other and not shame each other? What if we take a position of orthodoxy rather than orthopraxy. The words written in the Bible were written through a lens of biblical times. It captured a moment in time but in a way that can and should inspire one to place themselves in the body and lives of those immortalized and canonized in those sixty-six books. And because God is bigger than the Bible and transcends generations, I do not believe God's intention was to remain in that mortal state. That would be going backwards rather than going forward. It is in hindsight that we see mistakes and look to make correction. Was that not the purpose of Jesus's ministry? The Bible should not be used as a means to hold traditions and positions that continually oppress. What we should be doing is shining light upon the darkness, yes even the darkness of the Bible, and exposing what is so tightly wrapped in biblical literalism.

The woman of Mark 5 can be seen as a light, shining on the darkness of an oppressive system fixed in tradition and the status quo. While her story magnifies the power of faith, it limits her faith to a happenstance miracle. Her story can be seen as a lens through which we can see ourselves, a self-reflection of who we are or who we want to become. Perhaps the Gospel writers, and those who continue to paint her in darkness as always hemorrhaging, always with an issue, always alone, do so to limit the scope of how we see life, how we see women, how we see the disinherited. Her valiant transformation is negated by what she was, who she use to be, rather than who she became.

This woman had the fortitude to fight for existence. She had tenacity and faculty. She was an agent for herself. She had the mental dexterity to facilitate a path to inheritance. Jesus acknowledges her worth and her works. Her actions can be visualized in so many scriptures.

James 2:26 says, “For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.” Romans 8:6 says, “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” And Revelation 21:5-7, “‘See, I am making all things new.’ ‘...To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.’”

Exodus 12:13 in the Passover text reads, “The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you...”⁷ The Passover was not just the act of putting the blood over the lintel and door post it was having faith that God would deliver. The blood was an outward sign of the faith. The act was the physical doing. Jesus already knew what and why the woman did what she did. He knew it was important for everyone to see, hear, believe, and get a full understanding of what faith was. This was the beginning of the new covenant. Anyone can go through the motions, giving an external appearance of faith. What placing the blood on the door post showed was an outward confession of faith. That was the old covenant. The woman confessed with her mouth and believed with her heart that Jesus could keep her from dying. The woman did not have the opulence of Jesus's resurrection to know that he was God. She is a model of what it looks like to deflect what society thinks and instead focus on what God thinks.

I believe the power exchange in the Mark 5 text reflects a fulfillment of the promise to protect all—especially those subjected to oppression. It was the woman's biology specifically

⁷ God instructed the Israelites to cover the doorposts of their houses with the blood of the lamb. This was the antidote for the tenth and final plague, the plague of death, that was to pass over Egypt. Seeing the blood on the doorposts protected the Israelites, their firstborn specifically, from the death plague that struck at midnight. See Exod 12:1-32.

that became the root of her oppression. The woman was deemed impure because of an occurrence in her God-made body. She suffered because of laws established that made a woman's menses impure/unclean. The power sensed between Jesus and the woman created, defined, and bonded a relationship for eternity. Her honor was restored, and female was biology redeemed.

Malina says,

A person's claim to honor requires a grant of reputation by others before it becomes honor in fact. If a person's claim to honor because of some action results in no social grant of reputation, then the person's action (and frequently the person him/herself) is labeled ridiculous, contemptuous, or foolish, and is treated accordingly... So the problem with honor for the person claiming it depends on how, by whom, and on what grounds others will judge and evaluate a person's actions as worthy of repute.⁸

The woman embodies everything it means to be a part of the body of Christ. She came from high to low, and she was resurrected to kingdom status, a position that supersedes anything humanly defined. Who but God can place us in such a position? What do we do with someone who is claimed by the one in the utmost authority? Do we continue to pass her by once every few years, rereading her then story and skipping over a life story. Do we gloss over the fact that Jesus called her out for a purpose not just to heal, but to bestow honor and grant reputation?⁹

Because of this woman, all those women who were following silently were now speaking, asking questions, making petition to Jesus directly. They were touching, serving, and worshipping, and in the case of the Syrophenician women, defending her own honor. The

⁸ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 32.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

woman's encounter with Jesus was an invitation for all to know that Jesus will meet us where we are.

Yes, we may be met with resistance. We may have to fight our way through a thronging crowd, against the norms of society. The politics of the day, the laws of oppression and margins have been established to keep us out of neatly defined, pristine, and coveted boxes. But the power of Jesus extends beyond the dimensions of human hierarchy. Jesus's power extends even to the fringes of society.

This woman fell from the gracious position of plenty to the pits of the despicable, but Jesus calls her Daughter. This woman persevered through obstacles placed in her way, labels placed on her by society defining her character by physical conditions of her body, which she had no control over, but Jesus welcomed her into Kingdom status. This woman faced her circumstances, went against the oppressiveness of patriarchy and fought for her humanity, her honor, and her right as a woman to rise above the norms of society. This woman rose above limits placed on her, rejected labels that confined her, faced the consequences of her taking agency, and effectively opened doors to the fringes of society to petition for change to the status quo.

Being able to check certain boxes should not be a definition of our character. Being able to conform to a normality never defined by God should not limit our access to the Kingdom. The woman in Mark 5 was not welcomed or considered normal by societies standards. She was left alone to die in misery, but Jesus invited her into the Kingdom, and she graciously accepted.

Looking at the woman intersectionally through a Womanist lens helps define her character and develops this woman as a leading role, even when she is not given a voice, and not

simply as an object in a lesson of faith. This view returns her personhood and restores the sacredness of life to those often left in the fringes. She is the definition of what Christianity is—the belief that all are welcome in the Kingdom who trust and believe, even without seeing with our physical eyes, that God can redeem, that God can heal, and that God can restore life to things, to the dying world.

Now that we have another view of her story, how do we use her story to reflect ours?

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