

What were you doing twelve years ago? Maybe you remember. Probably you do not. Twelve years is a long time. This woman remembers well what she was doing twelve years ago. Her diseases had begun. She started seeing physicians, one after another, over the years. She tried the treatments they prescribed. She spent all her money, but to no avail. The discharge of blood did not get better, but only worse. After twelve years she continues to suffer with no hope of being healed.

But this isn't just any disease. It is a disease that makes her an outcast. She is considered unclean because of the blood. She has no place in society. No place with those who gather in the synagogue to worship. She is living, but like a leper, in some ways it is more of a living death.

And then she hears of Jesus. Reports of His healing miracles reach her ears, and she has hope. But does she dare come? She is unclean. Oh, but she must, for her hope is only in Jesus! She will come in secret. She will slip in through the crowd and not even say a word to Jesus but will approach Him from behind. She will touch, not Him, but just His garment, and she believes that she will be healed.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. When Jesus is the only hope, people will do anything. Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Him. Four friends cut a hole in the roof to let a paralytic down to Him. And this woman does what is strictly forbidden. She comes into the presence of God even though she is unclean.

Are you living in such desperate times? It is possible. There are people who are at the end of their rope, and yet they hide this from others. No one in that crowd knew what the woman had been going through. No one in the crowd knew that for her, these were desperate times. And perhaps no one in this crowd knows how deep your struggles have been, what you have been going through. Perhaps you want to keep it that way. And if you are here just to touch Jesus' garment and then slip quietly out through the crowd unnoticed, no one here will prevent you from doing just that.

Except maybe Jesus. This poor woman. Her plan is working. She sneaks in, touches the fringe of His garment, instantly she is healed, and she quietly slips away. But Jesus ruins everything! "*Who touched My garments?*" Now she is in the spotlight. Trembling and full of fear, she falls down before Jesus and confesses the whole truth.

Why does Jesus call attention to her? He raises the daughter of Jairus privately, away from the crowd. He tells her family to say nothing to anyone. But with this woman He does the opposite. Hasn't she suffered enough? Why put her through this public humiliation? Why not just allow her to walk away, healed of her disease, in secrecy?

And since we are asking these questions, we could also ask: Why not make baptisms completely private, even secret? Why put the baby through the ordeal of being the center of attention, of being in the spotlight? Right here in the midst of the crowd, during the Divine Service, the sponsors confess for the child that he is sinful and unclean, that this is a time of desperation because the child would be lost forever unless delivered from his uncleanness. But he is here

because his hope, his only hope, is in Jesus Christ. And so, his parents bring him in through the crowd and the child touches, or rather is touched, by Jesus' garment, and instantly the child is made clean; he is healed of the disease of sin.

How can Jesus keep such a healing secret? This woman was an outcast, but no more. Now she can gather in the synagogue, the church, to worship. Now she is included with the community. And the community must accept her as one of their own. And so, Jesus makes public what happened internally within her.

The word church has its roots in the word to assemble, to gather together. Which is why no one can be a church by himself. The church is those who gather, who gather as the woman did, around Jesus. Because He is our only hope. The One who heals, who redeems, who makes clean the unclean.

In your baptism, you not only touched Jesus' garment, you are wrapped in it, covered with it. The water of baptism is Jesus' garment. For Jesus is in the water just as He was in His garment for the woman to touch. And as He declared publicly that she was clean, so also in baptism Jesus speaks out loud for the child, for the crowd here gathered, even for Satan to hear, that his child, through baptism, is cleansed of all sin and is now fully a member of those who assemble, His Holy Church.

This woman felt in her body that the disease had been healed. And yet she trembled in fear before Jesus even though she was cleansed. She needed His words of assurance and peace. He knew this, and so He called her to Him: *"Who touched My garments?"* He spoke tenderly to her, *"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease."*

Touching Jesus' garments in your baptism, you are cleansed as was this woman. Yet you, too, will have days of fear and trembling. Sin does this to us because we are weak and plagued with doubts. This is why Jesus calls you here to Himself, you who touched His garments in your baptism. Falling down before Him, confessing everything, *"I have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed,"* Jesus speaks tenderly also to you: Son, daughter, I forgive you. Your sin, all of it, is forgiven. You are healed. You are cleansed. Go in peace.

And to reassure you even more, because you and I are weak, He bids you to come and touch His garments of bread and wine. For He is covered also in, with, and under these garments. And again He speaks tenderly to you: I forgive you; all of you. Depart in peace.

No matter how desperate these times may be for you, all is well. Jesus is your one hope. And out of all the crowd He sees you, loves you, and cleanses you of all sin. And so, go in peace and be healed. Amen.