

Reflection

Good morning, everyone.

It's the first time that we see each other. It's Canada Day, and I think it's a good time to begin our faith journey together.

It is supposed to be a short service for today, so I have prepared a short reflection based on the Gospel of Mark 5:25-34 (NRSV):

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."

Do you think we really understand what the woman was thinking? The one who had hemorrhages when she decided to touch Jesus' cloak? It was not the first day of Jesus' ministry. People must have spoken about what Jesus taught and what Jesus did. She must have heard that Jesus was a miracle worker, healed a lot of people, people with sickness, people who are possessed, and people who had given up their hope for anything. But due to the fact that Jesus was surrounded by a lot of people all the time, and the woman's sickness was considered as ritually unclean, it was both inappropriate and impossible for her to approach Jesus.

Did she stop thinking of getting healed? She didn't. But she did think of a more modest approach. She didn't want to interrupt Jesus directly. Her wish was to touch Jesus' cloak, only a touch. She believed she would be healed if she was able to do that.

What about Jesus? Do we know what was going through his mind? According to the scripture reading, after his clothes were touched, Jesus sought out the woman and told her, "Daughter, your faith made you well."

What if Jesus said nothing, after the woman touched his cloak and got healed? Would the woman feel like she had stolen something from Jesus, and feel regret for the rest of her life? That's possible! Would Jesus lose a chance to let people know that he had healing power? That's possible too, depending on how we understand Jesus' own understanding of his healing power.

However, Jesus did say something, and the gospel writer has captured that moment. Jesus said, "Who touched my clothes?" We were not at the scene, but the question Jesus raised was obviously a little bit silly, since there was a crowd surrounding him. But Jesus didn't stop with his question, he continued with his action, "he looked all around to see who had done it ..."

Through Jesus' weird action, the woman had the chance to identify herself. She was the one who did it on purpose. Her blood sickness was recognized. And the most important of all, her faith was also recognized as significant, and she received a further blessing from Jesus, a "Shalom", the restoration of a rightful relationship with her God, her community and herself.

The reason I re-enter the role of a minister is that the Christian experience is a happy experience, and Jesus' teachings and works are also very inspirational. I would enjoy the spiritual life more if I could share that experience by getting people together, learning to be God's co-worker, and living out faith in our communities.

It's an honor to me that we can move along together in our faith journey, including those who put their trust in the institutionalized church or the spiritual church, or those who admire spirituality more than rituals.

Life is not simple, which makes it mysterious, challenging and admirable.

I want to share with you a story:

"Once upon a time, there was a lovely princess. But she had an enchantment upon her of a fearful sort, which could only be broken by Love's First kiss."

Can you tell me the name of that lovely princess? ... You do need more hints, I think.
Have you watched the cartoon movie "Shrek"? Shown in 2001.

What's the name of the princess again? Fiona.

And what's the name of the person who is her first love? Was it the talking Donkey?

No. It was Shrek, of course.

Here's a dialogue between Shrek & the Donkey:

Shrek: Ogres are like onions.

Donkey: They stink?

Shrek: Yes. No.

Donkey: Oh, they make you cry.

Shrek: No.

Donkey: Oh, you leave them out in the sun, they get all brown, start sprouting little white hairs.

Shrek: No. Layers. Onions have layers. Ogres have layers. Onions have layers. You get it? We both have layers.

Donkey: Oh, you both have layers. Oh. You know, not everybody like onions.

Reading a story, or listening to a conversation is not always easy. It will take some time before an appropriate perspective can be established for better understanding, even when it involves a language that we are used to, or persons that we think we understand really well.

Misunderstanding does not happen only with Shrek and Donkey, but happens with us all. However, if we put misunderstanding into a proper perspective, something fun can come out of it, which is one of the functions of comedy.

I had been a teacher teaching in one of the most successful schools in Hong Kong for five years, and in one of the opposites for 2 years. What I treasured most from those 7 years of experience was the awareness that I gained, the awareness of being treated unfairly, namely, how students and schools were being labelled.

Like what Shrek said, onions have layers. We all have layers. There are different ways to understand a student, or a school. Stigmatization and labelling do not help. The woman we read this morning was not just a sick woman. Jesus was not one who wanted to draw people's attention. Through proper perspectives, stigmatized students, marginalized persons, Christians

who can't attend service on Sundays, Christian faith and other faiths may be understood differently. And those new understandings would help us to express God's salvation and reconciliation in more relevant ways.