

main course

encounters in Mark's Gospel – five

Jesus and a nameless woman – Mk5.25-34

This is one of a number of '**encounters in Mark's Gospel**' each of which enables a small-group conversation around a particular story in Mark's Gospel. These conversations aim to help you, and everyone else in your group, to:

- build up your **confidence** in actively exploring bits of the Bible
- **make connections** between the biblical story and your own life story
- find fresh **vision** for the business of being human today

all from watching and talking freely with each other about encounters between Jesus and those he meets – as we find them recorded in Mark's Gospel.

INTRODUCTION

This fifth **encounter in Mark's Gospel** is a fine piece of storytelling with two stories wound together to increase the tension and the impression both stories make. We're going to be concentrating on one of them – Jesus' tense meeting with a nameless woman who found far more than she hoped for when she dared to touch the very edge of Jesus' cloak. Watch it together as a group and see what you can see.

STRUCTURE

Each of your **encounters in Mark's Gospel** will follow the same basic structure:

1. Assembling and beginning
2. Sharing the story of the encounter
3. Our initial reactions - sharing our own first responses
4. Extra Insights 1 – learning from Mark's big story
5. Extra Insights 2 – learning about Jesus' world
6. Exploring the Encounter Triangle
 - What do we think was learned from encountering Jesus?
 - What do we think Jesus learned from the encounter?
 - What have we learned from watching the encounter?
7. Deciding how that helps us to live now
8. *(optional)* Rounding it off with a song

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1. ASSEMBLING and BEGINNING

The group needs to gather, settle in and prepare for a shared conversation. This may or may not include prayer or worship or some catering option, depending on your local circumstances and context.

2. SHARING THE STORY

The conversation is started by hearing or sharing the story that will form its focus – the story told in **Mark 5.25-34**. This might be done in one of the following ways:

- Someone reads **Mark 5.25-34** straight from their Bible
- The group re-constructs the story of **Mark 5.25-34** from various rememberings
- The story of **Mark 5.25-34** is told by someone who has prepared it for telling
- A locally-devised combination of some of the above

Mark 5.25-34 is one of those stories that is present in Matthew's Gospel and Luke's Gospel as well as in Mark, so if your group uses a remembering and re-telling approach you are going to have to decide how closely you all want to keep to Mark's particular telling.

3. OUR INITIAL REACTIONS

The group should then consider the question:

- "What is this story about?"

This can be done with a brief time of discussion in twos and threes followed by reporting to the whole group, or done as a whole group conversation – as group size and local practice allow. Let's be clear, there's no 'right' answer to this question – it's simply an assembling of ways in which hearing the story has struck group members and their memories of how they have learned its 'meaning' from past encounters and received teaching.

4. EXTRA INSIGHTS part one – learning from Mark's big story

Share the information about how Mark has used this story and where he's placed it in his big story that's given in the EXTRA INSIGHTS on **page 6** at the end of these notes

5. EXTRA INSIGHTS part two – learning about Jesus' world

Share the information about the social, political and religious world in which Jesus lived that's given in the EXTRA INSIGHTS on **page 7** at the end of these notes

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6. EXPLORING THE ENCOUNTER TRIANGLE

The group takes time to explore the story (in the light of their initial ideas and the Extra Insights that they've shared), standing, in turn, at each corner of the triangle:

Standing and looking at the story from the perspective of Mary & the family, consider:

- **What do we think this nameless woman learned by encountering Jesus?**
 - *teasing this out ... What did this woman risk and why? What did she receive from the healing touch? What, then, from their very public conversation? Where would this leave her after Jesus had moved on?*

Standing and looking at the story from Jesus' perspective, consider:

- **What do we think Jesus learned from his encounter with this woman?**
 - *teasing this out ... What were Jesus' concerns before he felt the healing? Why did he stop and talk? What did their conversation expose? What effect did this have on his ministry for Jairus? Where did all this leave Jesus?*

Standing where we stand, watching the whole encounter, consider:

- **What have we learned from watching these proceedings?**
 - *teasing this out ... What previous understandings of this story did we bring? What have we found in the story this time? What about this story connects with our own stories? What do we take away from watching this encounter together?*

7. HOW DOES THAT HELP US TO LIVE NOW?

Now your group needs to bring it all home. Working as a group, consider two questions:

- **In what ways does this story speak to us today?**

Be imaginative. Be playful. Be daring. Be incredibly serious. Try ideas. Disagree. Come to a consensus. Work with the story like you're squeezing oranges. What good ideas to help us with living now can the group find from what you have watched?

- **What are we going to do differently now?**

Be practical. Be realistic. But be prepared to face the risks and challenges the story raises. Honestly address what the story seems to be saying to you and your situation as individuals, but also as a group, in your church and in your local community.

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8. ROUNDING IT OFF WITH A SONG *(optional)*

HE OFFERS MORE *based on Mark 5.25-34,*

tune: St. Fulbert, Rejoice & Sing no.418, or another Common Metre tune

1. It surely would have been enough
if He had let me be –
He'd cured what others could not cure,
His touch had set me free.

5. So, somehow, by that selfsame grace,
I tumbled at His feet,
I owned His touch before them all -
He made my joy complete.

2. My neighbours surely would, in time,
have helped enlarge my world;
I'd sought so much; deserved no more;
yet more, at me, He hurled.

6. And by the love he showed me then,
and by his cross of pain,
we each and all can be received,
made human once again.

3. He would not leave without a word
exchanged before them all;
His question hung, unanswered, sharp,
and held me in its thrall.

7. So, sisters, brothers, ev'rywhere -
ignored, despised, unseen –
receive, with me, God's welcome back,
no matter what you've been.

4. It hurt, it shocked - I feel it still -
yet in that cruel pause
the fullness of the grace of God
made me it's only cause.

John M. Campbell

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EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

This is one of a number of **encounters in Mark's Gospel** that are being offered through the Vision4Life website. Between them these conversation materials explore a whole range of different encounters that Jesus has in the course of the Gospel story. If your group found this one helpful they may wish to try some of the others.

*Full acknowledgement for the ideas and information that have helped us to construct these materials is given in the **Introduction to the 'encounters in Mark's Gospel'** programme on the Vision4Life website:*

www.vision4life.org.uk

see the following two pages for the "Extra Insights" materials for this conversation...

EXTRA INSIGHTS

part one – learning from Mark's big story

What can we learn from the stories Mark places both before and after our story and from the way our story works in the whole- Gospel storyline?:

The bit before our bit (Mk 5.21-24)

- **Emergency action required** – Our story sits right in the middle of another story in a way that sharpens the effect of both stories. The bit before our bit gives us details on how the crowd (so necessary to our story) came about and why it was moving along with such urgency. A prominent (male) community and religious leader shows Jesus enormous respect by falling at his feet and begging him to come and cure his dying daughter. A great surging crowd of the curious soon surrounds them as they move off. Everyone is eager to see if Jesus will prove worthy of Jairus' great regard and whether he will meet the implicit challenge to prove his healing power that Jairus' family crisis presents. Then, suddenly, everything stops as our story happens.

The bit after our bit (Mk 5.35-43)

- **Is it too late, then?** – We have just settled into our story of the nameless woman and are beginning to enjoy its positive conclusion when we are thrust back, quite brutally, into the effect of all this delay on Jairus and his daughter. In an anguished moment it seems all is lost – the daughter is dead – there is no point in troubling Jesus now. Yet Jesus, all alone in his hope, insists on going on and, despite the evident disbelief and mocking mourners, restores this girl to health with a touch (touching a corpse?), a girl aged 12 years (the same time the woman had been ill). She, too, must be welcomed back by being offered a meal in the family home.

Our story in the flow of Mark's whole-Gospel story

- **Welcoming the unwelcome** - Two women cut off by different complaints are both welcomed back and restored to their community in these tightly interlocked stories – but the passionate pleading of a prominent and much-respected man does **not** lead to Jesus taking his case first. Here are further examples of Mark's Jesus overturning long-established community behaviour in order to welcome back those who have been ignored, or pushed out, by social expectations and taboos. It's a slowly-building disruption of the whole social order, but it is not done cynically just to create havoc – in each case it is about seeing further with the eyes of kindness then taking decisive action to right a wrong that society has all-too-easily ignored. Where, oh where, is this all going to end?

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EXTRA INSIGHTS

part two – learning about Jesus' world

Exclusion and Invisibility

This nameless woman has endured twelve years of invisibility and social exclusion. Her problem with bleeding had made her religiously (and hence socially) unclean for so many years that her whole personality and world must have been re-shaped to fit. Over twelve long years she must have learned to live with being cut off and ignored by others, She must have achieved a sort of invisibility (i.e. simply not being noticed by anyone). She may have embraced this as a way of avoiding hurtful confrontations. She must have occupied something of a silent, private alternative world even as she moved about within her home town. Her skilled practice of near-invisibility means that she would only expect healing from Jesus if she can find a way to receive it without being noticed by him or by others; certainly without being challenged or confronted.

For her, Jesus' question 'Who touched me?', and persistence in waiting for an answer, must have threatened all she knew, mortar-bombing her safe little world of invisibility. It exploded the only world society had allowed her these twelve years past.

For Jesus, equally, if she were to risk an answer, he, in his turn, would have faced enormous social risk. He was stopping to publicly recognise that he had been touched by an unclean woman and to demonstrate that he did not care who knew. He was placing her need of welcome and acceptance above all else. Remember, when he did this she had already been quietly and invisibly healed. If this was only about her health, then the problem had already been sorted; everyone could have moved on, nothing would have needed saying, her invisibility and his decency could have been left intact.

Yet he deliberately challenged and sought to end her social exclusion and invisibility. He offered everyone else the challenge to start to see her too, to accept her as fully human, to acknowledge her as part of their community, to welcome her back, even to name her name.

And all the while that Jesus was making her the very centre of attention, that important (male) synagogue leader, who already had a known name and wide public acceptance was left waiting in his own endless moment of exclusion - silenced, unseen and desperate.

Until, that is, the messengers arrived from his house...