

“A philosopher,” said the theologian, “is like a blind man in a darkened room looking for a black cat that isn’t there.” “That’s right,” the philosopher replied, “and if he were a theologian, he’d find it.” I would like to invite you to join me as explore the dark world of the middle East during Jesus’ time and deal with the cat, that people deny is there, but is there.

IN THE GOSPEL Jesus confronts the socioeconomic divisions created by the cultural-religious domination of Jewish theocratic rule. In other words, Jesus is a prophet criticizing the religious focus on custom and ritual over justice and mercy.

This is the story of two healings, one of an impoverished woman, who has no one to speak for her and the other a religious ruler’s daughter, at the opposite end of the socio economic ladder. The woman has been hemorrhaging for twelve years. The woman had lost everything. She has been ostracized. According to Jewish custom, a woman who is bleeding is considered impure (Leviticus 15:25-27). Anyone she touches becomes unclean as well. She shouldn’t be there; She is an untouchable. Coming from India, where almost one fourth of our population was once considered untouchable – The Dalits, who are considered subhuman, less valuable than farm animals and therefore not even part of the lowest of the caste system, are segregated, treated as slaves and mercilessly abused. In many places, they are denied access to safe water, education and choice of faith and occupation. In their suffering, they are opening their hearts seeking hope.

This hemorrhaging woman, unclean and untouchable by religious and social norm violated the law by being among the crowd and by touching Jesus. She had to act secretly, and one can imagine the tension, especially when she gets caught.

She is a symbol of people in our society who live in the shadows, shut out and ostracized for no fault of their own. In this case, the cherished symbol of womanhood and femaleness became her own very prison. The place where you women folks know who you are – your womanhood, your femaleness, and feel loved and caressed and cared for, becomes the walls of her confinement. And she has been confined for 12 years!!! This woman symboizes every woman in our world who lives in confinement and misery because she is a woman.

She said, “*If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well.*” Amazing thing is that touching the Master she is healed physically. Jesus feels power leave him. Jesus stopped, turned around and asked, “*Who touched My clothes?*” She came and prostrated herself before Jesus, and told Him before everybody the reason she had touched Him and how she was healed immediately. Jesus said to her, “*Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.*”

For twelve years she was an outcast, rejected by everyone. His first word is, “Daughter.” Remember? How beautiful. Jesus embraces her into his family by naming her as his “daughter.” He makes her act acceptable. He makes her acceptable. Jesus takes away not only her illness and isolation, but also her shame. Jesus restores her to health and to community. She does not need to lead an ostracized life any more. She does not have to be secretive anymore. She is indeed a daughter of Israel with full rights and access.

Women and girls were among the lowest of Jewish society. They had no rights outside the home, and even in the home they were subject to the rule of their fathers or husbands. Girls passed from father to husband with no say in the matter; they were sold for dowry when they became of age at about twelve years old.

We have two stories: First, is the story of a woman who lived 12 years in misery and oppression – ostracized and second, we have the story of a girl who lived her life 12 years free and now, on the verge of embracing her womanhood and femaleness and therefore, who is on the threshold of beginning her misery and oppression. All in the name of religious and societal norms.

Jesus' tone towards women was different. He often considered them. His teachings were radical for his time. Many women, including prostitutes, were among his followers. Jesus was concerned about the plight of women and children in Jewish society. – Woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, the woman who is washing his feet with her tears, the woman who wiped his face on the way to calvary.. Women played an important role in his life and ministry. They are the down-troddens in society.

We have just survived a week of dramatic events calling us to reflect and change – the funeral of those killed at the Mother Emmanuel Church, the Supreme court decisions, the Pope's call to change with his encyclical and much more. Mark's story points to the divisions in our society not only between male and female, but also between child and adult, the clean and the impure, and the rich and the poor.

A soldier was wounded in a battle and ordered to the nearest military hospital. Arriving at the entrance, he saw two doors: one marked "For Minor Wounds," the other "For Serious Wounds." He entered the first door and walked down a long hallway. At the end of the hall, he saw two more doors. The first read "For Officers," the other "For Enlisted Men." The soldier went through the second door. Again, he found himself walking down a long hallway with two doors at the end. One read "For Party Members," the other "For Non-Party Members." The wounded soldier took the second door and found himself back out on the street.

When he got back to his unit, his buddies asked, "How'd your trip to the hospital go?" "The people really didn't help me much," he said, "but, man, are they organized!" (Andy Cook, "The Search for God's Own Heart," Men of Integrity).

Not everyone who passes through the hallways of our Church are healed or transformed, not everyone who calls himself or herself a Christian possesses Christ-like virtues of welcome and inclusion. You could pass through these sacred corridors – attend mass and go to sacraments and still be mean, unforgiving, selfish and a racist.

Changes come in our society – not through institutions or governments, not even through the institutionalized Church or religion. It comes when you and I step up with the right attitude towards our fellow humans and the world. Jesus said, blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God. St. Gregory says, blessedness does not lie in knowing something about God, but rather possessing God within oneself. When the Jesus in you and me, steps out confronting the evils of our time, change will happen. Mahatma Gandhi who challenged his fellow men about caste system and discrimination and asked them to embrace nonviolence said, "You must be the change you want to see in the world." Mother Teresa said, "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples." Thank you and God bless you.