

SHAPED BY SCRIPTURE

A Scripture Sandwich

Mark 5:25-34

May 25, 2025

Today begins our new summer series: *Shaped by Scripture*. And as we begin our summer series, I felt it was important that I be honest with you about all the ways in which much of my life has *not* been shaped by scripture. Probably an unusual place for us to start. But let me tell you about how the shaping nature of scripture has shown up later in my life.

I did not grow up consistently going to church every Sunday, and our home was not an overly, explicitly religious one. Aside from my mom's deep love for art and images of Noah's Ark, I had very, very little contact with and connection to the Bible. Sure, I had some basic awareness of those "major hits" in the Bible, but beyond Eve and Adam, Noah's Ark, and the fact that I knew some Jesus guy pops up later in the Bible, I had very little experience with scripture.

I've never really been super gifted at memorizing scripture. And, as hard as I try to keep those books of the Bible in order in my head, I always find myself sneaking a glance at the table of contents, to make sure I'm going to the right place. And so, in so many ways, the Bible feels very new to me. And sometimes this lack of biblical literacy and all the catching up I am trying to do, well, it's a bit of a hang up for me—it certainly has fueled a kind of imposter syndrome. And nowhere did I feel this more acutely than in the early stages of my ordination process.

For folks in our denomination who have felt the call to pursue ordained ministry, an early part of the ordination process is to take and pass what is called the Bible Content Exam. The Bible Content Exam is a one-hundred-question exam that assesses one's general knowledge of the Bible and its major themes. Spoiler alert: I failed. Twice.

I found out very quickly that I knew absolutely nothing about the minor prophets or that there were even minor prophets to begin with. And that simply knowing that Jesus pops up

once in a while is not quite enough information when being asked about the nuances of the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain.

And yet, as I've come to engage more deeply, thoughtfully, critically, and intentionally with scripture, I have come to find that because I am still very much a beginner, the Bible feels fresh, and it feels invigorating. I find myself eager and excited to read and hear what comes next. And, as our summer series suggests, I do believe that there is a difference between knowing scripture and being shaped by scripture.

So, now that I've told you all the ways that I'm very much a novice in the life-shaping language of scripture, let us begin our journey together this summer.

Our passage today is one of the first passages from scriptures that I dissected deeply while in seminary, using many of the tools and strategies of critical biblical scholarship. I picked apart this story in just about every way imaginable, and I found this experience exhilarating. I was hooked. Scripture had taken hold of me. It was beginning to shape me and mold me. And in my initial explorations of this passage as a seminary student, I learned a new, fun, and nerdy word. *Intercalation*.

This word—intercalation—is a literary technique used by the gospel writer in which the author sandwiches a whole new story in between another story that has already begun. But here's where it gets fun. The less technical term is a *Markan Sandwich*. So, today, together, we get to consume a scripture sandwich!

You see, in this moment in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is operating at peak Jesus. He's preaching and teaching through parables. He's been calming storms. He's healing folks overtaken by unclean spirits. And just before we readers have arrived on the scene, a religious leader has

fallen at the feet of Jesus, pleading with him to come and to heal his daughter who is near death.

So, as you might imagine, word has traveled fast that this Jesus guy is up to something different, something new. And as tends to be the case in the life of Jesus, a crowd quickly gathers. They want to see him. They want to hear from him. They want to touch him.

Things are progressing along nicely. The plotline of the story is on point. Jesus seems to be making his way to this dying child, and then it happens. We are pulled out of the drama of one exchange and encounter and plopped down into a totally new exchange and encounter. The scene has completely changed. This is the literary brilliance of this sandwiching technique. It is abrupt, and it is startling. Mark is trying to get our attention.

And so that's where we arrive today. Jesus. An unnamed woman. A flow of blood. The touch of a cloak. A transfer of presence and power.

Touch. Tenderness. Healing. Faith.

There have been countless pastors, preachers, and theologians who have commented on Mark's favorite word—*immediately*. You see Mark's writing style is one that often wants to move readers along in the drama. *We know how this story ends, so let's just get there!*

And yet, in this moment of the gospel, Mark seems to go into an uncharacteristic level of detail. He certainly has more to say about this encounter than his gospel counterparts, Matthew and Luke. Their versions of this encounter are short and sweet. Mark's version has depth. It has detail. Mark's version is raw, and it is real.

I think this should give us pause. For Mark, this is one of those stories that is asking us to slow down and to really digest the details—the image of a sandwich becomes quite appropriate. We are being challenged, compelled even, to consume this story (and perhaps scripture as a whole) in small and digestible bites.

Every year, during our annual Footsteps of Faith pilgrimage with our high school seniors, we spend a good chunk of

time at the Vatican. And every year, the Vatican is filled with crowds. People are everywhere. It is a constant pulsating of crowds filing in, crowds frenetically following along, crowds anxiously pressing in. And every year, we always have a few travelers who are not overly comfortable with crowds and overly crowded spaces.

One year in particular stands out. Knowing we had a youth who felt especially anxious in the presence of relentless crowds, my colleague and co-conspirator in all things youth ministries, Andrea Kamwendo, encouraged a few of our more physically prominent youth to simply keep an eye on their fellow traveler. She suggested that maybe they even flank their friend, so as to keep the crowds from pressing in too much.

And so, the maneuvering and manipulating of the crowds began. And there they were, two big and burly bros, faithfully flanking their friend. And then, in the thick of the crowd, the presence of more and more people pressing in, it happened. The flanking was failing a bit, so what did they do?

Admittedly, I thought they would abandon their post. The assignment had failed, and they would bail. Instead, they doubled down. They each extended a chicken wing and invited their friend to slide an arm through to grab hold. They were interlocked, sandwiched together within the crowd.

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I imagine she didn't much prefer crowds either. In fact, I must imagine that she tried to avoid crowds. She tried to avoid people as best she could. This flow of blood would have, in many circles, deemed her unclean and thus unworthy of any sort of engagement and interaction, much less physical touch.

And the physicians, the doctors, offered her no help. In fact, under their watch, she only "grew worse." In the face of cold and insensitive care, her voice was diminished, and her experience was ignored. Time and time again, insurance denied her claim, and there was simply no money left to spend.

And so, with no options left, she remembers that "she had heard about Jesus." So, despite her bewilderment, despite

her despair and desperation, she makes her way boldly and bravely to the crowd, maneuvering and manipulating through the seas of snickering and snarling people. She endures the stares of disgust and indignation, and she finally gets close enough to Jesus to touch his cloak.

In anticipation of writing this sermon, I went back, and I listened to an interview between civil rights icon and leader Ruby Sales and Krista Tippett.¹ During this interview, Sales recounts a defining (and perhaps divine) moment in her life where she felt compelled to ask an acquaintance who was in the depths of despair a simple question. *"Where does it hurt?"*

Sales goes on to explain, "And just that simple question unleashed territory in her that she had never shared...She talked about all of the things that had happened to her as a child. And she literally shared the source of her pain."

I cannot think of better question we could be asking each other. I cannot think of a better question which encapsulates our shaping encounter with scripture today. She touches Jesus's cloak and *immediately* they both simultaneously feel power and presence flow through them. In that moment, they take on and share in each other's pain.

But it doesn't end there. Jesus is aware someone has touched his cloak, he's aware that healing has occurred and that wholeness has been restored. He wants to know particulars. He wants to see the face of the one who has been suffering, and he wants to know, *"Daughter, my beloved, where does it hurt?"*

And so, she comes forward, tears rolling down her face as she shares in a way she never has. The bleeding. The ridicule. The shame. The endless doctor's appointments. The empty bank account. The lack of human contact and touch for twelve years. The loneliness. The isolation. The absolute desperation.

She shared the source of her pain, and Jesus tenderly enters into that pain with her.

One of the gifts of this story, I think, is that this woman gives us all courage to talk about and to name those places and spaces that so often get unnamed and overlooked. And, in

this way, this story gives us permission—and perhaps even compels us—to ask one another about our wounds and, then, to speak directly to that which ails us.

And so, in this way, this encounter with scripture shapes us in two ways: It gives us a model for how we might openly share our pain and how we might tenderly embrace and engage with those in pain.

It gives us courage to ask each other "Friend, where does it hurt?" And then, feeling the tug of this pain, we don't turn away. We move towards it. We move towards the hurt and the one who is hurting.

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Or, as Father Greg Boyle says it: we meet one another with "extravagant tenderness." We receive the tender glance, and then we become it. So, friends, I ask you this morning, where does it hurt?

Where are those places and spaces in your life—and in our collective lives—where we are tugging at the cloak? Where do we feel someone tugging at our own cloaks? Where are we desperately needing that tender glance, and where might we share that tender glance?

Perhaps you or someone you love has just received a devastating diagnosis or is being overcome by a relentless disease or injury. Tell us, where does it hurt?

Perhaps you or someone you love has a memory that is fading and all that once was familiar is now becoming foreign. Friends, tell us, where does it hurt?

Perhaps you are an individual or a couple battling and struggling through infertility, an endless routine of needles and doctors, and bank account transactions, of grief and lament and loss. Friends, tell us, where does it hurt?

Maybe, despite all the effort, all the conversations, all the counseling, separation and divorce have become the needed and necessary outcome. Tell us, where does it hurt?

Maybe you're a teenager who desperately longs to be known, named, and loved but is constantly told that those affirmations can only come in the form of digital likes and distant, unattached views. Tell us, friend, where does it hurt?

Maybe you're a child desiring the affection, love, and attention of caring adults begging them to please stop working and to simply come and play. Tell us, where does it hurt?

Maybe you're a college student, or an emerging or young adult, overcome and overwhelmed by all that life and society is telling you that you must do and all that you must accomplish. Tell us, where does it hurt?

Or what about those struggling in the throes of addiction, who wake up each day and must tussle and tangle with the relentless tugging to just take one more drink, to just feel that high one more time. Tell us, where does it hurt?

What about those individuals in our lives who are overcome with depression and despair, where simply getting out of bed feels insurmountable, and to simply exist feels impossible. Tell us, where does it hurt?

How about those among us who aren't sure where their next meal might come from or where they might sleep tonight. Where does it hurt?

Or those voices and experiences of those who have long been silenced, wounds intentionally healed and hidden from the world. Where does it hurt?

What about those of us who have succumbed to the seduction of production and consumption, only to find that this endless pursuit of accumulation leaves us feeling empty, and it leaves creation groaning. Where does it hurt?

What about those who are living and surviving in the terrors of abuse and anger. Tell us, friend, where does it hurt?

Or how about those who have been left to linger alone, craving contact and connection but who continually encounter people who would rather cover their eyes with their cloaks and keep moving forward, and thus the isolation persists. Tell us, where does it hurt?

Or how about those sitting and watching among us who are painfully aware that the seat next to them is now

empty. Loved ones who have died leaving a void that feels impossible to fill. Tell us, where does it hurt?

Friends, this is the shaping nature of scripture. Reading and encountering scripture is not an exercise in hemming us in such that we all have our individual cloaks keeping us contained and closed off. Reading and encountering scripture is not an opportunity to avoid the hurt or to condemn the hurt. Reading and encountering scripture is not an excuse to turn away in disgust when we realize who has touched us.

Scripture is an encounter. Scripture is embrace. Scripture is an embodied engagement with life. Scripture shapes us—compels us—to serve as a witness, a witness to each other's wounds. Scripture shapes us to serve as a collective balm in the face of our collective brokenness. Scripture cloaks us in tenderness, touches us with total and complete embrace, and walks alongside us in our woundedness.

So, friends, please tell us, where does it hurt? Amen.

¹ On Being with Krista Tippett – Ruby Sales, "Where Does It Hurt?" (<https://onbeing.org/programs/ruby-sales-where-does-it-hurt/>)