

20 July 2000  
Pentecost 6

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Never-failing Compassion”

Text: Mark 5:24b-34 (Lamentations 3:22)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Her body was almost consumed. The ravages of disease had taken their toll. For twelve long years the woman we heard of in the Holy Gospel had been subject to bleeding. And to live with such a disease is to live in constant fear and uncertainty. Each time she again began to bleed, she had to wonder, “*Will it stop this time?*” Each time, as she began to feel light-headed from the loss of blood, she had to wonder, “*Is this the end?*” For twelve years, this physical and mental anguish had taken their toll. . . . She had tried and done everything she could. She kept going to doctors, each of whom probably promised healing and relief. She had given all of her money to them in the hopes of a cure. But nothing worked. She kept growing weaker. She kept getting worse. The end was probably near for her. She was almost consumed.

And so she had nothing to lose when Jesus came through her town that day. He was her last hope. The hope of the hopeless. She had heard about Him and knew He could help. And she put her faith in Him. “***If I touch even His garments, I will be made well.***” He was that powerful. Powerful enough to do in a touch what all the doctors had been unable to do in twelve years. . . . And so she joined the crowd that day. She fought her way through the jostling and the elbows and somehow managed to get close to the hem of His garment. And she touched it . . . and when she did, immediately she knew! She knew that somehow her body was no longer being consumed, but that she had been freed from her suffering! Her faith in Jesus had not been in vain!

Most of us know how this woman felt. Many of us have been there, or have known someone who was. Struggling for a number of years. Trying many different doctors. Getting our hopes up that maybe *something* will work, only to be disappointed. Getting to the point where it seems virtually hopeless. . . . Yes, we know how this woman must have felt. . . . And so we also know the joy she experienced when she was healed! When she was finally released from her burden and could live again! . . . What would we give to have an opportunity like this woman had? It is what we pray for, and what

many of us hope for. That Jesus would show the same compassion to us and heal us, or our loved one, just as He healed this woman. For we, too, have put our faith in Him. . . .

But that's not all there is to this story – this story is not just about healing. For immediately after this woman was healed, something quite unexpected happened – Jesus stopped! He and His disciples had been moving purposefully through the town, having been summoned by a synagogue ruler to the bedside of his daughter who needed healing. But as soon as this woman touched His garment, He stopped. He knew! He knew, as we heard, ***“that power had gone out from Him.”*** And so He turned to the crowd and asked, ***“Who touched my garments?”***

And suddenly, the joy that this woman must have felt in her healing vanished . . . replaced instead with fear. Perhaps she should not have touched Him. Did she do something wrong? He was her last hope – what else could she have done? But now her secret was out, and Jesus wanted to know – who was it? ***“Who touched my garments?”*** . . . The disciples thought that was a silly question to ask. After all, there were so many people around that undoubtedly many people had touched Him, and jostled Him, and bumped Him! ***“You see the crowd pressing around you,”*** His disciples answered, ***“and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’”*** . . . But Jesus wasn't talking about bumping or jostling – but that *different* touch. That touch of faith that He had felt. And so Jesus wouldn't be denied, but kept looking around through the crowds of people for the one who had touched Him in faith. He kept searching . . . it was important that He find out.

So the woman, seeing that she could hide no longer, came forward and fell at Jesus' feet. And trembling in fear, she ***“told Him the whole truth.”*** It *gushed* out from her lips. She told Him all about the struggles of the past twelve years. She told Him about all the doctors. She told Him about her dashed hopes. She told Him all about her feelings of despair and hopelessness. She told Him of her faith in Him, that she knew He could help. . . . And Jesus wanted to hear it all. That's why He had insisted on knowing who had touched Him! He wanted to know this person, and hear her story, *and help her in ways she hadn't even thought of*. She wasn't interrupting Him. She hadn't done anything wrong. He was here for her, and wanted to help. And so at the end He speaks those comforting words, ***“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”***

And it was there, in that sentence, that Jesus showed His true compassion to this woman. For yes, He had healed her and she had been released from her suffering. But even more than that – did you notice? – she is now no longer an outsider. She is no longer just a nameless “part of the crowd.” Jesus now calls her ***“daughter!”*** We don't know anything

about her background, or where she is from – but neither does it matter. She is now, by faith, a daughter of God. A member of His family.

And this is where we see the truth of the Old Testament Reading come forth today, in that verse from Lamentations which read, ***“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end.”*** . . . Because, you see, Jesus didn’t have to stop. After this woman touched His garment, she could have been healed, and He could have kept right on going. And there were people who wanted Him to do just that! The synagogue ruler whose daughter Jesus was on His way to heal. The disciples who urged Him not to stop. They didn’t want Jesus to bother! But in mercy, in compassion – true compassion – Jesus had to stop. Just healing this woman wasn’t enough. Yes, she would have been freed from this disease and suffering now, but what about the trials she would surely face in the future? What about diseases that would strike in the months and years to come? What about her *eternal* life? . . . Jesus had to stop. His love and compassion would let Him do nothing less.

And that’s equally true for you and I here today. We too, like this woman, come to our Saviour in faith with our prayers and requests and concerns, but it is not enough for Him to simply give us what we ask for and keep going on His way! That’s kind of like what our government does with all of its programs, like Medicare, and Social Security, and all the others. They really don’t care who you are, and they really don’t know you — you’re just a number to them. An anonymous, faceless person who needs what they are giving. . . . But that’s not how God works. In true love and compassion, He wants more for you than that. He wants to know you, and He wants you to know Him . . . and most of all, He wants you to be His child. His son or daughter by faith. Not an outsider, but a member of the family.

And that’s the real key here for us today – to understand that God’s mercy does not consist in what He gives us or what He does for us when we ask Him, but in what He has already done for us. God’s compassion for us begins and ends in Jesus Christ. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, and in Him God’s mercies never end. Or, as another translation of the Scriptures puts this verse from Lamentations: ***“Because of the Lord’s great love, we are not consumed, for His compassions never fails.”*** . . . And that’s a good word there, *consumed*, because really, that’s the alternative. To our eyes and experience it may seem as if we may or may not be getting what we ask for from God, but to Him, it’s a much bigger picture than that. Either He has compassion, or we are consumed.

You see, that’s a picture of the battle that is going on for you and me – Satan wants to consume us, but our Father, in compassion, wants to save us. Now most of the time, we

don't think of Satan in quite that way. We think of Satan and his demons being in the business of doing something called evil and trying to get us to do various things called sins – but the spiritual warfare raging all around us is much more serious than that! Satan wants nothing less than your destruction, and to *consume* you in His evil. But ***“because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed.”*** Because of the Lord’s great love, God sent His Son to be consumed, in our place. And that is what happened on the cross. Our sin and guilt and evil consumed the Son of God. That wasn't just punishment taking place while Jesus was stuck hanging on that cross with nails through His hands and feet – that was consumption! . . . And its also what the devil would like very much to be able to do to you and me.

But ***“because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed.”*** We are not consumed, because Jesus, in His great love for you on the cross said, ***“Father, forgive them.”*** We are not consumed, because Jesus, in His great love for you became your brother, and made you sons and daughters of God in Him, in Holy Baptism. We are not consumed, because Jesus, in His great love doesn't just give you what you ask for, what you think you want, or what you think would be the best for you *right now* – He instead gives you what you need to lead you to eternal life. We are not consumed, because Jesus, in his great love, gives His own body and blood to be consumed by us, to strengthen our faith in Him and give us new life. And we will not be consumed in death, because Jesus was not consumed in death! Because even though He was consumed on the cross, when Jesus rose triumphant on that third day, He consumed the consumer! And therefore we will not be consumed. Now alive forever, His mercies will never come to an end.

And that's what happened to this woman in the Holy Gospel we heard today. Yes, she was healed from her disease, but she was given much more than that! In fact, that was the least of the miracles in her this day. . . . And that's true for you and me as well. Whether or not you are struggling with something right now – like a bad back, or Parkinson's Disease, or cancer, or something else – there is a far greater compassion being shown to you than simply whether or not you get what you ask for; whether or not you are healed. . . . For ***“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to and end.”*** The things of this world will come to an end. Days come and go; troubles and joys come and go; people, jobs, friendships, come and go. And someday, diseases will end – in healing, or in death. But what then? We're often too short-sighted for the “what then?” We're focused on the here and now. But not our Lord, for His love never ceases, and His mercies never come to an end. And so for this woman, and for you and me, there is much more. Much more than healing, much more than good things, much more than our short lives here on earth – and that is what your Saviour wants for you; that is what He wants to give you; the greatest blessing that could ever be given: that you be called son, daughter, forever, in Paradise.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.