**CLOSE ENCOUNTERS (#3)**

***The Bloody Woman (Matthew 9)***

Let’s all say it together now: “SPLAGCHNIZOMAI.” What? You can’t pronounce it? Well, if you were a Greek speaking Jew in Galilee, Samaria or Judea almost 2,000 years ago you would have said that word over and over again. It was not a word they would have used very often before 30 A.D., but for a period of three years they would have learned to say it so often that it would easily roll off their tongue. My talking lexicon (a lexicon is a Greek dictionary) pronounces this strange word as **splankh-ne’-zo-mi**. That doesn’t help much either, does it? So let’s just define it:

“*To be moved as to one’s bowels, have compassion (for the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity); to have the bowels yearn; feel sympathy, to pity*” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon).

In modern terms we would not use “bowels” but “guts.” It is something we feel deep down in our gut. We might also better use the word “heart” or “soul” to speak of compassion or pity for another human being.

In the first century A.D. there was very little “heart” or “soul,” or even “bowels” being felt for others in that cruel Roman world. Just read Romans 1:18-32 to know the horrible broken world in which men lived. Into that cursed world came the love of God in the form of Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:16; I Jn. 3:16). When He was 30 years old He began to drastically soften the cold, hard dog-eat-dog world in which men suffered. We read the heart of Jesus as we see time and time again the word SPLAGCHNIZOMAI be connected to His life and ministry. Let’s see just a few examples from the gospel of Matthew, then connect it to an example of a poor sick woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve painful years.

Matt. 9:35-36 *Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages … healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was* ***moved with compassion*** *for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.*

Matt. 14:14 *And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was* ***moved with compassion*** *for them, and healed their sick.*

Matt. 15:32 *Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, “I* ***have compassion*** *on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.”*

Matt. 20:32-34 *So Jesus stood still and called them, and said, “What do you want Me to do for you?” They said to Him, “Lord, that our eyes may be opened.” So Jesus* ***had compassion*** *and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him.*

We could multiply these examples on Jesus’ compassion but these should serve us to know the beautiful heart of our Lord. But one example stands out in a special meeting that an anonymous woman had with Christ that helps us all to feel that He would love us and help us in our hour of need too. I love this very moving personal encounter. I hope you do too.

Matthew 9:18-22 and Mark 5:21-34 tell her story, but Luke 8:40-48 gives the details I want to use in this personal encounter with Christ.

40 So it was, when Jesus returned, that the multitude welcomed Him, for they were all waiting for Him. 41 And behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue. And he fell down at Jesus’ feet and begged Him to come to his house, 42 for he had an only daughter about twelve years of age, and she was dying. But as He went, the multitudes thronged Him. 43 Now a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any, 44 came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped. 45 And Jesus said, “Who touched Me?” When all denied it, Peter and those with him said, “Master, the multitudes throng and press You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’ ” 46 But Jesus said, “Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me.” 47 Now when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before Him, she declared to Him in the presence of all the people the reason she had touched Him and how she was healed immediately. 48 And He said to her, “Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace.”

How can you not love this compassionate heart-warming story? It immediately makes me break out in song:
“Does Jesus care when my heart is pained too deeply for mirth and song;
As the burdens press, and the cares distress, and the way grows weary and long?
O yes, He cares, I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares.”

This nameless nobody, ostracized from society by her “unclean” blood condition, would have likely lived alone and in deep depression. Imagine her life if you can. She likely lived in a small box room with her own bed, chair and eating utensils all to herself due to her constant bleeding (quite possibly her womanly “period” never ending for going on a dozen years!). Every time she left the house it was a cause of shame and embarrassment, not to mention the chronic fatigue and pain from blood loss. In short, she was slowly bleeding to death. There were no blood transfusions to save her.

Desperate times demand desperate measures. She heard the miracle worker was in town. She made the decision that she would risk everything to be healed. She plotted out a strategy of covert operations in which she would by stealth “*touch the hem of his garment*” while thronged by the masses. She was hoping for a quick hit-and-run, avoiding all eyes and exposure. But Jesus would have none of it. That’s not how He worked. Miracles were meant to lead to faith, and that demands confrontation.

She sneaks up and in the midst of the throng reaches out to touch Him. Instantly she feels the clotting effect that she hadn’t felt in 12 years! She is healed! It’s a miracle! Her body is finally well and she can live free from pain and shame again!

But, not so fast. Jesus won’t let her go without a personal close encounter to allow her to feel His love and care. Of the two things that happened that day, the miracle, and the words “*Daughter, be of good cheer, your faith has made you well, go in peace*,” she would surely cherish the words over the healing for the rest of her life!

This woman, who had lived in quarantine with social-distancing for over a decade, was finally free to be restored to society again. But my guess is she treasured the touch of the Master’s heart over the touch of the Master’s hem for as long as she lived.

SPLAGCHNIZOMAI. I now love that word so much more. As that anonymous woman of long ago felt His compassion, so millions since then have felt it too. Including me. How about you?

Jesus’ bowels yearn for you. And I love you too. – Rick