

WD December 2, 2024

“The Power of “How Are You””

Recently a muppet we all know as Elmo went viral on X with a simple question; “Elmo is just checking in! How is everybody doing?” No one expected what happened next. In less than 48 hours, the post has received over 13,000 replies, over 100,000 likes, and has been reposted over 46,000 times. “Elmo” became the No. 1 trending topic in the U.S. on X (Twitter), with over 338,000 posts according to an article by Inc. (<https://www.inc.com/justin-bariso/elmos-viral-9-word-tweet-just-set-internet-on-fire-its-a-powerful-lesson-in-emotional-intelligence.html>). Many responses were essentially “Thanks for asking” while other responses talked about layoffs, mental health concerns, and expressions of anxieties about the world around them.

“How are you doing?” is a question tossed out pretty casually much of the time. The typical answer is “I’m fine.” But are we? Are you doing okay as you watch this?

In Mark 5:24ff we meet a woman who had bleeding problems for twelve years. Note verse 24ff. “A large crowd followed and pressed around Jesus. 25 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. 26 She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. 27 When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” 29 Immediately her bleeding stopped, and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.”

Did you catch it? For twelve years. For twelve years she hoped that doctors could help her, but they didn’t. They made it worse and left her poorer in the process. Bleeding would have made her unclean, meaning she wouldn’t be able to be in a crowd, or among family. This would have been a lonely life. She is all alone in a crowd. No one knows her problems. No one knows how’s she doing. Even if they asked, she would probably have said, “I’m fine.” Does anyone really want to know? Could she trust anyone to understand where she has been for twelve years? Everyone else is busy going about their own business crowding around Jesus. We too are busy and crowding our lives with all kinds of other things. Would we have the energy to notice. But God wants us to see her. That’s why we read about her here in the Gospels. Notice too that she is captive to her thoughts and her hopes. She has become a very private person. Perhaps you can understand her because of your own private struggles.

However, we also know that Jesus inspires hope within her. She probably thought of nothing else but getting to Jesus once she learned that He was passing though. Held deep within her thinking she is telling herself, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” “How are you doing?” has a very different answer after she reaches out to Jesus.

Verse 30-34 goes on to say, “At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

“You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’”

32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

Here’s what I hope we all see. She has Jesus’ total attention. The crowd fades away and it is just her and Jesus. She falls at Jesus’ feet and in a moment of pure terror—I say pure terror because someone unclean is not supposed to touch a rabbi or anyone else for that matter. She is trembling with fear because she tried to be subtle, unnoticed, hiding amongst the crowd, something perfected over twelve years of an invisible life. Yet here she pours out her heart; years of frustration, disappointments over doctors, years of spoiled hopes, years of tribulations, sadness, loneliness—The whole story is poured all out before the crowd. Finally...She gets to tell her story. Finally, someone gets to know who she really is—not because she is healed but because in her sheer terror she feels she must. But somehow this terror spills out in relief. Finally, she no longer has to be invisible. Verse 33 says she told “the Whole Truth.”

“What’s Jesus reaction going to be?” she may have thought. Jesus looks right at her, “Daughter...” Let that linger for a minute. “Daughter...” means she is not isolated but part of a family. Jesus welcomes her as a daughter of Israel and of God. “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your

suffering.” I hope for you to see that what is more important than the actual physical healing was that he showers her with love. She is no longer unknown, untouchable, nor someone that should think of herself as unwanted.

Perhaps you have plenty going on too. I don’t have a miracle of healing to offer. My clothes are not that powerful. But I can listen, and pray, and remind someone that they matter and that they are worth stopping a busy crowded day for a chance to talk about how they are doing. I can give them a place to pour out thoughts and emotions that have been long trapped for fear of rejection. We can all do that. I have met many with illnesses and troubles of all kinds. They struggle with bad days and good days which happens with anyone. But the bigger thing is, “Does anyone care about me?” The simple answer is yes. Jesus of course does. However, we are the ones who are sent to remind each other that we matter to Jesus. We are the ones who show Jesus’ compassion. Who listen as Jesus would.

Thousands of people responded to a puppet from Sesame Street. But we are not talking about Elmo therapy here. We are talking about bringing the grace of God to someone in the form of time, company, and a willingness to listen; to take real interest in them. “Notice me.”

If there is anything we learn it’s to notice others, especially our sisters and brothers in the Lord. Calling the woman “Daughter” not only blessed her with a reminder of her value to Jesus but communicated to everyone else in the crowd, who didn’t notice her, that she was family to Jesus. They were quick to notice Jairus’ troubles because he was of a synagogue. But now they were to note this woman’s faith, which stood out in this crowd. It’s important to notice others. And that means more than just greeting them on Sunday. It means stepping out of our crowded lives, perhaps even interrupted for a moment for the sake of the one who is needs someone to listen. For us it means making it a point to reach out to them instead of always waiting for things to be convenient or for them to come to us. At any level surely as Christians in the body of Christ we can do better than Elmo in asking “How are you doing?” and mean it. We can do that. Right!?

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30