As I was thinking about the question for this week – “where does it hurt?”, a hard one - I couldn’t help thinking about my grandmother… I remembered all the wonderful wild and wacky things I got into as a kid, and I ended up with the scars to show for most of them. Grandpa taught us how to ride bikes, and that of course, came with some falls – skinned knees, hands, chins – you know the drill. The thing was, I could always run to grandma when it was bad, and the question would always be, “where does it hurt?”. She then would hold you tight, clean up the wounds, kiss it all better and maybe even put a band-aid on the booboo. And almost always, just with that, all was better, and the pain forgotten.

As we grow older, though, it seems that we forget how to go find comfort – at least those of us who were able to find in loved ones when we were young. Or, maybe it is less a case of forgot and more a case of unlearn. And a lot of the time the unlearning was due to pain. Bullying that happened if you looked “weak”. Hearing over and over that “boys don’t cry” – you have to be strong. Not daring to look vulnerable as a female – you will be deemed unfit and emotional. Rather, we learn to bear things stoically, silently and independently… lest what we bear might be shameful, or not to be mentioned in polite society. Or maybe our pain has been ignored and invalidated so many times that we believe our emotions are not justifiable or disgraceful. Or maybe we just fear how these emotions, or us, will be perceived, so we bury them as deep as we can.

So today, my question to you is, from the depth of my heart: “Where does it hurt?” And yes, maybe that implies that all of us know or have known pain and suffering, and I don’t think it is a lie. Maybe the depth of the wounds varied, the experiences that caused the pain, the way it shaped us and formed us, but I dare say we all experienced moments of pain in our lives. And in this series, where we explore connection, curiosity and courage in deepening relationships, it is good to remember that to cultivate that connection, we must be curious about pain – that which we carry ourselves, and that which others carry. See, pain is real, and bearing witness to each other’s pain, help us to cultivate compassion and truly see each other. And who we are, is just as much a function of where we are from as it is of our wounds.

Today we witness the pain of two women and one man. We see Hannah crumble before God under the weight of being ridiculed and patronized by those in her own household, and most probably in society due to her inability to bear children. Unable to acknowledge the gifts and love from her husband, in her sorrow she turns to God in the temple. And, once again, she is being scorned for bearing her whole self before God, without holding back her tears.

We witness the pain of a father who finds himself powerless to do anything about his daughter’s illness and impending death. He is wealthy and powerful, a religious leader known and respected in society. And yet, despite his position and power, he finds himself full of sorrow, as he has no way to fend off death.

We witness the suffering of a woman, hemorrhaging for 12 years, marginalized and ostracized, pushed out of society for something she had no control over. She lost all she had trying to find a cure, while the doctors made it worse. She was marked as unclean, untouchable, not welcome at the synagogue. She was kept at a distance by a community who was afraid to come close, to touch her, who saw her presence in a crowd like this as scandalous, even unlawful. She was *illegal*… exposing everyone to her touch. She is a woman at wits end, risking everything for one last chance to touch the One who she heard about, healing so many. To reach out to the One who she heard choose Love above the last little letter of the law. To touch the One who would see past this one indiscretion.

I am sure that we can all, in some way, identify with any one or all of these characters in some shape or form. We all bear our own sorrow, pain and suffering. A pain that is deep and so much more than just a physical ache. A pain that tethers us to ourselves, that spills out in all the wrong places in our lives. Mental illness, addiction, guilt, shame, feelings of loneliness and not belonging, of not being good enough and not being accepted. Mistakes made, and the pain we caused ourselves or others. Domestic violence and sexual assault, being different. Infertility and miscarriage or finding yourself powerless watching a child taking a wrong direction despite your best intentions. Financial insecurity, job loss, the loss of love, terminal illness…

And amidst our own pain, the sufferings of this world are overwhelming – from the increasing intensity of natural disasters to addiction epidemics, from illnesses caused by toxic waste to the scourge of global pandemics and their trail of economic devastation. Children dying from hunger, war, divisiveness, and the lack of opportunity or equality. When we lift our eyes from the pains of our own small circles of acquaintance and survey the sorrow of those in other parts of the nation or the world, it quickly becomes too much for us to comprehend and far too much to bear. So, we shut down, ignore it, bury it… and all it does is fester.

But there is good news here, my friends. And we find the good news in all these stories – stories that are connected in some way or another - they are all connected in their faith. Our pain does not need to hold us back, change us, or spill over into the rest of our lives. Once we acknowledge our wounds, once we decide to face them, once we reach out, there is healing…

Hannah had faith… Going to the temple to mourn what so many couples mourn. Spilling her heart before God, and inadvertently Eli. She is vulnerable and courageous, naming her pain and sorrow, laying them on the altar before God. Hannah finds peace in this prayer, in Eli’s acknowledgement, in his prayer for her.

Jairus, finally humbling himself, realizing his limitations, goes to Jesus to ask for help. Jairus, who stepped back, not rushing Jesus, maybe realizing that those who does not have power might have needs more urgent than his, is rewarded in his patience and faith as Jesus speaks the words, “*Talitha koum*”, and he sees his daughter rises back to live.

The woman, courageous in faith, thinking, “If I can just touch his clothes, I will be saved”, takes a risk in sharing her grief through reaching out. She is healed, physically, but so much more – she is restored to the family as Jesus acknowledges her, calling her daughter; speaking words of peace and healing to her.

Disclaimer – in all of these stories, these people received what they were asking for. It is easy to say that if we just have faith, we will get it all. That does not always happen. Healing does not always happen physically; our loved ones still die; we still notice suffering in the world. But in reaching out, in trusting Jesus, in acknowledging and sharing, our hearts to heal. We find peace, we grow, we gain strength and compassion, and we become a healing balm to others.

And we can rest in the knowledge that the One we reach out to, knows all about suffering. Jesus knows all about the suffering of the world, that he would eventually carry on his own shoulders. Jesus sweat blood in the garden, as he prayed, feeling that suffering encroach on him. In a devotional study based on the work of Henri Nouwen, Marjorie Thompson writes, “there is no suffering – no guilt, shame, loneliness, hunger, oppression, or exploitation, no torture, imprisonment, or murder, no violence or nuclear threat – that has not been suffered by God. There can be no human beings wo are completely alone in their sufferings since God, in and through Jesus, has become Emmanuel, God with us.”

God knows our suffering and pain intimately. He knew and brought peace and healing to all the people in our readings today. And so it is with us. Our healing too can happen once we are humble and courageous enough to step out in faith… to reach out and share our stories. Because all of our stories are connected. As different as we are, as different as the ways we come to Jesus are, whether with dignity or without, with privilege or without, we all come to Jesus in our desperation, we all fall at his feet, we find God’s salvation in him. Jesus looks into the face of each one of you, and everyone who is so different than you, and calls you all daughter, son, beloved child.

If we are ever to be people who bring peace and healing to this hurting world, we must be willing to pause and bear witness to pain—to our own and others’. Like the characters in these stories, with dignity and honesty we can embrace our stories without shame, trusting that God is present and ever listening.

My friends, Jesus was clear about the purpose of his ministry. He says in Luke 4, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberation to the captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.” May we too, as God’s body in the world, the Church, look around at all God’s children, all the world’s desperation, all the orthodox and unorthodox ways people are reaching out for help, and recognize that our stories are tied together. And instead of shirking away or delegitimizing, may we, perceive and accept the pain of others, and like the God we follow, stand alongside those who suffer; like Jesus, speak words of peace and healing. May we, like Jesus, lift each other up. May it be so.