

Maybe the Church Needs to Lose Power

By: Larry Greenfield

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Jesus, I suppose, didn't think he was retaining his power at the expense of others. In his mind, I'm guessing, he thought he was doing a pretty good job of sharing his power with everyone who asked.

After all, according to the first five chapters of Mark's Gospel, Jesus was expending the supply of power God had granted him rather generously: exorcising demons, removing fevers, healing paralyzed bodies, curing withered hands, to name just a few — along with his preaching and teaching and arguing with the Pharisees and taking time out to explain his parables to the thick-headed disciples.

With every request and challenge, Jesus was spending his reserve of power without it fazing him much at all. No dip on the fuel gauge when he chose to expend that God-given power to bring life and health and sanity and understanding to people who needed it.

Until, that is, in the midst of a large crowd, Jesus unmistakably felt a strong and unintended drain on his battery. As Mark records it in the 30th verse of that fifth chapter: "Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus..."

A hemorrhaging woman, he was soon to learn, was responsible for his losing power.

She'd been hemorrhaging blood for 12 years — she'd been losing her power and strength for all of those dozen years. And although she'd seen every physician available and spent all her money doing so, nothing had changed. So in her desperation, having heard about this roving healer named Jesus, she went and joined the crowd around him and risked touching his garment.

Understand: this hemorrhaging woman didn't ask to be healed. She didn't beg. She didn't seek his word or his hand. The contact with his robe, she believed, would be enough — enough to stop the bleeding, enough to end the exhaustion, enough to gain strength and to regain power.

When Jesus turned to the crowd around him and asked who had touched his clothes in such a way that he lost power, the thick-headed disciples told him not to bother — that it was a waste of time in that large crowd to try to find out who was responsible for the power loss.

But Jesus persisted and finally the now-healed woman came forward "in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth." (Mark 5:33b)

The Jesus who had just lost power told the once-hemorrhaging woman: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

I'm confident that the church — the Body — of Jesus Christ today thinks it's doing a fairly decent job of sharing its God-given power with most everyone who asks. Even in hard economic times, the contemporary Body believes it's doing its best to share its resources with those who request assistance. In a lot of cases, it doesn't think it is retaining its power at the expense of others.

After all, there are some wonderful stories about churches doing extraordinary things to help people and families and organizations asking for aid.

And, most of the time, when this happens the church doesn't experience a major drain on its power supply. Somehow the power is sustained. And, sometimes, it seems that it actually gains power whenever it responds to the pleas for assistance.

But the story about the hemorrhaging woman who has been losing strength for over a decade, despite trying all the remedies, might make the church ask itself if it is sensing any unexplainable drains on the battery today.

Not from those who ask for help, but from those who, in the crowd, pass along our properties and pass by our facilities, harboring the hope that we have the power to give them life again.

I'm thinking of people and families who have struggled to get by when, over the past dozen years or so, everything seemed to be going so well for so many others.

I'm thinking of those people and families who are suffering much more than the rest of us now that the economy has tanked.

I'm thinking of those who will be suffering even more severely because state legislatures can't find a way to meet their obligation to protect the vulnerable in our society — in fact, some state legislators are ready and willing to drastically reduce aid to the most vulnerable in order to protect their own political self-interest.

The story of the hemorrhaging woman should make the church ask if it hasn't felt a power loss from the touch on its garments by those suffering people, whether it deserves to be called the Body of Christ.

A sign that it really is that Body might be that, having felt the touch of the vulnerable on its garments, the church expends some of its God-given power not just to stop the bleeding, but also to start the healing.

Losing our God-given power could help us experience our God-given calling.