

# She found one weird trick to cure a flow of blood!

Hespeler, June 11, 2023 © Scott McAndless – Second Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 12:1-9, Psalm 33:1-12, Romans 4:13-25, [Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26](#)

**W**e began an important journey together as a congregation at the start of the year. We did so because we recognized that we were facing some unprecedented challenges as a church in the early twenty-first century. We were not thriving like we felt that we could or should. We wanted to know why and what we could do to change that feeling and that reality.

And now, today, we are moving towards the end of that process. After worship today we will discuss a report that includes some specific recommendations that we hope will help us move into the future with a real sense of vitality and hope. But, before we delve into that report, I would like to talk a bit about the attitude that we want to bring with us.

## Online Advertising

I wonder if you can remember a time about two decades ago. Online advertising and commerce were still kind of new back then, and, in the early 2000s, the web was flooded with a certain kind of advertisement. They called it clickbait. It was the kind of ad that had a loud and enticing headline that made it almost irresistible to click on it just to find out what it was about.

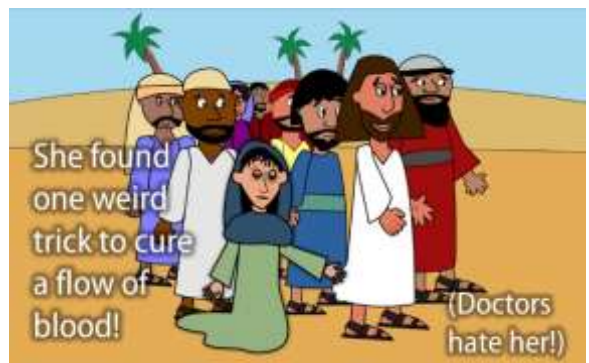
## One Weird Trick

And one kind of ad stood out. I know you have seen them. They proclaimed that a certain man or woman had found “one weird trick” to solve some of the most difficult problems that people struggled with. There were weird tricks for everything – to fix your weight problems, your hair loss, your complexion or wrinkles. And all you had to do was click and the answer to your problem would be right there. Remember those ads?

The ads often included lines like, “Doctors hate him or her.” That part of it was also enticing because it suggested that you could solve your problem without going through painful or expensive medical intervention, that you could be healthier without having to work out or make significant changes to your diet. The implications were that “they” (the doctors or whatever other experts) were intentionally trying to suppress or hide this trick because “they” didn’t care about you like the people posting the ad.

## Why These Ads Work

Many of these ads, in case you don’t know, were scams. Some of them managed to defraud people out of thousands of dollars. But I am sure that we all understand why they were so successful. Whenever we are struggling, whenever there is something that isn’t quite right, it is always so tempting to look for that one weird trick. If only we can find that one simple thing we can do to make it all right – especially if



it is painless and if you don't have to make any real changes to what is comfortable to us – everything will be great!

## North American Churches Search for Solutions

Churches do that too. In fact, in many ways, the history of the Christian Church in North America over the last few decades has been the story of an endless search for that one weird trick. That history is just full of ministry and program fads. Various experts have come along and promised that, if only you adopt their three-point (or twelve-point or however many point) plan, you will thrive. We have been promised that this evaluation tool or that missional philosophy will make everything alright.

And, of course, I am not saying that there wasn't anything of value in these approaches. A lot of churches undertook them, and they helped them to make some necessary changes and led to at least some success. But I would suggest that those congregations who saw these ideas as that one weird trick that would fix everything with no mess and no fuss likely did not get what they really needed.

## Local Churches Affected

The one weird trick fallacy also affects many a local church. How many times have church leaders had a church member, or even a visitor, come up to them and say, "Pastor, Pastor, I have one weird trick that will save this church." Well, okay, they don't actually say it in so many words, but that is what they mean when they say that they heard about this church over there that does this thing or that church over there that does that thing, and they have so many people showing up. If we just did that one thing, just think of the results!

Now, once again, there is nothing wrong with learning from what other churches do successfully. But it actually rarely works that you can just take one thing from one church and expect it to work somewhere else in the same way without taking into account the culture, context and many others specific characteristics of that church that no doubt contribute to that success. It doesn't really work as a one weird trick kind of solution.

## The Woman with a Flow of Blood

There was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years – an absolutely horrible situation. A flow of blood would have made her unclean and, therefore, socially unacceptable. So this is not just a medical issue, it affects every part of her life.

This woman's story is told three different times in three of our gospels. Each time it is told in the same general terms, but if you compare them side by side, you quickly realize that each gospel writer, Matthew, Mark and Luke, has a way of telling it slightly differently.

For example, in the Gospel of Mark, it speaks specifically about how this woman **"had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had, and she was no better but rather grew worse."** (Mark 5:26)

But Matthew just jumps over her years of struggles. He doesn't mention her suffering under many doctors. (Which makes me ask, do doctors hate her?) Matthew jumps straight to her finally

coming up with one weird trick to solve all of her problems. **“She was saying to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.”**

## A “One Weird Trick” Story

The way that Matthew presents it, it really does seem like a “one weird trick” kind of solution. Years of struggling and trying to find health and social acceptability for herself are suddenly wiped away by her doing just one thing. And I’m sure that you will agree with me that what she does is definitely a bit weird!

And honestly, if the story had ended there, I think that would be the message. It certainly represents the way that we often approach Jesus to solve our problems. We like to wait until we’ve gotten ourselves into a bad corner and then finally turn to Jesus in desperation to just fix things for us.

As I have already said, we tend to do it when we are worried about the vitality of our churches, but I can also give you countless examples of people who do it when they run into serious problems in their lives. I know I’ve done it too. Our default is to want to turn Jesus in to that lucky charm, that talisman, that one weird trick.

## That is not how it Ends

But the story doesn’t end there. And here again, if you read the other versions of this story in the other gospels, you will get quite a different impression. They spend a fair bit of time puzzling out how Jesus figured out what had happened.

In the Gospel of Mark, we are told that Jesus felt the power going out of him and stopped, looking around to try and figure out who had touched him. But Matthew mentions none of that, likely because he recognizes that it might leave his readers with the impression that Jesus really is a magical source of healing power, that he really is that one weird trick that can solve your problem.

## Jesus’ Response

But Matthew and Jesus know that that is not the case. And so Matthew jumps immediately to Jesus’ commentary on the whole affair. **“Take heart, daughter;”** he says, **“your faith has made you well.”** And only then Matthew finishes her story by saying, **“And the woman was made well from that moment”** – that is, from the moment when Jesus said that to her.

Now, at first glance, it may seem as if all of this is only reaffirming this woman’s “one weird trick” approach to health and vitality. It is her faith that has made her well; doesn’t that simply confirm that she was right to believe that she would get well just by touching the hem of his garment? But, of course, Jesus doesn’t say that she has been healed because of her belief in the magical power of the hem of his robe.

## Having Faith

He says that her faith has done it. And in the Gospel of Matthew, in all of the gospels, having faith is never simply a matter of just believing certain things. It is always a matter of trust. It is always about trusting in Jesus and in what he has said. It is always part of an ongoing relationship and so it can never be reduced to one weird trick.

The woman's wellness doesn't begin when she touches his cloak. Matthew makes it clear that it only starts with Jesus' affirmation of her faith and his encouragement to take heart. Most significantly, it begins when he calls her "daughter," which is all about her relationship with him and with her God.

## Our Report

When you get your copy of the report today, you will find that it is filled with things that we propose that we do as a congregation together. There are actions that we plan to take by particular dates. There are new regular practices that we mean to put in place. I hope you will find that there are a lot of specifics that will help us to discover a thriving future and do it well.

But do you want to know what you won't find? You won't find one weird trick that will solve all of our problems and fix all of our worries. Health, well-being and thriving are not things that we will ever achieve by just finding one weird trick.

Yes, there are some relatively simple things that we can do and that will help us, but none of these are about doing something that costs us nothing and fixes everything. They will only make a difference if they are part of an ongoing journey of faith and faithfulness – faithfulness to God and faithfulness to one another.

## Cultivating a Culture of Kindness

Let me get a little more specific by talking about one of the aspects of our report. We identified as one of our priorities the need to cultivate a culture of kindness. That includes things like making sure that people feel that they are welcome and that they can participate no matter who they are. We do believe that that priority can certainly help us to bring vibrancy to our church.

But if we try to do that through a one weird trick approach, it will be doomed to failure. It's not going to work just to tell people that they are welcomed or included, for example. It is not enough to just lay out a welcome mat. Actually, getting to a place where people, especially people who are perhaps a little different from us, feel as if they can really belong, it's going to take some work. Because it can only be achieved by building trust over time.

## Healing Hurts

I don't know if you realize this, but a lot of people have been hurt by churches over the years. It may not have always been intentional. Sometimes, perhaps, it was unavoidable. But it has happened. And when you have been hurt, when you have been made to feel as if you do not have a place, there's no one weird trick that can fix that. It takes time to build a relationship, to get people to a place where they feel as if they can let their guard down because this time nobody's going to try and hurt them.

There are no one weird tricks. But there is hope, and there is life. That is what that woman discovered when she came up to Jesus that day. I don't know if doctors hate her, but I do know that that day she was finally able to know that Jesus loved her and that she belonged. And that is what made the difference.