

Sermon on Sunday 16 November 2025

by Rev. Alan Stewart

Readings: 2 Samuel 22. 1-3, 31-34 & Luke 8. 43-48

Safe

As a teenager, I never imagined I'd end up in such a glamorous occupation. I had plans of being an archaeologist, then a fashion designer. But my real dream was always to be rock star!

It might surprise you to hear that I was once in a band; you are, in fact, looking at the former charismatic front man and lead singer, no less.

And we toured prestigious venues like the church halls and basement cafes of Fulham, eventually and quite miraculously, playing a few gigs in Chennai, South India. Rock and bleedin' Roll!

We spent a lot of time trying to find the right name for our Christian would-be-REM-inspired band, settling eventually on the one-word 'Safe'. It was supposed to give the message of being secure or 'safe' in God's love, except we hadn't realised that that word was also street slang among the yooof of the day, for 'good' or 'cool'. Truth be told, we were neither.

We'll come back to that idea of feeling safe with God. Let's, for a moment, turn to the story we've just heard. An unnamed woman risks everything by doing something extremely unsafe. To

understand this, we first need to know a bit about Jewish purity rules. In Judaism, then as now, different things can make a person unclean. One of them was blood. This woman had been haemorrhaging for 12 agonising years. She'd spent all her money on doctors who couldn't help and, as you can imagine, she was desperate and destitute.

Her condition meant that she would have been shunned by her family and her community, because bleeding didn't just make her unclean, it made anyone in contact with her unclean, too. So, this woman would have been isolated; alone in poverty with her pain and shame. She couldn't worship at the synagogue; couldn't sit down with family to eat; wasn't allowed into public places.

Can you imagine what that was like?

And then she hears about this guy, Jesus, who's healing all sorts of people, and in desperation she walks into a jostling crowd, 'contaminating' them, reaches out and touches the hem of Jesus' cloak. And immediately she's cured.

I can only imagine tears of relief and gratitude, and then panic; 'I need to get out of here before they lynch me'.

And then, Jesus stops in all this push and shove. And he asks a seemingly insane question; 'Who touched me?' 'Mmn, everyone!,' Peter replies. 'No, I felt power leave me,' says Jesus.

Now, why did Jesus do that? If he had any insider intel of this

woman's circumstances, which he sometimes did, and the risks she was taking, why make a thing of it? Why not just let her slip away?

I guess there's different ways of answering that. Maybe he wanted to make an example of her faith. He certainly commends her. Definitely, he wanted to challenge and reverse those cruel purity laws; 'Just because she touched me, I'm not unclean'.

Another clue is found in that one beautiful word of Jesus; 'daughter'.

This woman had, for twelve long years, been isolated and shunned, unwelcome anywhere through no fault of her own. And here, she is called 'daughter'. Jesus is saying, 'You are part of the family, no one belongs here more than you'.

You see, Jesus was interested not just in healing a body, but also in healing a soul. Here, Jesus restores not only this woman's health but her place in community.

And nearly all of Jesus' healing miracles are about challenging the prejudice and purity laws of his time, and restoring someone to community.

People who felt unsafe with the world, felt safe with him.

Just as Jesus sought to create a community where all could feel safe, so that must always be the intention and aspiration of his

church. A question we always need to ask ourselves is, do we have our own version of purity laws which make certain people feel unsafe or undervalued?

I wonder what makes you feel safe with another person? I imagine it's got to do with trust and respect, with consistency; with being able to be vulnerable, feeling seen without judgement.

This is what we seek to nurture here, and when we fail, we need to own that, learn from it and commit to being better.

We seek to model the safe inclusive love of God; to be a safe haven for all; a place where each and every one can know ourselves as fellow sons and daughters, as children of the Living God.

And that's something we commit to together. So, if we disagree, we disagree as well as we can. We listen carefully. We don't judge. We speak up when we see abuse of power. And we protect our young and our vulnerable.

One of the biggest compliments one person can say to another is, 'I feel safe with you'.

Some of us don't feel wholly safe with God, often because we haven't felt wholly safe with Christianity or with Christians or with the Church.

I'm here to tell you that our God is safe; a safe harbour in the

storm, a safe rock in shifting sand, a safety net beneath us when we fall.

We can trust God with it all; with everything we're ashamed of, with what's painful and raw, with what's precious.

With God, we are safe to be our true selves because he respects us like no-one can. With God, we are seen and understood, and within the safety of his love, we are healed and made whole and called children; sons and daughters of the Living God.

