Unlikely Candidates: Pushing Through to Hope

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0:00] Good morning and welcome here for this Sunday, October 30th. My name is Kent Dixon and I am the lead pastor here. And welcome, as I said before, whether you're joining us in person or you're here on the podcast or on the church website in the days ahead.

So many of you know Evelyn Fedorik. Evelyn has attended Braemar for a long, long time. Evelyn's daughter texted me out of the blue on Thursday night and said her mom had fallen in a parkade on Thursday during the day.
She messed up her shoulder, messed up her arm a little bit. They figured she might have fractured her hip. So they took her to emerge at the Royal Alex quickly.
X-rays were done on Thursday. They determined she would need a hip replacement and they weren't sure if it would be a partial or full. And I said hip replacement for a fracture. And they said, well, based on where the fracture happened, a hip replacement was the best solution.
So the last I knew, her surgery happened on Friday morning. Flawless, no complications. She is on the mend now. And as you know, Evelyn, nothing will stop her from getting back to herself.
[1:17] So I'm staying in touch with Drina, one of her daughters. And so I will update you as I learn more. So she is well, but pray for her to continue to get better. So it's good to be back with you this morning, as I said.

Thank you for your prayers and your kind words of support following the passing of Michelle's dad on October 13th. It was one of those things where Dave had Parkinson's for over 20 years.
We were reflecting on it and we remember that leading up to our wedding, Dave had said to Rosemary, his wife, do you think anyone will notice at the dance?
So he already knew before his diagnosis that something was going on. So that was 26 years ago. So he passed on the 13th.
So we're blessed to have been able to spend time with Michelle's siblings and the extended family planning and preparing for the service. You can all imagine that's a lot of work, as well as being there for a few days afterwards to help her mom check off some boxes.
[2:25] She kept telling me to stop helping her, but I moved her winter tires. I did a bunch of other stuff and she kept saying, stop it, stop it. And I said, I'm as stubborn as you, so you can keep trying. So we checked as many boxes as we could off for her before we left so that we could free her up to begin to see what this new chapter looks like.

And, you know, you all know how emotional I tend to get. So what you're hearing in my voice cracking so much is my cold, mostly. I'll say it's the cold anyway.
So Michelle is talking to her mom every day these days and she's pretty tough. And she said the other day, the hardest thing is that I've come to realize he will never walk through that door again. That's pretty heavy. So as much as we're glad that he's freed from the Parkinson's and she's freed from being his full-time caregiver, the reality of that separation is real.
So we appreciate your continued prayers for Rosemary, for Michelle, for the other family members as they all grieve and adjust. And as I've said to all of them, everyone grieves differently.
[3:40] If you're angry, that's okay. If you're sad beyond being consoled, that's okay. If you're not feeling anything and you're feeling numb, that's okay. It's all grief and grief takes many shapes.

Re-grounding now. So a few weeks ago, we began a new sermon series called Unlikely Candidates. And I was reflecting on it this past week and I said to Michelle, I had planned to preach so many more sermons in this series, so we'll have to do a part two at some point.
But over the course of this series, we've been taking a closer look at specific people from the Bible. Some who have maybe been familiar, some not.

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And we're going to be looking at a few more over the coming weeks. And we've been considering how God may have chosen them. How he worked in and through them. And what we can learn, we personally can learn from their stories.
And my hope has been that this is an enlightening and encouraging journey for all of us. And some of the feedback I've gotten has been that that is the case. So just a quick refresher this morning.
[4:47] We began our series by considering the qualifications of unlikely candidates. So I want to refresh that for us a bit. We recognize that they may be relatively unremarkable in some ways.

But that's specifically what makes their journeys, their stories, likely more relatable to us. Because often I believe we consider ourselves to be unremarkable, right?
These are relatable folks. Unlikely candidates are often also people who recognize their need for a savior. Their need to be redeemed.
And unlikely candidates are also not boastful. They don't seek the spotlight. They don't seek or crave attention or praise from other people. Thank you, Leah.
And ultimately, they often reflect their experiences. They reflect those things, that sense of the spotlight or attention or praise. They reflect those things back to God because they recognize he is the one from where they came in the first place.
[5:55] We also have recognized that unlikely candidates have no special qualifications, right? That old quote, God doesn't call the equipped.

He equips the called. God doesn't look for someone who's got all the right skills. God doesn't review resumes and go, yep, this one's perfect.
Use him. It's usually the contrary. God promises in his word that he will equip us with whatever we need to carry out his divine purpose when we answer the call in our lives.
So I don't know about you, but I could use a sermon on hope right now. And so that's the core theme of our sermon this morning, pushing through to hope.
And I said to Donna, the irony of this theme is not lost on me this morning. Here I am pushing through a cold to do this because I wasn't going to be kept away from doing it.
[7:04] But that's a bit ironic. I'm pushing through in another way. So this morning, we're going to consider what it means to desire something more. To anticipate better things in the future.

To expect or hope that your life or your experiences or your circumstances will get better. And we're going to explore the idea of hope in our lives through the lens of God's word, the Bible.
Our unlikely candidate this morning is one anonymous woman who's mentioned only very briefly in the Bible. And our story is found in Mark chapter 5, verses 24 to 34.
So if you have your Bible, now that we have Bibles back in the pews, you can grab a Bible from the pew in front of you. You can open it up on your phone or look in your own Bible.
And if you would turn there with me to Mark chapter 5, verses 24 to 34. And I'll give you a minute also recognizing that the translation I read may not be what you have.
[8:14] So our story actually begins partway through verse 24. Because as it happens, sometimes when the chapter breaks fall within a passage, or sorry, where the verse breaks fall, it can be in mid-thought.

So I don't generally like to start partway through a verse. So I'll recognize that verse 24 begins, So Jesus went with him. So this actually finishes an interaction with Jesus that came just before.
So don't let that throw you. But then we continue in the passage. A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years.
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.
When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak.
Because she thought, if I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.
[9:23] Immediately, her bleeding stopped. And she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. 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 around against you, his disciples answered.
And yet you ask, who touched me? Cheeky disciples, right? But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet.
And trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.

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So let's consider the story and the personal circumstances of this woman that we've just read about. I think we can recognize that she seemed to be in a very hopeless situation, can't we?
[10:29] But how do we reach that conclusion? You know, what tells us that? Well, verse 25 tells us that she had been suffering, is the word that's used. She had been bleeding.

It gets specific. Some translations use the word hemorrhaging for 12 years. That's significant.
For your body to keep regenerating blood and keep dealing with some sort of a constant drain on its system is exhausting. It's discouraging.
It's frustrating. Verse 26 gives us more detail of how she had been suffering. She went to all the doctors she could find. And the doctors had compounded her suffering by not only not curing her health issues, but in charging her for their services.
It says she had spent all she had. She was destitute. Instead of getting better, we read she grew worse. She spent all the money she had to find some relief, but instead had added financial destitution to her suffering.
[11:45] Just added another dimension of suffering. And her suffering had become compounded and became worse than it had been with her health issues alone.

If you've struggled with financial issues in your life, you know how stressful that can be. To know if you're going to be able to make payments. To know if you're going to be able to keep your car or your home or whatever.
Financial stress is one of the biggest concerns in our lives. So her situation had become even more hopeless than it likely felt before.
Just when you think something can't get worse, it did for her. So do you personally find yourself in a situation like this in your life right now?
Not exactly the same. But maybe you are in a situation like this woman was. Maybe you're facing medical issues that seem hopeless.
[12:45] Maybe your work or financial situation seems hopeless. Maybe you're experiencing family or relationship challenges that seem hopeless.

Or maybe, I've felt this sometimes, you all know what's happened to me over the last six months. Maybe it's just life. So much happening to you.
So much coming from every different direction. That you just feel like life is too much sometimes. Does it feel like you can't even put your finger on where your sense of hopelessness is coming from?
Does everything seem hopeless to you right now? Maybe you've been there. Maybe you can relate to that. But hang on. Because we're going to get to the rest of the story.
This is not where I end the sermon and go, well, good luck with that. Happy Sunday. No. I won't leave you there. I promise. So there's another major factor to this story.
[13:51] And that is the crowd. The crowd is mentioned in this story, if you count, five times. And as we've recognized in the past, whenever we see repetition in the Bible, it's the author's way.

It's God's way of going, yoo-hoo. This is important. Come back here. This is important. It means God wants us to pay close attention to something. Repetition is used for reinforcement and to draw attention.
So the crowd would also likely have represented a problem for this woman. But why? If the people in the crowd knew her, we can recognize that she may have been shunned by their community. Shunned by her community. According to the law in the Old Testament, her condition and her bleeding would have made her unclean. Would have made her an outcast.
Someone that you could not associate with. She would have been seen as off limits. No one would have been intended or cleared to have any contact with her.
[15:02] The crowd likely would have looked down on someone like that. Would have seen her as less than somehow. Or, potentially, the crowd may have just been indifferent to her.

Couldn't have cared less. Have you ever observed someone struggling in public and watched as people just passed by? Have you ever noticed that?
I've gone to help someone who looked like they were struggling and gotten some of the strangest reactions. Surprise and joy and appreciation. And also, irritation.
Why would you help me? Mind your own business. But it's interesting, right? Because I think sometimes human beings can become so wrapped up in our own worries and tasks that we stop seeing beyond the end of our own noses.

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If you just observe people just in general, if you're in a store or something like that, there's a lot of thousand yard glazed kind of gazes on people's faces.
[16:10] So we can also recognize, and I noted this as I was reading the text, that Jesus' disciples themselves were part of this crowd. And in their own way, even these dedicated followers of Christ stood between this woman and Jesus.

It's always struck me when I've read that passage myself that that's pretty cheeky, that the way the disciples speak to Jesus, speak to their master.
Well, of course people ran into you, someone touched you. There's people all around. Use your eyes, man. Wow. But see that? They were in the way as well.
They were part of the problem, not part of the solution. So I want to talk about the crowd for a minute, because much of our lives are spent surrounded by crowds as well, aren't they?
We're likely surrounded by people every day whose lives and circumstances may seem hopeless. Some of us here today may be feeling hopeless, as we've already considered.
[17:19] There are probably hopeless people in our lives and our communities who are not in church this morning, and that's not specifically our church, but church in general, because of fear.

Maybe someone has tried church before. Maybe they've heard that a church community is a place where you can find hope. And then when they came, they left feeling judged or condemned or possibly even just ignored.
Maybe as Christians, we can become so wrapped up in the concerns of our own lives that we begin to fail to recognize the concerns in the lives of other people.
Maybe we're so comfortable in our established relationships and routines that we simply can't be bothered to recognize or care for someone new.
I have a hard question for you this morning, for me too. How many hopeless people, people who are seeking hope, have Christians actually crushed?
[18:30] My friends, I want us to commit today as a church that we will never be the crowd. We'll never be the crowd and the people that keep others from hope.

I want us to commit today that we will treat all people with the love of Jesus. I want us to commit that our church will always be a place where people are offered hope.
Can we commit to that together? So focusing back on our unlikely candidate, despite the crowds and her pain, despite the seeming hopelessness of her circumstances, we can recognize that this woman had what?
One more push left towards hope. Clearly she had heard about Jesus, as we read in verse 28. We learn that she was thinking, if I just touch his clothes, I will be healed. She knew who Jesus was. She sought him out. And so she pushed through the crowd.
[19:43] Her hope remained anchored in Jesus. And she wasn't about to let this opportunity pass her by. My friends, if you're experiencing hopelessness in your life this morning, I want to encourage you that you can still find hope.

You can still find peace. You can still find rest in Jesus. So my friends, push through the crowd. Don't listen to the negative voices and discouraging news in your life and in your circumstances. Don't let the reality of this life overwhelm you and drag you down.
Don't let the chance to rekindle your hope pass you by. Reach out to Jesus. In case you thought I may have missed a key part of this story, we need to recognize there's another very prominent figure in the story, and that is Jesus himself.
We can see that Jesus was this woman's last hope. She had suffered for years and lost everything that she had.
[21:08] She was out of options. And he was right there. He was close enough to touch. In reaching out to Jesus, what did she find?

Let's hear the words of verse 34 again. He, Jesus, said to her, Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.
She found a savior. She found healing. She found faith.
And ultimately, she found peace. All in Jesus. Friends, Jesus is where we will find true hope and purpose in our lives.
Sometimes we let our problems keep us from reaching out to him. When in fact, that's the time when we most need to reach out. Does your soul need healing right now?

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[22:23] Reach out to Jesus. God is always ready. I think we can forget this. God is always ready to help us when we're struggling.

He's always right with us. And we should never allow our personal fears to keep us from reaching out to him. So let's learn from the example of our unlikely candidate this morning.
And be ready to push through. Push through the crowd. Push through your medical problems. Your work or financial problems. Push through your family and relationship problems. Push through to Jesus.
Surrender all your worries to Jesus. And find your hope in him. Amen.

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