

Threads of Hope Sewing Devotion 7

So here we are again to look at another passage of Scripture that has a connection to fabrics and sewing. Earlier this year, we looked at a passage from Psalm 139 that talks about hems. Verse 5 of that chapter says “You {God} hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.”

I said during that devotion that I like the idea of God hemming my person. Hemming in can be a protection but a hem is also a finishing, a refinement. When God looks at my life, he knows what it takes to make my ragged loose edges to be refined into the perfect image of His Son.

Today we are going to look at another Scripture passage that talks about a hem. We will read this story from the book of Matthew, but it is recorded in Mark and Luke as well. The recording of this story in 3 different Gospels tells us it is very significant, and I like that because the story is the interaction between Jesus and a woman. That shows us how much Jesus valued women, at a time when women were not appreciated and respected as much as men.

Here is the story from Matthew 9:20-22: “And suddenly, a woman who had flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of Jesus’s garment. For she said to herself, “If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.” But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, “Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And the woman was made well from that hour.”

If we were to fully unpack that story, we would find many significant concepts. But first, let’s look at this phrase: the hem of his garment. Obviously, in Bible times, clothes would have been made similar to our garments today in that they might have a folded or finished bottom edge—a hem. But this bottom edge of a coat or robe is not what this woman longs to touch. The original Hebrew in the Old Testament and then Greek or Aramaic words in the New Testament indicate that the “hem” mentioned here in the Scripture is actually the fringe or tassel of a garment Jesus would be wearing.

Way back in the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy, God tells the Israelites, the Israelite men, to begin wearing a special garment. The garment would be a long, rectangular cloth, or mantle as it was sometimes called, with fringe or literally, tassels, on the four corners. The tassels, in Hebrew TZITZIT (zeat-zeat), were to have a blue thread woven into them. This is significant because blue dye for that thread was costly and time-consuming to produce.

Why would God ask the Israelites to wear this specific piece of clothing with a specialized fringe tassel hem? The book of Numbers tells us the reason: so “you may look upon it and REMEMBER all the commandments of the LORD and DO them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may REMEMBER and DO all My commandments, and be holy for your God.”

Wow! God told them to wear this specific garment with this specific hem so that every day, putting it on, and having it on, would remind them to follow God’s instructions. They would REMEMBER and DO. One commentator says this would be like Christians wearing a Bible on a chain around their necks every day—a powerful reminder to do things God’s way! And that costly blue thread would remind them that they are royalty—God’s chosen people.

You may have seen or seen pictures of modern-day Jews wearing this same type of garment. Today it is called a TALLIT and Jewish men will often wear different styles and colors of it, either wearing it close to their bodies like an undershirt or over their clothing or putting it on only for prayer.

But back to the woman in our story. Look at her—she has reached the end of her rope. Scripture says she has had an “flow of blood” for 12 years. Literally, she has had a 12-year period. She’s sick, she’s drained, she’s exhausted from the physical toll of this and the work that comes from dealing with it. Historians list over a dozen different treatments that would have been used for this malady in Bible times and I’ll bet she’s tried every one of them with no success. Not only is she continually bleeding but that blood flow makes her unclean according to the Law. No one can touch her, hug her, take food from her hand, live with her. In effect, no one wants to even be around her. She is an out-cast.

Her only hope is JESUS. Imagine her thoughts: if only I can get to Jesus! Perhaps she knew the prophecy from Malachi that “the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings.” Healing in His Wings! Wings—the same Hebrew word used for wings is the one used for hem, fringe, tassels. Malachi is prophesying about this very story! Jesus is so filled with healing in his person that it permeates into his very clothing.

We don't know the details of how this woman was in a position to be able to touch Jesus's “hem”. She's in a crowd of people who are waiting to get next to Jesus. The tassels of this “hem” would most likely be hanging close to the ground. Is she sitting along the path, or is she lying there in exhaustion? How much faith did it take for her to even get to where she knew Jesus would be that day? What did it feel like for her to reach out her hand, grasp that fringe and feel healing flow through her body? An over-whelming relief!

Jesus knows she touched him. Being fully God, I think Jesus knew exactly where she would be and passed in front of her so that she could touch him. He looks at her in love and proclaims her faith has healed her. You know this woman would have a powerful story to tell her whole life because she touched the “hem” of Jesus's garment.

Jesus still offers healing—healing of body but more importantly, healing from the disease of sin. That is why we are sewing—seams and hems. Handing out a dress or a pair of shorts to point the way to a Savior who loves children enough to die and pay the penalty for sin.

This month as you sew, remember the faith of this woman who reached out and touched Jesus's hem. Remember that Jesus still heals—body, soul and spirit. Imagine how your life would change by wearing a Bible or a tassel every day to remind you to REMEMBER and DO God's commands. Sew up your hems with the faith that Jesus loves children and wants to use the clothing you make to help tell them so.

