Will you pray with me please? May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of each one of our hearts, be acceptable to you, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer.

What a wonderful and inspiring mix of Scriptures we have this morning. How can you not love this Gospel passage? It’s a scene of utter chaos, there’s too many things going on at once, and if you throw in a cell phone ringing and some emails, you would have ministry in the modern world in a nutshell.

The overall context of this morning’s Gospel passage from Mark is Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. In the story of Christian salvation, this is a major theme: that Jesus challenged and inspired and ministered to people all the way to Jerusalem, where his challenge and his rootedness in God’s purpose for the world proved to be too great a threat for the entrenched political powers of his day. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem.

Within that wider context, this morning’s passage is part of a chapter in Mark that tells us about a Preaching Tour that Jesus has undertaken while he is on his way to Jerusalem. He is working here to get the word out so that his wisdom will touch as
many lives as possible. So, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, and he is in the middle of a Preaching Tour.

As though that were not enough, just before this morning’s passage begins, Jairus, one of the leaders of the synagogue, has begged Jesus to come save the life of his beloved daughter, who is gravely ill. Jesus has agreed to come with Jairus to his house to take a look at the girl. So, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, and he is in the middle of a Preaching Tour, and he is going, with some urgency, one would imagine, to save the life of Jairus’ little girl.

And, while all that is going on, the Scripture tells us that the ever present crowds pressed in on Jesus from all sides, as they had done for many weeks now. Crowds of the infirm, the old, the destitute. Crowds of people who were ill in ways that we, with our modern medical care, can only imagine. Crowds of the hungry, the thirsty, the widowed, the orphaned. Crowds of people who embodied every possible human need, both physical and spiritual.

So, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, and he is on a Preaching Tour, and he is hurrying along to see a dying girl, and he is pressed upon from all sides by every human need imaginable. Jesus has what we would call today “a full plate.”

Life, as you know, is what happens to you while you are making other plans, and this morning’s Gospel passage tells us what happens to Jesus while he very clearly has other plans.
In the midst of the noise and the dust and the press of the crowd and the demands and the preaching and the whining and the prayers and the confusion, someone reaches out to Jesus for help. Someone who has been bleeding for a long, long time. When I picture that scene, the crowd, the chaos, the busyness, the woman just catching the hem of Jesus’ robe, I think of women and children and men who have been victims of domestic violence. And I think of the way that these victims are reaching out to the religious community for help. Right now, they are reaching out to just catch the hem of our gown for help.

In the work of domestic violence, women and children and men have been victims of violence in their own homes. There is a flow of blood that has been going on for a long, long time. Every day, day in and day out, at least three women in the US are murdered by an intimate partner. Nearly 1 in 3 adult women experience at least one physical assault by a partner during adulthood. The SafeLink Statewide Domestic Violence Hotline in Massachusetts annually receives more than 26,000 calls. Across our state, there are some 37,000 active restraining orders.

This flow of blood does not just involve women. It is all of us. Men are victims of domestic violence in about 5% of reported cases. Men and women are victims in heterosexual and in same-sex relationships, where abuse is as prevalent and as horrifying as in heterosexual relationships.

Children are also vulnerable. The Registry of Civil Restraining Orders estimates that 43,000 Massachusetts children are annually exposed to abuse and violence between
family members in their homes. Even if they are not directly abused themselves, these kids are 10 times more likely to grow up to become an abuser or a victim. They are six times more likely to commit suicide, twenty-four times more likely to commit a sexual assault, 50% more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, and 74% more likely to commit crimes against others. There is a flow of blood going on here.

The woman with the flow of blood who reached out to Jesus was not helpless. She had tried many times to get help. She had expended all her financial and emotional resources trying to get help. But instead of getting better, things got worse. Similarly, most victims of domestic violence try many times to get help. They may reach out to family members, friends, and others. But when the shelters are full and housing is expensive and health care is unaffordable, help is hard to come by. And, without effective intervention, domestic violence, like the flow of blood, gets worse.

In today’s Gospel the woman with the flow of blood reaches out and gets help without anyone even knowing it. She calls no attention to herself. She is completely anonymous. Perhaps you have experienced this in working against domestic violence in your congregation. You put out information, and it quietly disappears. You put up posters in the bathrooms, and the phone number cards evaporate. You will never know how many people who are suffering from the flow of blood that is domestic violence have been helped right here. The information that you provide may mean the difference between life and death.
And this woman reaches out for help so tangentially. I mean, she doesn’t walk up to Jesus, look him in the eye, and say, “I have a flow of blood and I need help.” No, that’s how Jairus asked for help because he has social status and standing. He is a leader in the synagogue. He is a somebody in the community. He can march right up and say, “I have a problem at home, you’ve got to come help me!” But not this woman. No, she comes up from behind, she reaches out to Jesus while being shoved around by all the other folks in the crowd who are pleading for help, she almost get pushed away, she almost misses him, and then, at the last moment, she just manages to catch the hem of his robe. Just the hem, as he goes by.

In the same way, victims of domestic violence don’t usually come up to us, look us in the eye, declare that they’ve been hurt in their home, and ask for help. Instead, we get hints. We hear clues. We start to put the picture together. We need more information. We’re not sure what’s going on. There sometimes isn’t much to go on. It’s all very tangential.

And, at the same time, there are all the Jairuses asking for our help. All the people and causes who speak right up. All the voices that are clear and cogent and comprehensible. It is so much easier to hear and to respond to those loud, clear, powerful voices. It is so hard to stop and respond to the nameless, voiceless, status-less people. The difference is even embodied in the telling of the story. Jairus asked for help directly, and Jairus has a name. This woman who has been bleeding for many years must crawl up and catch the hem of Jesus’ robe. And she has no name.
Another dynamic at work here is immediate crisis vs. long term, entrenched problem. All of us, I think, find it easy to respond to the immediate crisis. A neighbor’s house burns down, a friend loses a job, a spouse is sick, a child breaks a leg. Crisis grabs our attention. Crisis represents a big change in Life-as-Usual. We rise to the occasion.

It is much harder to respond to long-term, entrenched problems like domestic violence. It has been going on forever, and ever, and ever, with seemingly no beginning and no middle and no end. It doesn’t grab our attention. It doesn’t change life-as-usual. Until it happens to me or a loved one, it doesn’t grab my attention. It is the same today, tomorrow, the next day. And because it has been going on for so long it has gotten really entrenched, so it’s complicated, and a mess that I’m not sure I have the energy to do anything about.

In today’s Gospel story we see Jesus juggling the short-term crisis and the long-term problem. Jairus’ daughter represents the short-term crisis. She’s sick, she’s dying, it grabs our attention, it’s happening, it’s now, let’s respond. The woman with the flow of blood, on the other hand, well, that’s been going on forever. If these two cases were triaged in a modern emergency room, guess who would get treatment first.

And yet, Jesus stops, in the middle of the short-term crisis, to attend to a deeply entrenched, recalcitrant, long-term problem. He takes the time. He sees the need. He responds first where it is hardest to respond. Like Jesus, we the faith community are asked to respond not only to the attention grabbing headlines, but also to the entrenched long-term problems of our times.
Jesus knew that he had been touched by someone because he felt power flow out of him. There was a flow of power, from one place where there is power, to another where there is not. It’s like an electrical circuit. Power was over here, and then it is transferred over here.

This is what we are doing when we get information and support and resources to victims of domestic violence. We are giving them power. We are empowering them to make choices and pursue options that would not otherwise have been possible. Abusers strip power from their victims. Abusers do whatever they need to do to have power over their victims. By providing resources and choices, we are restoring power to those victims.

Likewise, when we talk to our youth about healthy relationships, about how to share power within relationships, about the pitfalls of romance and courtship, about danger and warning signs, we are empowering them. We are giving them the information they need to make good, strong, healthy choices. We are giving them the foundation on which to stand when they sort out what is happening in their own personal relationships.

Today’s Gospel message is clear: one way to be Christ-like, to walk in Jesus’ shoes, is to stop, in the middle of the rush and confusion and over-commitment of our lives and ministries, to stop, to take note of the person with the flow of blood who is reaching out to us for help, and to do whatever we can to transfer power to that person. Victims of domestic violence are reaching out to us, the faith community, for help, for empowerment. We must stop. We must respond. We must empower.