

My Kingdom for an Adapter

Dr. Stephen D. McConnell



Mark 5:24-34; Mark 6:1-13

It had been a long day. I had awakened early in the morning and had gotten into the office to get a jump on things because later in the day I was travelling out of town for a meeting. When the time came to get going to the airport I quickly threw my stuff in my backpack and made off for Tampa International. I got to the plane on time, boarded and settled into my economy seat answered a couple of texts and emails and when the airline hostess said it was time to shut off my cell phone and place it on airplane mode I did as I was told. At least I thought I did as I was told. What I had not done which I thought I had done was put my phone on airplane mode – and those who travel know that when you don't put your phone on airplane mode your phone continues to roam for a signal while you are flying and promptly drains your battery. So by the time we landed my phone had no power. No fear, said I. When I get to my hotel room I'll just plug it in and it will recharge overnight and I will be fine. So imagine the jolly feeling I felt when I arrived in my hotel room and unpacked my backpack and found my cell phone charger only to find that it was missing something. It was missing the adapter. I had the phone, I had the wire, I had the electrical outlet, but I did not have that little plug, that little adapter to access the power. I had many calls to make, I had many emails to return, I had many texts to answer – but I did not have this little thing that was going to allow me to do all those things. And I sat there singing Kum Bay Yah to myself (not!) – the modern day conundrum almost got me to chuckling. Almost, not quite. And the conundrum was this – here I sat completely surrounded by power. Every wall, the ceiling, the floor has coursing through it wattage and wattage of power – electrical outlets everywhere – I couldn't get to it. I couldn't access it. Because I didn't have an adapter. “My kingdom,” I muttered to myself, “for an adapter.”

You know the longer you spend in the world of the church, the longer you spend teaching and preaching about the kingdom of God and the more you seek to share the good news of God's grace and power – the more you realize in this world the amount of people who for a thousand different reasons have gotten disconnected from the very thing that surrounds them. Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms that the kingdom of God – the grace, love and power of God is in your midst. The grace, love and power of God is right here in this room. Closer to us than even the wires in the walls. The kingdom of God is not a place we travel to, it's not a destination at the end of life – the kingdom of God – the grace, love and power of God is right here. It brushes past us like a breeze in every moment. But life, as it is, has the remarkable ability of disconnecting us from this kingdom. We've got the heart, we've got the wiring – but life has its way of misplacing for us the adapter.

You know what I'm talking about. It can happen at any moment, in any day. It can be something as simple as a calendar that is too busy and you get distracted and you get preoccupied and you get overwhelmed with what life is throwing at you. And you find you can't seem to quite plug into the enveloping kingdom. Or maybe life has thrown you a curveball. You had every expectation that life was going to go this way, and then all of a sudden you are headed that way. And you get knocked off balance and all of a sudden your disappointment and discouragement has you made it hard for you to access this kingdom. Or maybe you look around you and you see a troubled world and it appears at least in your mind that the bad guys are winning and not the good guys and the more you look the less you believe that there really is anything out there and around here to plug into at all. That maybe all this talk about the kingdom of God is a bunch of hoey. Life has all sorts of ways of disconnecting us from the grace, love and power of God.

Some fifty years ago a book was published with the title, *A Grief Observed*, and it was a rather raw account by an apparent Christian talking about the intense grief he experienced in the wake of his wife's death. The man, as it turned out, had waited nearly sixty years to find the woman of his dreams and just at the point when he had given up the possibility there entered his life the very

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person. And just as he had fallen in love and married her she contracted cancer and died before his very eyes. And the grief was crushing – and even more was disconnecting. He no longer felt God. How could God, after all, give him love and so quickly take it away? When this book, *A Grief Observed*, was published it was published over the name N.W. Clerk. Which turned out to be a pseudonym for another name – C.S. Lewis – the great defender of the Christian faith – but life had unplugged him and for a time he had no adapter.

When I was boy there was a girl at my school who was a little different. Kind of big, kind of clumsy, kind of loud. Just enough of all that to make her the butt of all our jokes. There's nothing like a school playground to be both a place of play and a place of hostility. And for Julie Johnson (that's what I'll call her) it was a place of hostility. Laughed at, scorned, even pushed around. I have no idea what happened to Julie Johnson, but I can only imagine somewhere on the Gordon Elementary School playground she lost her adapter. She lost her ability to plug into the grace, love and power of God.

So we can sympathize can't we with this woman from our text this morning. The woman afflicted with a condition – a menstrual condition – that left her suffering for twelve years. Twelve years is a long time. And it is even a longer time when you live in first century Judea and the law of your religion says that your condition (over which you have no control) renders you unclean. Bad enough to have ill health – but then to be unclean, ostracized by your own people and for twelve years – nothing can be more disconnecting than that. So there is this wall between her and the rabbi Jesus, the great physician –

and she's got no way to access the power. So she takes the audacious step and out of desperation and at the risk of making the rabbi unclean himself and at the horror of those who know her and shun her she reaches out and she connects with the rabbi. Touches the hem of his robe. And the power comes. The healing comes. The life comes. And Jesus blesses her – because Jesus knows this is what it is all about. It is about this sick and supposedly unclean woman connecting into the grace and love and power of God.

And that's what Jesus brings back to his hometown Nazareth a chapter later. He's seeking to bring the grace, love and power of God – but the Nazarenes can't seem to connect. No deeds of power could he do there, Mark tells us. Maybe they couldn't see past the little boy who used to run their streets, maybe they couldn't grasp what he was trying to say. Maybe it was their pride. But something disconnected them from the power. No deeds of power could he do there.

Now the truth of the matter is we've all been there. We've all felt our disconnection. And even more we are well aware of a world full of folks who for many good reasons – have lost the connection. You don't have to look long to find the research to tell you that we are living in a time and a culture where more and more people confess to the fact that they are and have been disconnected from the church. The fastest growing segment of our society – in respect to spirituality – are what are called the “none's”. The None's are those who mark the box in the religious affiliation column – None. No religious affiliation. Many of the none's are disconnected. And they can't find their adapter. Or they may not even want to find their adapter.

Now the truth of the matter is it has always been the mission of the Church – for two thousand years it has been the mission of the Church – to be an adapter to the kingdom of God. The grace, love and power of God come to be known through the connective life of the Church. Everything we do – or everything we are supposed to be doing – is to serve as an adapter through which people access the kingdom.

The last 50 minutes while you have been here -- has been a connecting point for the presence of Christ. Every Tuesday and Thursday we fill up the campus center with tutors who minister to families – 95% of whom would never set foot on this campus otherwise but they have found an adapter into the kingdom. From 10 until 4 every day the door opens to the Food Pantry and scores of people show up on our campus who wouldn't otherwise come and find in these bags of groceries an adapter into the kingdom. The Samaritan Counseling Center housed on our campus is full of excellent therapists who provide affordable counseling to people many of whom are quickly disconnecting from the love and grace of God – but in these wonderful people they are finding the adapter. In our children, student and family ministry kids and parents are finding safe places to come and be loved with God's grace – it's their adapter. In our Stephen Ministry and our Grief Support groups people are being cared for in their deepest needs – and finding in these good people the adapter into the love of God. My dear friend Joe Davis who teaches in the Garden leads a ministry to at-risk kids in Sarasota and those kids are coming to the Garden because they found an adapter. Our Early Childhood Center is filled with families that wouldn't otherwise come to our campus – but they have found in our teachers the adapter into the kingdom. In Kirkuk, Iraq – one of those towns we've been reading about in the paper threatened and surrounded by ISIS – inside that little town is one of our mission partners, Pastor Haitham, who is leading this incredible Christian church and school – many of the students Muslim – but they have come to the love and grace and security of this humble school – because it is the adapter into the kingdom and power of God.

Our dear friends who are going to Honduras to teach and to build, and with every word and every nail they will be an adapter in the kingdom of God.

Over the next few weeks you are going to be hearing about the next exciting chapter for Church of the Palms – constructing a new ministry center – we're calling it the Palms Center -- a multi-purpose space for our whole church family through which to engage people of all ages through a variety of ministries – recreational, social, dining, music, exercise, Bible study – to create a space for people to make their way onto our campus and find through this adapter -- the real grace and love and power of God.

Because you know the truth is in this fast changing world where more and more folks count themselves as None's – we the family of God will need to find more and more ways to be the adapters for a world hungry for love, grace and power. We do this because for years we have been saying that while we must care for our own people – our families and our seniors – we have always said that we must pay attention to the disconnected.

Father Gregory Boyle is a Catholic priest who by fate and by faith got assigned to serve a parish in East Los Angeles – the Dolores Mission Church. The Dolores Mission Church sits in the middle of one of the most dangerous part of Los Angeles – a neighborhood occupied mostly by gangs. Hundreds of gang members die on the streets surrounding the Church. And for much of its history the church stood as a fortress against the ills that surrounded it. But when Father Boyle arrived he wondered about instead of being fortress, could they be the adapter? How does a Homey – a gang member – connect into the grace, love and power of God? The kingdom that surrounds him? And what could they do about it? And that's when Father Boyle began what came to be called Homeboy Industries – a ministry of the parish for kids in gangs who wanted a way out. Homeboy Industries provides training, job skills, job placement, employment, addiction counseling, for kids looking to connect into the kingdom. As a result thousands have found the adapter they'd been looking for, received the baptism of the Church and have made a way into a new life.

At one point Father Boyle mentions in his book (a book I would recommend you read - Tattoos on the Heart) – that a former parishioner had returned to town and wanted to see his childhood church. He remembered the fortress, but saw something very different when he arrived. Boyle writes, “He sees gang members gathered by the bell tower, homeless men and women being fed in great numbers in the parking lot. Folks arriving for the AA and NA meetings and ESL classes. It's a Who's Who of Everybody Who Was a Nobody. Gang member, drug addict, homeless, undocumented. The man says to the priest, “You know, this used to be a church.” And Father Boyle replies, “Most people around here think it's finally a church.”

The kingdom, Jesus said, is in your midst. And you know I grew up seldom doubting that. I got really lucky because the cards in my life got stacked up for me and not against me. I plugged in I think even before I was born. And I have a million people to thank for that. But you know there are too many people – too many kids, too many parents, too many adults, too many none's – for whom life has pulled the plug. For a thousand different reasons. And if there is anything I have ever felt I would be held accountable for – it's whether somehow, somehow I was able to find for someone – the adapter into the grace, into the love and into the power. The kingdom, Jesus says, is in your midst. Surrounding you. Breezing right past you. O my kingdom...my kingdom...for an adapter.



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