

In today's gospel, we meet two people who are in need of healing. Jesus heals both of them, one of an acute, life-threatening illness, the other of a chronic, debilitating condition. Other than their gender, they have nothing in common; they inhabit very different places in their community. Let's meet them separately and then together. We'll call them Anna and Chloe.

Anna, the first to appear, is a young girl. Did you catch her age? The author tells us, at the very end of the story, that she is twelve. What do we know about her? Nothing, but we do learn about her family. What do we know about her father, whose name is Jairus? He's a leader of the synagogue, a well-respected authority in his community. He cares deeply about his daughter; he is bold to approach Jesus on her behalf. Anna also has friends and neighbors who care about her, who gather around to pray for her and then to mourn her supposed death. Anna is surrounded by a caring, loving community.

Chloe, whose appearance interrupts Anna's story, is, on the other hand, a woman without community. Old enough to have begun menstruating—and, after that, to have been bleeding irregularly, for twelve years, she's at least in her mid-twenties or thirties. Seeking a remedy, she has "endured much under many physicians." Instead of getting better, however, she is getting worse. And she is alone. We'll come back to that in a moment.

Let me pause the story here to talk about Chloe's illness. She is introduced to us as "suffering from hemorrhages." While the narrator doesn't specify, she probably has excessive or irregular menstrual bleeding. Either she has very heavy bleeding—or bleeding for more than seven days at a time—or frequent periods. Today her condition would be called "menorrhagia." Menorrhagia causes trouble for Chloe on several counts. Not only does she have the inconvenience of nearly constant bleeding; not only might she have anemia due to frequent blood loss; not only is she likely infertile; but her illness produces a social condition even more burdensome than her physical suffering.

What is that social condition? By Jewish law, Chloe is considered to be "unclean." In the Torah, in the Old Testament book of Leviticus, chapter 15, we read about the uncleanness of menstruation:

When a woman has her regular flow of blood, the impurity of her monthly period will last seven days, and anyone who touches her will be unclean till evening... When she is cleansed from her discharge, she must count off seven days, and after that she will be ceremonially clean. On the eighth day she must take two doves or two young pigeons and bring them to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting. The priest is to... make atonement for her before the LORD for the uncleanness of her discharge.

That's the law regarding regular menstruation. What does the law say about Chloe?

... When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge ... Anyone who touches [her—or her clothing or sheets] will be unclean; they must wash their clothes and bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening.

Chloe's menorrhagia is a problem not merely because it's messy or inconvenient or medically dangerous, but also because it isolates her. If she is a married woman, she probably encounters the

shame of infertility, and she likely experiences tension in her marital relationship because her constant uncleanness requires her to refrain from sexual intimacy. She is also barred from the synagogue during her time of uncleanness. She can return to the temple only once four conditions are met: 1) her menstrual flow has ceased; 2) she has waited for seven days; 3) she has made purification with a sacrifice of doves or pigeons; and 4) she has taken a ritual bath called a *mikveh*. Because Chloe either has continual vaginal bleeding, or abnormally long periods, or short, frequent periods, her bleeding never stops long enough for her to fulfill the Torah, to count those seven days after cessation of menses to go to the *mikveh* and be cleansed. While she is physically and ritually unclean, she is not allowed to enter the temple.

Initially, Chloe's husband and family and neighbors and friends are careful not to touch her, but eventually, they stop speaking to her, and, after a while, they simply ignore her; it's safer that way. So Chloe is completely alone; even when she is in a group, she's ostracized; she's ignored. She is erased; she is invisible. Her disability of menorrhagia prevents people from seeing her, because they try to avoid her in their attempts to stay "clean." They look past her or through her or at her, but almost never into her eyes. She is unseen. She is alone.

Anna, however, is seen. She is not alone. She is seen by her father; in fact, she is the apple of his eye, and he will do anything he can for her. She is seen by her community as well; as the daughter of a leader of the synagogue, who has both wealth and status, she is known, she is loved, she is embraced as a valued member of the community.

Two daughters of God, Anna and Chloe. Today I invite you to hear their healing stories through a particular lens, a lens of privilege. The Oxford dictionary defines "privilege" as "a special right or advantage available only to a particular person or group." In my doctoral work I explored ways of reading Scripture that attend to where privilege resides, ways that ask who has privilege and who does not in a given story. In this story, which of the main characters has privilege? The little girl; she has everything she could possibly need, except, of course, her health. The woman who is hemorrhaging has neither privilege nor health.

A word about privilege—it refers not to something you have earned, like a promotion at work or an educational degree. It's something you haven't earned, something available to you, something that essentially plopped into your lap which puts you at some advantage over others. Maybe you lack privilege, or maybe you have a lot of privilege due to factors you didn't choose and can't control.

For example, white privilege is a set of advantages experienced by those who qualify as "white." A person with white skin can usually enter a store without a salesperson following them around; can generally drive through someone else's neighborhood without being stopped by the police; is likely to be able to register to vote and to vote without barriers. These are examples of privileges accorded people with white skin. If you have white privilege, it doesn't mean that you didn't earn your way in your working life or that you don't work hard at school. It means, simply, that you enjoy some privileges that others don't, simply by virtue of your skin color.

As another example, male privilege is enjoyed by persons who identify as male through no choice or virtue of their own. I am not saying that, if you are male, you don't deserve what you have. I'm saying, instead, that you have privileges that are accorded to you as a male. You can go into a bank, for example, and be relatively assured that, if your credit is adequate, you'll get a loan. That's not necessarily true for women or people who identify as neither male nor female. You can work hard and

earn your income, one dollar for every 84 cents a woman earns for the same job, regardless of how well you or she does the job. You can enter a business with your wife and the salesperson will probably address you, rather than her. Again, having male privilege does not mean that you don't work hard, but that you are accorded privileges that others are not, privileges that you did not earn and that you cannot control.

We could go on to talk about heterosexual privilege or wealth privilege or the privilege of ability (that is, the privilege of not being disabled, whether physically or intellectually or emotionally), but we don't have time. Suffice it to say that you and I have varied levels of various kinds of privilege in our lives.

Here's a tricky thing about privilege. Those of us who have it, whether male privilege or wealth privilege or the privilege of ability, often don't recognize it. Our very privilege deludes us into believing that we have earned our way on a level playing field. We cannot see the "hand-up" that privilege has afforded us, and we cannot grasp what it is like for those who live without privilege. It's hard, hard, work to become aware of our privileges, and it's not for the faint of heart.

I've been on the journey of unwrapping my privilege for about forty-five years now, and I still fail. I keep uncovering more assumptions and more prejudices in myself, each of which has to be re-examined and re-formed. Over and over again, I have to confess my sin of taking my privilege for granted—or not even being aware of it, and then I have to recommit to my own personal learning and growth, putting in the effort to learn from others who are different from me.

People who have privilege have the responsibility to sort out what it means to have privilege, to look honestly at what has been conferred upon us vs. what we have earned; to confess the ways we have brazenly or unwittingly taken advantage of others; and to use our privilege, not to advance ourselves, but, rather, on behalf of those who lack their own. How do we do this hard work? By reading, watching documentaries, listening to people of color or LGBTQ neighbors or people who live in poverty or family members with disabilities, asking questions and being open to answers that challenge us. That's how we begin to learn and grow. I invite you on your own journey of unwrapping your privilege, your own journey of exploring and learning and growing, and I commit to walk that rocky road with you, as a friend in Christ who also has something to learn from you.

Back to today's story. How could we cast today's gospel story in modern-day terms? Let's imagine Anna as a white middle-class girl with a mother and father and doting grandparents. She comes to church weekly, and everyone knows her name. They greet her and ask how school is going and remember her birthday. Anna starts out with a few sets of privileges: she is white, the predominant ethnic group in her church. She is middle class, dresses well, and has access to health insurance and income she can use for co-pays. While she is severely ill, she is not disabled; she is suffering not from a chronic, untreated condition but from an acute illness. Anna enjoys white privilege, heterosexual privilege, wealth privilege, and the privilege of ability. She has done nothing to earn these privileges, and she can't undo them. Nonetheless, Anna is suffering from her illness, and her desperate father goes in search of Jesus to advocate for her.

Now let's imagine Chloe as a Native American, descended from ancestors robbed of their land and their culture by invading colonists. As a Native person, Chloe lacks white privilege. As a girl, she lacks male privilege. If she ever had money, she "has spent it all" seeking healing, so she lacks wealth privilege as well. She has a chronic and debilitating illness, maybe AIDS or cancer or Long COVID, so she lacks the

privilege of ability. Chloe is like many in our country today; her companions include African-Americans, descendants of the people enslaved in our nation, who lack white privilege; women and people who identify as neither male nor female, who lack male privilege; people who identify as LGBTQ, who lack heterosexual privilege; people who live in poverty, who lack the privilege of wealth; and people who are “differently abled” or not whole in body or mind, who lack the privilege of ability. Chloe, like so many in our country today, lacks a variety of privileges. She can do nothing to access what others simply have available to them. Like Anna, Chloe is suffering from her illness and is desperate to find healing, but unlike Anna, she has no money to find a cure and no one to advocate for her.

Both Anna and Chloe are in need of healing, one with privilege, the other without. I mentioned in the beginning that Chloe’s story interrupts Anna’s. Some scholars describe this as a “sandwich story.” The narrator tells one story, which is interrupted by another, and then the narrator finishes the first story. Today’s gospel starts with Anna’s story, is interrupted by Chloe’s, and then returns to Anna’s. This juxtaposition is significant as these two “daughters of God,” as they are called, who have nothing else in common, each find themselves in need of healing, in the same moment, so that their stories intersect. One has an acute, life-threatening illness, the other a chronic, debilitating disease, but both are desperate to be healed. And, in their desperation, each encounters Jesus, the Healer.

The Healer is “no respecter of persons.” He doesn’t have his disciples filter out those who aren’t male or white or straight. He doesn’t send out an advance team to screen out those who have retirement accounts. He doesn’t ignore someone who comes to him for healing who wears glasses or takes psych meds. Jesus meets both of these “daughters of God” as they are, each exactly as she is, with privilege or without, and he invites each into a healing relationship with him. He calls each, in turn, “Daughter,” and then he embraces her into his community.

In the same way, Jesus meets you as you are, privileged or not, welcomed or ostracized, seen or unseen. He sees you, as you are, and calls you “Beloved Child” or “Daughter” or “Son.” And then he sends you out to tell others that they, too, are God’s Beloved, just as they are. There are people like Chloe, on your block, in your office, in your classroom, in your family, who wonder if they belong, who are invisible to others, who are longing to be seen. How does Jesus invite you to witness his healing power to them, just as they are, privileged or not, welcomed or ostracized, so that they might come to know that, in God’s eyes, they are seen, as they are! AMEN