

## The Synoptic Question Activity

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As an exercise in redaction criticism, the students will analyze the parallel account of the woman with a hemorrhage. Virtually any Triple Tradition material that is not verbatim will work. This exercise helps the student to practice close reading of the text, and propose possible reasons why the authors may have changed the material they found in their source.

### Mk 5:28-34

for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.'

Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' He looked all round to see who had done it.

But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.

He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

### Lk 8:40-56

She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her haemorrhage stopped.

Then Jesus asked, 'Who touched me?' When all denied it, Peter said, 'Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you.' But Jesus said, 'Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me.'

When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed.

He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.'

### Mt 9:21-22

for she said to herself, 'If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.'

Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, 'Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.' And instantly the woman was made well.

**Step 1) Arrange the parallel texts.** Working in groups, this can be done by cutting photocopies of the biblical text and pasting the passages in columns (as I have above), or using different colored highlighters

to distinguish the Markan material that is found in Luke, Matthew, neither or both. I find columns make the similarities and differences more evident. If time is too limited, this step can be skipped by preparing a handout with the material already in parallel columns.

**Step 2) Ask the “Why?” questions.** Beginning by listing all the differences and similarities, the students pose questions about the motivations and editorial choices of the redactors. Perhaps six to ten quality questions is enough.

**Step 3) Brainstorm.** It is important students understand that while sometimes the author’s reason seems clear, this activity is always quite speculative. They should feel comfortable speculating and being creative, without feeling that you are looking for a particular ‘right’ answer.

**Some examples of “Why?” questions and possible answers:**

- Why did Matthew reduce a lengthy passage down to just three sentences? (Maybe he thought Mark was too wordy. Maybe he did not like those parts of the story.)
- Why does Luke introduce Peter, when Mark only writes of unspecified disciples? (Maybe he has a special affection for Peter. Maybe he tends to include Peter more than the other gospels. Maybe he thought it was awkward with multiple disciples speaking.)
- Why did Matthew place the healing of the woman after Jesus talks to her, rather than at the moment she touches Jesus? (Maybe he found it odd that Jesus could heal unintentionally. Maybe he thought it was more personal.)
- Why does Matthew remove the section about Jesus wondering who touched him? (Maybe he doesn’t like the idea of Jesus being ignorant.)

**Step 4) Discuss possible answers.** The last sample question is particularly interesting. Matthew removed the issue of Jesus’ ignorance and made the woman very passive. Why? We can speculate that the author found this theologically troublesome. Also, the woman almost seems to be the hero. Matthew changes this by having Jesus directly heal the woman, rather than her initiating her own healing by touching Jesus’ garments.