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Mark 5:21-43

Waiting for a Miracle

Like Jairus or the unnamed woman in this morning's gospel reading, we're all waiting for a miracle for ourselves or for someone we love. For the cancer to be cured. For the chronic back pain to go away. For a time when the diseases, the dis-eases of our lives that seem so incredibly unfair, disappear. But there's a problem with miracles. The problem with miracles is that once we see one, we want one, too. In her book *Bread of Angels*, Barbara Brown Taylor makes it plain. "The problem with miracles," Taylor writes, is that "it's hard to witness them without wanting one of your own" (*Bread of Angels*, p. 136-137).

I imagine Jairus, the ruler of a local synagogue, head of a household, and father of a twelve-year-old girl, knew the problem with miracles. He's heard of this man named Jesus who is a healer. Jairus' daughter is dying and he, like the unnamed woman he will soon see, is desperate. He falls on his knees and begs Jesus to come touch his daughter so she can live. Without an answer from Jesus, Jairus heads towards home and Jesus follows. The crowd pushes to get a closer look at another one of this prophet's magic tricks. Then Jesus notices that something inside him has changed. He stops and asks, "Who touched my robe?" I imagine that Jairus wants to scream "Who cares? There's no time for this! What about my daughter?"

But instead of hearing the yell of a desperate father, we see a woman without a name, without a family, without any social standing, emerge out of the crowd. She's been ill for twelve years, unable to bear children for 12 years. She's gotten 2nd and 3rd and 4th opinions and she's sicker and poorer for all those visits to the doctor. And Jesus stops and facing her says, "Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you're healed and whole. Live well, live blessed! Be healed" (*The Message*). As he is talking to this woman, Jairus' friends come to say the words every parent dreads. But Jesus doesn't stop walking to her home. He says, "Just trust me" (*The Message*). Just trust me. Just trust me?!

The household has already begun making the arrangements, but Jesus takes Jairus, his wife, Peter, James, and John, to enter the girl's room anyway. He says, "Little girl get up." And she does. The Greek word for "get up" or "arise" is the same word that will be used later in Jesus' resurrection story; this word is a word of resurrection of new life. The people are beside themselves and we are, too.

We want Jairus' daughter to live. Of course, we want the woman who's been suffering for twelve years to be healed, too. But can't her healing happen later? Why this interruption in the story? The question we're invited to consider is "What does Jairus' faith have to do with hers? What does the healing of his daughter have to do with the healing of this woman who becomes a daughter?"

I am still figuring out the answer to this question. But I do know that I cannot be a Christian alone. I know I need to see God in Jesus Christ healing others, not just myself, to remember that Jesus Christ is not mine. I need what usually seems like an interruption to help me see that Christ cares for everyone else just as much as he cares for me.

I usually begin my day with a list and attach my worth to what I get done in a day. Tuesdays are particularly full, especially with Temporary Relief of Unexpected Emergencies, the new name for Tuesday morning emergency outreach. Five parishioners or so wake up early in the morning to hear stories of people whose luck has run out, whose benefits have been denied, who have gone to get healing and have gotten poorer and sicker. I usually come down for a bit to listen to those seeking assistance to keep roofs over their heads or running water for themselves and their children. Before guests speak with volunteers in detail about their situations, I ask if they have questions about the forms. Inevitably, stories like that of the unnamed woman emerge. Stories of landlords who deny payment of medical bills related to neglecting the upkeep of their properties. Stories of husbands who abuse wives and children, of companies that can't stay in business. I remember one story in particular. One morning a woman told me about her life, how she's the only one who will take care of her ailing mother with dementia, how her daughter can't take care of her children, so she takes care of her grandchildren. This same woman's husband has just gotten laid off work. She has five mouths to feed,

clothe, house, and love and an oxygen tank to keep running. And she was thankful. She told me that she never doubted God, that every day she gets a blessing. Every time her grandchildren put their arms around her neck and say, “I love you, Grammy” she just thanks God.

And I thought I had things to do that day. I thought I had people to “save.” After my conversation with this woman, contacting people moved to the top of my list. Typing minutes, getting a flyer just right, writing an article that’s due a week later moved lower on my list. In essence, I was the one who needed healing that day.

Let me tell you another story. This past week I was privileged to be on staff for a youth conference at Kanuga Conference Center in Hendersonville, NC. About 20 other adults and I played, prayed, discussed, and sang with 96 middle schoolers to learn more about God and what it means to be faithful stewards of God’s bounty. Even though much of the staff would not say so out loud, there was one participant in particular who seemed to annoy us and his peers to no end. His tall, gangly eleven year old body seemed to be in everyone else’s space. He wanted to get any kind of attention, so his responses to others’ actions were often reactive and not helpful for himself or others. In other words, some (adults and participants) considered him an “interruption.” We tried to be patient and equip him with skills to make better choices, but we wondered if anything was getting through to this person and we wish that he could have “gotten himself” together so we could go on with our week as we had planned. During our closing Eucharist, we asked the participants and staff to tell us a bit about what they learned about God or themselves during the week. This “interruption” was the first one to speak and he spoke the truth “God is love.” At the moment, the awkward preteen who seemed to get in the way of his peers was the one who spoke the truth, who pointed the way, who was everything but an interruption.

These stories are not the most accurate present day illustrations of the stories in this morning’s gospel. After all, my daily “to do” list and role as a conference chaplain does not include healing for a dying daughter. I can’t imagine that desperation. I have nieces and a nephew and the thought of them dying is hard enough.

But I can imagine and I do believe that in and through Christ our witness to the pain and healing of others matters. You see, one person's faith is not just between Jesus and that person. To some extent, one's faith is formed by witnessing the pain and healing that happens on the way to being where we think we should be.

I wonder with whom you resonate most-Jairus, the unnamed woman, or the crowd. Wherever you find yourself there is good news. Jesus Christ is on the move. We can reach out to him and he will always reach back. He is never too busy to be interrupted and there is no time too late for resurrection. Even when we're waiting for a miracle, maybe we can allow ourselves to be interrupted, too. Maybe the miracle, in part, is what we bear witness to while we're waiting.