

It was one year ago this weekend that a group of us from this and other congregations in the synod made our way to Florida to do some hurricane relief work. We were about two hours into the eighteen hour drive when our first bus broke down. After it became clear that we'd be spending at least a few hours waiting for a replacement bus, some of us adults started working on the problem of how to feed our group at this abandoned weigh station on the side of the Maryland interstate, since Domino's does not, as they claim, deliver anywhere. Meanwhile, a bunch of our young volunteers wandered over to the abutting property and ended up weeding the neighbor's garden. They had come on the trip to be of service, and they were not about to restrict themselves to our official itinerary when a need presented itself. I'm told life is what happens while we're busy making other plans.

Mark begins today's portion of the gospel by narrating Jesus' return boat trip to Jewish territory from the gentile community where he cast demons into a herd of pigs. His reputation apparently precedes him as he's surrounded by a crowd while he's still at the seaside. Immediately a father approaches him, begging him to come to his house to heal his very sick daughter. Mark identifies Jairus as a leader of the synagogue, a detail which tells us a couple of things: first, he's an important member of the community, so this has the potential to be a high stakes, high profile healing for Jesus. But Mark has also told us that Jesus' teaching and healing have angered the religious establishment, causing conflict in the synagogues, so the fact that Jairus is willing to throw his lot in with this controversial itinerant preacher shows us how serious the girl's condition is and how desperate her father is to get her help. Jesus goes with Jairus, and the crowd goes with Jesus.

As Jesus is on his way to perform this intentional act of healing, he accomplishes another miracle, without intending to do so at all. I don't know what we'd call the condition that Mark describes as hemorrhages, but it's enough to know that she suffered from it for twelve years—as long as Jairus' daughter had been alive—and that this disorder would have isolated the woman socially as well as affecting her physical health. Whereas Jairus' daughter had her father, her mother, and a whole household of people concerned for her, this woman is all on her own. She doesn't even try to stop Jesus to ask for help, just reaches out to touch his cloak as he passes by, convinced that even that little encounter with the divine will cure what must have felt like an evil that had plagued her for so long. Remarkably, Jesus can tell that power has gone out from him, and he stops to see what happened.

More so than the other gospel writers, Mark portrays the disciples as generally clueless, so in spite of them having already witnessed Jesus doing miraculous things, they can't imagine how he could expect to figure out who in the crowd touched him. Picture them, with Jairus,

waiting impatiently and incredulously as Jesus interrupts their mission so he can find and talk with an unnamed disabled woman. But by stopping and acknowledging the woman, Jesus provides not just a cure but healing. If you've ever had a major medical event, you know the difference. An illness might have a simple cure, but healing the disease that comes with an illness requires more than just medicine; Jesus starts that process of healing by restoring the woman's identity—calling her *daughter*—and reconnecting her to the community. *Go in peace and be healed from your disease* is the call to start her new life, not the end of her story.

It may seem to Jairus, the disciples, and the crowd like that detour took too long and ruined everything; the girl has died by the time they reach the house. But while the crowds tell Jairus to give up and while they laugh at Jesus for wasting his time, Jesus does something even more miraculous than curing the girl's illness; he raises her from the dead. There is no thing such as "too late" for Jesus.

We should be careful making comparisons, because the two gospels are so different. But John tells us that Jesus waited when he heard that Lazarus was ill, and when he finally goes to Bethany it is with the intention to raise the already dead Lazarus from the grave. Now, Mark gives us no indication that Jesus expected this girl to die while he lingered with the woman who touched his cloak. But that doesn't mean that Jesus made a mistake or that healing the hemorrhaging woman was a distraction from Jesus' real work of healing the synagogue leader's daughter. There was no hierarchy to Jesus' acts of loving service; he helped both the woman and Jairus when they reached out to him in faith, and he had more than enough healing power to go around. Mark didn't include the one story inside the other on accident: Jesus' agenda included everyone; he cared about the unnamed woman every bit as much as Jairus' daughter.

The season after Pentecost is celebrated in green to symbolize growth—both our personal growth in spirituality and the growth of the church community as we work to share the gospel more broadly in this world that God so loves. So it is good and faithful of us to respond to God's love with intentional ministries and planned programs that serve our neighbors. But chances are, people who very much need Jesus' love and healing will cross our path while we're still on the way to doing whatever we planned to do to fulfill *our vision* of God's mission. If Jesus took the time to stop and meet the ones who needed him where they were, we can do that, too. And lest we get discouraged when our progress seems to be interrupted, we remember that Jesus was able to do even greater things than anyone asked or expected after stopping to help those along the way. It really is a good thing that God is not limited to the places and spaces we expect; may we rejoice when we find God meeting us elsewhere.