

Mark 5: 21-43

SHANE CLAIBORNE, ONE OF THE FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION, *THE SIMPLE WAY*, IN PHILADELPHIA, TELLS A HEALING STORY OF A COUPLE WHO LIVED IN PHILADELPHIA. THE COUPLE BECAME FRIENDS WITH A YOUNG WOMAN WHO WAS UNHOUSED AND SIX MONTHS PREGNANT. EVENTUALLY, THEIR RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPED, THEY INVITED THIS YOUNG WOMAN TO COME INTO THEIR HOME—TO LIVE WITH THEM UNTIL SHE HAD HER CHILD. THEY SAID, YOU CAN'T HAVE YOUR BABY ON THE STREETS, COME INTO OUR HOME AND WE'LL FIGURE THIS OUT SOMEHOW.

AND THIS YOUNG WOMAN DID, SHE MOVED IN WITH THIS COUPLE. THEY WERE IN THEIR 50'S AND THEY BECAME PSEUDO-PARENTS TO HER, EVENTUALLY PSEUDO-GRANDPARENTS TO HER CHILD. AFTER THE CHILD WAS BORN, SHE CONTINUED TO LIVE WITH THEM. THE COUPLE SAID, YOU CAN'T RAISE THIS CHILD ALONE—WE WOULD LIKE TO HELP—WE WOULD LIKE TO BE PART OF YOUR LIFE AND YOUR CHILD'S LIFE. AND SO THEY ALL DECIDED TO KEEP THEIR LIVING ARRANGEMENT. THE COUPLE HAD ALWAYS WANTED TO HAVE CHILDREN, AND NOW, THROUGH A WHIRLWIND OF EVENTS A CHILD WAS GROWING UP IN THEIR HOME.

AND THE STORY CONTINUES. AFTER SOMETIME, THE COUPLE ASKED THIS YOUNG MOTHER, WHAT IS YOUR DREAM? IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO DO OR PURSUE? THE YOUNG MOTHER SAID SHE HAD ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A NURSE. AND THE COUPLE SAID, WE WOULD LIKE TO HELP MAKE THAT HAPPEN, WE WILL HELP YOU WITH HOUSING AND CHILDCARE—KEEP LIVING WITH US WHILE YOU GO TO SCHOOL. AND SO THE YOUNG WOMAN WAS IN NURSING SCHOOL AND THE COUPLE WAS HELPING.

I THINK WE WOULD CALL THIS STORY A MIRACLE. THE MIRACLE OF PEOPLE WITH NO BLOOD TIES FINDING THEIR LIVES INTERTWINED—FINDING THEIR WHOLENESS RESTORED THROUGH BEING IN COMMUNITY TOGETHER. A MIRACLE OF LOVE. OF OPENNESS. OF BOTH GIVING AND RECEIVING HOSPITALITY---IT IS AS MUCH A MIRACLE THAT A YOUNG WOMAN WOULD GO AND LIVE WITH SOME STRANGERS AS IT THAT THEY WOULD INVITE HER IN IN THE FIRST PLACE. IT IS A SMALL GLIMPSE OF THE HEALING THAT IS STILL DONE BY AND THROUGH THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST.

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS REMIND US THAT THE WAY THINGS ARE IS NOT THE WAY THEY WILL ALWAYS BE. JESUS IS LIVING PROOF THAT GOD'S WILL FOR US IS NOT CHAOS BUT WHOLENESS, AND EVERY MIRACLE PROCLAIMS THAT TRUTH. EVERY HEALING, EVERY TIME THE LAWS OF PHYSICS ARE BENT, EVERY BANISHMENT OF EVIL IS A GLIMPSE OF HOW THINGS WILL BE IN THE FUTURE, WHEN WE SAY IN FAITH, THAT IT WILL BE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.

THE MIRACLE STORIES WE HEAR TODAY FROM MARK ARE GLIMPSES OF THIS.

SOMEONE ONCE SAID THE PROBLEM WITH MIRACLES IS THAT IT IS HARD TO WITNESS THEM WITHOUT WANTING ONE OF YOUR OWN. WE ALL KNOW SOMEONE WHO COULD USE A MIRACLE—SOMEONE WHO NEEDS ONE, OR SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN ONE. BUT MIRACLES ARE HARD TO COME BY. NOT EVERYONE WHO PRAYS GETS ONE, NOT BY A LONG SHOT.

WE HAVE TWO STORIES HERE, TWO STORIES OF HEALING AND RESTORATION. TWO STORIES THAT GO TOGETHER: THE ONE HEALING TAKES PLACE ON THE WAY TO THE OTHER; ONE INVOLVES A 12 YEAR OLD GIRL, THE OTHER A WOMAN WHO HAS BEEN SUFFERING FOR 12 YEARS; A GIRL A DAUGHTER OF JARIUS, THE OTHER ONE IS CALLED 'DAUGHTER' BY JESUS. AND WHILE THEY GO TOGETHER, THEY REPRESENT TWO VERY DIFFERENT REALITIES: ONE INVOLVES A MAN WHO CAN ADVOCATE FOR WHAT HIS FAMILY NEEDS, HE HAS POWER AND WEALTH AND STATUS; THE OTHER INVOLVES A WOMAN WHO HAS NOTHING—SHE IS POOR, HAVING SPENT ALL SHE HAS IN SEARCH OF A CURE. ONE IS PART OF A FAMILY SYSTEM, WITH A FATHER SEEKING HEALING FOR HIS LITTLE GIRL. THE OTHER SEEMS ALONE, SHE HAS NO ONE TO ADVOCATE FOR HER BUT HERSELF. WE KNOW THE NAME OF THE FATHER, JARIUS. GENERALLY, IT IS ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE SOME STATUS AND PROMINENCE ARE NAMED IN SCRIPTURE. THE WOMAN HAS NO NAME, WE NEVER LEARN IT, SHE IS PART OF THE CROWD—MEANING SHE IS ONE OF THE MANY POOR WHO FOLLOWED SOUGHT-OUT JESUS. AND SO TWO STORIES OF HEALING THAT GO TOGETHER.

AND OF COURSE, PART OF THE GOOD NEWS HERE IS THAT BOTH RECEIVE ATTENTION AND THE HEALING TOUCH OF CHRIST. BOTH ARE WORTHY OF HIS TIME. BOTH HEAR HIS WORDS OF LOVE DIRECTED AT THEM: "LITTLE GIRL, GET UP." "DAUGHTER, YOUR FAITH HAS MADE YOU WELL."

PERHAPS THE WOMAN WHO HAD BEEN SUFFERING FROM HEMORRHAGES FOR 12 LONG YEARS, PERHAPS SHE DID NOT BELIEVE HERSELF WORTHY OF JESUS' FULL ATTENTION AND TIME. SHE WAS UNCLEAN AND SHOULD NOT BE NEAR THIS RABBI. OR, PERHAPS SHE WENT FULLY PLANNING TO TRY AND GET JESUS' ATTENTION, BUT THEN SHE HEARS THE PLEA OF A FATHER WHOSE CHILD IS NEAR DEATH, AND SHE THINKS, MY SITUATION IS NOTHING COMPARED TO A CHILD WHO IS DYING. AND SHE STEPS BACK—SHE DECIDES NOT TO SLOW HIS MOVEMENT TOWARD THE SICK CHILD, INSTEAD SHE WILL JUST TRY TO TOUCH HIM SECRETLY—TO GET HER HEALING QUIETLY.

CERTAINLY ONE COMMON THING THAT HAPPENS FOR MANY OF US, WHEN WE FACE HARDSHIP OR PAIN OR LOSS—WE SAY THINGS LIKE, "IT COULD BE WORSE" OR "SOME PEOPLE HAVE IT SO MUCH WORSE." AND THIS IS TRUE. AND WHILE OTHERS MAY HAVE IT WORSE THAN US OR BE IN MORE PAIN, THAT DOESN'T NEGATE HOW WE ARE FEELING—IT DOESN'T NEGATE OUR MOMENTS OF PAIN OR TURMOIL OR LOSS—THAT DOESN'T MEAN THAT WE STOP PRAYING FOR HEALING AND WHOLENESS.

JUST BECAUSE JARIUS' DAUGHTER IS DYING, THAT DOESN'T NEGATE THE PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SPIRITUAL PAIN THAT THIS WOMAN HAS FELT FOR THE PAST 12 YEARS.

IT IS NOT A ZERO-SUM GAME. THERE IS NOT A LIMITED AMOUNT OF GRACE OR HEALING OR LOVE TO GO AROUND—NOT FOR THE GOD OF ABUNDANCE. AND SO THE NEED OF JARIUS' DAUGHTER, NO MATTER HOW DESPERATE—IT DOES NOT NEGATE THE NEED OF THIS WOMAN WHO HAS BEEN SUFFERING HER CHRONIC CONDITION WHICH HAS LEFT HER ALONE AND DESTITUTE—IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT SHE CAN NOT APPROACH CHRIST WITH THAT WHICH SHE MOST DESIRES. WHEN IT COMES TO THE LOVE AND GRACE OF GOD, WE DO NOT HAVE TO DIMINISH OURSELVES OR OUR NEEDS, SO THAT OTHERS CAN BE HEARD AND SEEN.

THAT BEING SAID, I WOULD HAVE SNAPPED IF I WAS JARIUS. I WOULD HAVE CRIED AND MAYBE SCREAMED, KNOWING THAT RELIEF WAS SO CLOSE FOR MY DYING CHILD AND YET SOMEHOW STILL OUT OF REACH WHEN JESUS STOPS FOR THE WOMAN. BUT AN IMPORTANT PART OF THIS STORY IS THAT JARIUS LEARNS TO WAIT, TO TRUST, TO BREATHE, TO HANG ON—EVEN AT A MOMENT WHEN ALL SEEMS LOST.

TEN YEARS LATER, SHANE CLAIBORNE SAID, HE WENT BACK TO THE HOME OF THE PHILADELPHIA COUPLE—WHERE THIS GROUP OF PEOPLE HAD LIVED TOGETHER IN A NON-BLOOD LINE FAMILY RELATIONSHIP. THEY WERE STILL LIVING TOGETHER. THE WOMAN WHO WAS THE YOUNG MOTHER WAS NOW A NURSE. THE CHILD WHO WOULD HAVE BEEN BORN ON THE STREETS WAS APPROACHING HER 10TH BIRTHDAY AND FLOURISHING. AND THE WOMAN OF THE COUPLE, SHE HAD SEVERE MS AND WAS DYING. AND IT JUST SO HAPPENED THAT SHE HAD A NURSE LIVING WITH HER, HELPING TAKE CARE OF HER.

I CAN SAY IN MY OWN CONFUSION AND UNCERTAINTY, I DON'T KNOW HOW HEALING COMES. OR WHY IT SOMETIMES TAKES 12 YEARS. OR WHY IT SOMETIMES FEELS LIKE IT HASN'T ARRIVED AT ALL, OR MAY NEVER ARRIVE IN THE FORM OF A PHYSICAL CURE. A MAN WAS DIAGNOSED WITH PARKINSON'S DISEASE WHEN HE WAS IN HIS 50'S. HE AND HIS WIFE PRAYED AND PRAYED THAT HE MIGHT BE HEALED. TWENTY YEARS LATER, HE IS IN THE LAST DEBILITATING STAGES OF THE DISEASE. NEVERTHELESS, HE SAID HIS PRAYERS HAD BEEN ANSWERED. HE SAID IN ALL SINCERITY, I *HAVE* BEEN HEALED, NOT OF MY PARKINSON'S DISEASE, BUT I HAVE BEEN HEALED OF MY FEAR OF PARKINSON'S DISEASE.

I KNOW THAT THERE IS NO MAGIC FORMULA—MIRACLES DO NOT WORK ALONG THE SAME LINES AS THOSE STRENGTH TESTS YOU SEE AT THE FAIR, THE ONES THAT LOOK LIKE BIG THERMOMETERS WITH RED RINGERS AT THE TOP WHERE IT'S ALL A MATTER OF HOW HARD YOU CAN HIT THE THING WITH A SLEDGEHAMMER. IF YOU ARE REALLY STRONG, YOU CAN RING THE BELL AND WIN A PRIZE. AND IF YOU ARE NOT STRONG ENOUGH, BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME. MIRACLES ARE NOT LIKE THIS. IN THE MYSTERY OF GOD, THERE IS NOTHING ABOUT HAVING A STRONG FAITH THAT MAKES MIRACLES WORK. REMEMBER, EVEN JESUS

HIMSELF EXPERIENCED LOSS AND HURT. HE LIVED THROUGH THE DEATH OF HIS DEAREST FRIEND AND RELATIVE, JOHN THE BAPTIST. IT HELPS TO REMEMBER THAT EVEN JESUS PRAYED FOR A MIRACLE THAT HE NEVER RECEIVED. ON THE NIGHT HE WAS BETRAYED AND ARRESTED HE PRAYED THAT IT WOULDN'T HAVE TO HAPPEN LIKE THIS...THAT THERE WOULD BE ANOTHER WAY...THAT HE WOULD BE SPARED ARREST, TORTURE AND HUMILIATION OF THE WORST KIND. HE PRAYED TO HIS HEAVENLY FATHER, "PLEASE REMOVE THIS CUP FROM ME." ONLY WHEN HE OPENED HIS EYES, THE CUP WAS STILL THERE. DID JESUS LACK FAITH? WAS THERE OTHERS IN A WORSE SITUATION THAN HIM? I DON'T THINK SO.

IT WAS THOMAS a KEMPIS WHO SAID: "WHEN THE MIRACLES OF GOD COME TO PEOPLE, THEY CAN DO ALL THINGS, BUT WHEN MIRACLES DON'T COME, THEY BECOME POOR AND WEAK, AS IF ABANDONED BY GOD. YET IN THIS CONDITION THEY SHOULD NOT BECOME DEJECTED OR DESPAIR. ON THE CONTRARY, THEY SHOULD CALMLY AWAIT THE WILL OF GOD AND BEAR WHATEVER BEFALLS THEM IN PRAISE OF JESUS CHRIST, FOR AFTER WINTER COMES SUMMER, AFTER NIGHT, THE DAY, AND AFTER THE STORM, A GREAT CALM. WHEREEVER WE FIND OURSELVES THIS MORNING.....THANKFUL FOR A MIRACLE OR STILL WAITING, MAY WE CONTINUE TO GIVE PRAISE TO JESUS CHRIST FOR HE IS WITH US NOW AND ALWAYS.