

'Overcome with amazement'

There's something to be said for the determined focus that is part of both of these miracles: A father's determination to find help for his little girl. A long-suffering woman finding her way through the crowd just to touch Jesus' cloak. And Jesus; who lets nothing distract him from acting in mercy and love.

It's something we don't always notice, but when Jesus notices someone who is suffering, they get his complete attention. The minute he is touched - not just jostled by the crowd, but purposefully touched - he turns his attention to finding the woman in need. He speaks directly with her, acknowledges her ailment, and declares her whole. Then he arrives at the house of Jairus. He sees something in the girl that no one else has seen. People have met them on the road - told Jairus that it's too late. Jesus brings his closest friends and invites Jairus to have faith. "She's sleeping," Jesus says. The crowd of mourners mocks him, so Jesus sends them out - emptying the house of those whose grief and disbelief get in the way of the truth. The rest, as they say, is a miracle.

We have been convinced that an ability to multi-task is somehow a superior skill. We are in a world full of ideas and opportunities - information and experts. We want the fullest human experience possible, so we keep our options (and eyes and ears) open. The result is so overwhelming that we sometimes lose sight of what really matters. We can't see the forest for the trees.

How long had the father listened to the voices in the crowd that said 'she's in a bad way. It's hopeless. Your daughter is as good as dead.'

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How many times had the older, ill-fated woman been dismissed by those who wanted her problem to be all about women's issues...or about something she had done wrong? The loudest, most persistent voices in the conversation - the so called 'wisdom of the crowd' - prevailed by being loud and persistent, not by being correct. The father is distraught - the woman is desperate. Jesus is the port of last resort in both of these cases. And Jesus shows us what happens when the noise of the crowd is silenced. Jesus cuts through the swarm of opinion and engages with the people in distress. No multi-tasking for Jesus; he prefers the direct and singular approach.

People are hungry? Give them something to eat. Let's see what we've got - let's make it happen. No feasibility studies - no need for food security summits. For heaven's sake, let's not ask the authorities for advice. Feed them.

Your daughter is dying? Let's go see her. You reached out for mercy. You get it.

The (other) astonishing thing about the miracles of Jesus is how directly they happen. With very few exceptions, needs are addressed. Bad news becomes a blessing. Lives are drawn from the brink of death by a word - or a gesture - a single interaction.

And sure - this is God at work. But it's mystery, not magic. The words Jesus utters are not spells that only work because of his connection to God. This works because Jesus makes connections with people.

These things still happen. The personal connection with someone in distress can change - even save a life. The best remedy for the fear that grips so many people

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when they meet someone living rough in the neighbourhood is to make eye contact. To say 'good morning.' To learn their name and use it. When we turn the unknown into the known, something wonderful can happen. And the miracle is not the instant granting of some fondest desire. The miracle is the return (even for a moment) of human dignity.

When we talk about a person (or group of people) as though they couldn't hear us - as though they were somehow unable to recognize their own situation - we give ourselves permission to deny that they are just like us; beloved members of God's extended family. If we plan around them, or plot to save them - without engaging them, our plots and plans will fail (have failed!) If we say we want reconciliation with first nations peoples without hearing from them what they need, and what reconciliation looks like from their perspective, there will be no reconciliation. Our efforts in the Presbyterian Church to seek better relationships with first nations, the ethnic congregations in the denomination, the LGBTQI community - each of these stumbled and stuttered until we engaged the people with whom we wanted better relations. We are too often guilty of talking about people. We need to talk with them.

Slowly but surely we are learning this lesson, but was always Jesus' habit. He went to the source of the request. Looked people in the eyes - took them by the hand. Spoke with them, cared for them. Jesus shows us what it means to be fully present. And that's where the miracle happens.

If you have any doubt, remember that the miracle that defines our faith is all about Jesus being fully present. An empty tomb is just a minor story on a slow news day, until his grieving friends found themselves face-to-face with Jesus. It's the personal touch that make it a miracle. Every time.