

The more you look at the two recipients of healing in today's story, the more contrasts you discover between them. Really the only thing they have in common is that they are female. And the number 12.

The woman with the hemorrhage, Mark tells us, had suffered for twelve years. Her ailment sounds like endometriosis—a sort of never-ending menstrual period, and if it's endometriosis it's also severe chronic pain. She must have had money early on in her life, because Mark says she had spent all that she had. She'd consulted many physicians who had prescribed treatments that were in themselves debilitating. But nothing helped. To add to her suffering, she was isolated. Chronic pain, of course, isolates you because you don't have the bandwidth or the energy to do more than the bare minimum. She would not have been running over to the neighbor with fresh rolls, or stepping out to see the sights on market day. But also, hemorrhage would make her constantly ritually unclean. She should not be touched, and she certainly should not be intimate with her husband. Life for her probably felt like an endurance test.

But this woman is also a fighter. Even after 12 years, she hasn't given up hope or accepted that society has gone on without her. Having heard about Jesus, and probably worn out or lost anybody else who might advocate for her to Jesus while she lies at home in her bed of pain, she gets herself out into the street, thinking, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." And so she is.

Setting aside for a moment the reactions to this particular healing, take a look at how different Jairus' daughter is. She is twelve years old, but presumably her illness is fairly recent. It's not a chronic condition; it's an acute and potentially fatal condition, an emergency. By

definition Jairus' daughter is not isolated; she is a child in her parents' home, and we know her by her close relationship to her father. This little girl is not a fighter, or at least, she's too sick to advocate for herself. She's just lying in bed at home, removed from the crowd and Jesus. Her advocate is her father. She may be approaching marriageable age, but she's referred to as a child and a little girl, recently and unnaturally laid up, not a mature woman who had many years of making decisions about how to cope with her illness.

They're different in so many respects. But the story of the woman with a hemorrhage is sandwiched into the story of Jairus' daughter, forcing us to consider each in terms of the other. And we're also forced to consider Jesus behavior toward each in terms of his behavior towards the other, and the behavior of onlookers in each case. The people in the crowd are probably, overall, indifferent to the sick woman. She's been sick for a long time, literally not out and about much, and she's just not playing much of a role in anybody's life. To the extent that they're aware of her, they're probably a little irritated that she doesn't either get better or die. Going around moping and trying to find new doctors with her diminishing resources doesn't make her a fun person to be around. When Jesus feels the power go forth from him, he notices and reacts. Although the woman is afraid to confess what she did, Jesus affirms her boldness and self-advocacy, and he calls her "daughter," implying that she is not isolated but part of a family, his family. In the mildest way, I think, there's a little rebuke to the crowd for their indifference. After all, even if they couldn't heal her, they could have stayed connected enough to be her advocates with Jesus—to go, as Jairus does for his daughter, on her behalf.

The audience for the second healing comes off even worse. Mark tells us there's a commotion around Jairus' house, with people weeping and wailing loudly. This implies that

professional mourners have showed up and gotten busy. When Jesus challenges their commotion, saying that the child isn't really dead, they laugh at him, I imagine jeeringly. Too late, pal, you had your chance and you squandered it dawdling with some no-account perpetual invalid you found in the street. Let us get on with *our* opportunity to make a buck from this well-connected man Jairus.

Jesus rather pointedly excludes these people from the rest of the action, putting them all outside and taking only the child's parents and his disciples into the house. Only those who really care get to be present for her resuscitation or resurrection, whichever it is. Again, the uncaring or cynical crowd is rebuked, this time by being excluded from seeing the miracle.

Jesus had told the woman with the hemorrhage that her faith was what made her well. I'm told that the Greek word used here translates as sort of a mashup of "faith" and "belief"—that is, it's not a cognitive idea, but a willingness to put trust into action. She acted, not knowing just what to expect. On the way to Jairus' house, when his daughter has already been reported dead, Jesus tells him, "Do not fear, only believe"—the same word, implying trusting and moving forward. And Jairus keeps up with him, probably also not knowing what to expect but trusting Jesus in the moment.

Indifference precludes trust, or faith. The crowd that was indifferent to the woman's suffering did not do anything for her, and they didn't do anything for her on faith. The professional mourners outside of Jairus' house, actively skeptical rather than hopeful or trusting, did not have faith either. It would seem that people who are not Jesus, which is us, need to understand that faith starts with caring. Only when you care enough about someone to move forward without any guarantees can faith be mobilized. Only when you realize that

God is Love can you locate how God might be operating in a certain situation. Without love, the crowds never thought about the woman possibly getting healed or the little girl still having potential for life.

There's one other angle I want to address briefly. Several studies have shown that patients and their families who identify as religious are often the ones who insist on medical interventions past the point of futility. They say they don't want to "play God" by consenting to the patient's death without trying every last possible thing. That's really tragic, because it puts the patient through unnecessary ordeals, wastes resources, and must be excruciating for the nurses and doctors who know how this is going to end. I think it's a mistake to see Jesus' healing stories as emblems of miracles that we might also hope for. These stories are not roadmaps to manufacturing our own miracles, and you can't prevent someone dying by ginning up a critical mass of faith.

This story tells us that Jesus always sees a way forward because he is 100% clued in to the infinite love and compassion that is God's. Living with the awareness of love and compassion as realities is what enables us to care about others and to move forward in the trust that God is making a way. That's what I think these stories are about, not about why some people get miracles and others don't. And as people of faith, we have to accept that death comes even when we're not ready for it, but also that there's a way forward past death as well. It's not unfaithful to allow someone to die.

The two people whom Jesus heal in this story couldn't be more different, but each one was worth Jesus' full attention. That's a good lesson to take with us out into our lives: each one of us, and each person we meet or fail to meet, has Jesus' full attention and plenty of future to

move into.

God of healing, when someone in your world suffers, you suffer as well. Restore your world and heal your children so that no one needs to suffer any longer. Amen.