

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27
Psalm 130
2 Corinthians 8:7-15
Mark 5: 21-43, Year B

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Breaking Through

May the words of my mouth and the mediations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

If you look for signs of God doing something new, you might start with the day before yesterday when Derek Chauvin was sentenced to 22 and a half years for the murder of George Floyd. It was a moment when our too often flawed justice system appeared to work, providing at the very least accountability for police officers who commit murder while on the job.

It is something very new indeed; thanks be to God, because Chauvin's sentence was one of the longest ever for a police officer convicted in killing a person of color. Rarely are officers ever charged, and even more rarely if they are do they serve significant time in prison, which Chauvin will do.

It in no way fixes the problem of systemic police violence. But we have been pointed in a new direction as God works to liberate the oppressed and tear down the big barriers and more subtle obstacles we place to deny God's kingdom to the outcast and marginalized wherever they are found and whatever color they may be.

Which leads us to Mark's gospel story today of Jarius' daughter being resurrected from the dead and a woman, who, after bleeding for 12 years is cured. It is easy to be awestruck by these two miracle stories. Their magnetic attraction is undeniable. Isn't this what we want? To know that our faith can heal us and cure us? That even if we don't understand how miracles work, we know Jesus turns the key? A good God to keep handy for when times get tough.

And yet there is so much more than the surface meaning here. The danger in clinging to them as feel good stories is that it obscures their deeper meaning. Because in both God is doing something new in his ongoing liberating work of healing, salvation, and a radical transformation of an unjust social order.

Fear and desperation are central to each story as is the boldness of both Jarius and the bleeding woman that crashes through boundaries.

In thinking about Jarius, I remembered recently witnessing a father scream and plead over the body of his dead child who was brought to the ER on a night when I was on call. His small child had been found dead at home. He held the child in his arms screaming 'Wake up! Wake up!' The veins in his neck were ready to erupt. "I waited 22 years for you. Wake up! Wake up." The fire in his eyes matched the furor in his voice when he pleaded to the ER physician. "Isn't there anything you can do? ANYTHING?"

This searing moment came to mind because the story of Jarius is so familiar that the anguish is drained from it.

Jarius was desperate, but also rich and privileged - a leader in his synagogue and one of the religious elite - who adhered to a rigid and legalistic system Jewish laws. In panic, he threw himself before Jesus - a carpenter's son from Nazareth he had no reason to believe in -- and in doing so threw out the rules of his Temple when he still insisted Jesus come even after word came that she was dead.

In Jewish law, dead bodies were unclean. For Jesus to touch her or heal her would defile him and all in his presence. But rules don't matter when your child is dead. Rules be damned if it meant resurrecting his daughter.

When the little girl awoke, Jesus asked her parents to get her something to eat, and then insisted they tell no one what had happened. He knew this was exactly what could get him killed - ushering in God's kingdom that upends the existing order that draws arbitrary boundaries between the clean and unclean.

The bleeding woman was an outcast for 12 years, ostracized in her own community as repulsive and unclean. She would never be allowed in the synagogue. Nor could she marry or have a family. She had tried everything there was to try and was out of both options and money. We don't know her name, but we know her defiance. What she did was an act of civil disobedience, fighting her way through a packed crowd, desperate to touch Jesus despite knowing it would make him unclean, too.

Jesus, aware that something happened, stopped everything to demand to know who touched him. Imagine the reaction of his disciples who had no idea what had just occurred, not to mention Jarius, who was frantic to get Jesus to his daughter.

The woman had a choice, she could have disappeared into the crowd, but instead came forward Mark tells us in "fear and trembling" emboldened to speak her truth. Women - in good health - had no voice or status in their ancient world Palestine and she had been written off for twelve years as an outcast for something she could not control.

Jesus acts not only to cure her but in calling her to come forward, he makes sure her humanity is publicly restored within her community. Writes Debie Thomas, in this week's "Journey with Jesus:"

He pauses to restore a broken woman to fellowship, dignity, and humanity. He insists that her embodied experience is no less important than a synagogue Leader's. He doesn't allow her to slink away into obscurity. He invites her to bear witness, to find her voice, to speak publicly and confidently about her story and God's. "Daughter," he says when she at least falls silent, "Daughter go in peace."

I wish we knew what happened to Jarius after his daughter was resurrected. Did begin to reconsider the religious taboos upheld by his temple? Did he notice that Jesus was teaching him -

a rich and prominent man - by making an example of a poor nobody, an utterly powerless nobody. Curing her, and then, resurrecting Jarius' daughter showed that in the Kingdom of God they were both equal. The social order was turned on its head which could only enrage the privileged and ruling class, committed to maintaining their power.

Writes Debie Thomas:

I hope that when Jarius embraces his resurrected daughter he embraces a new vision of who God is, and what God values. In Jarius' story, Jesus demands that we not see death where he sees life. In the bleeding woman's story, he demands that legalism give way to love every single time. In each story, Jesus embraces what is "impure" (the bleeding woman, the dead body") in order to practice mercy.

We don't know if anything changed in Jarius. But maybe the question we need to ask is what's going to change in us? Is our faith bold enough, defiant enough, courageous enough to be co-creators in bringing God's kingdom and liberating love to this earth?

Yes, we had a glimpse on Friday of the kingdom breaking through. Yes, a measure of humanity was symbolically restored to George Floyd and the countless thousands of others who have been brutalized at the hands of police with little or no accountability. And the impact of that cannot be discounted.

The question now is this the end point or a turning point? Will Congress muster the momentum to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act? You need to look no further than the effort to restrict voting rights in this country to understand how privilege and power works to protect itself.

"Miracles are like a hole poked in the opaque fabric of time and space," writes Reverend Barbara Brown Taylor. "The kingdom breaks through and for a moment in time we see how things will be or how they are in the mind of God and then it is over."

God never gives up on us; why do we so often insist in our lives and in our institutions on giving up on God who showed us through the life of Jesus what it means to bring his kingdom to this earth? Following Jesus has never been about going along for the ride; it means now what it did then, taking risks and digging into the work.

AMEN