

## **The Miracle In Front of You**

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Mark 5:21-43

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The musical *Wicked* tells the true story behind the two witches in the *The Wizard of Oz*. There is Glinda, the Good Witch, and Elpheba, who later becomes known as the wicked witch of the west.

Glinda and Elpheba couldn't be more different. Glinda wears hot pink and everything sparkly. She has this bubbly personality even sings a song about just how pop-u-lar she is. Elpheba, on the other hand, has bright green skin. She has a smart and fiery personality, and extraordinary talent, but she is often misunderstood. And because all of the other kids make fun of her, she tends to keep to herself.

When this dynamic duo is suddenly assigned to be roommates at school, both Elpheba and Glinda write letters home about how much they can't stand the other. According to Glinda, Elpheba is "Unusually and exceedingly peculiar altogether quite impossible to describe." But Elpheba needs just one word to describe how horrible Glinda is – she's "blonde."

As the show goes on, the two of them progress in very different ways. Glinda becomes a public figure, engaged to be married to the town heart throb, and travels around in a giant floating bubble. Elpheba, on the other hand, becomes a fugitive who has to work behind the scenes so that she won't be captured, and so she travels around on a flying broomstick. The townspeople speculate that her soul is so wicked and unclean – that pure water can melt her!

But over time, this unlikely friendship develops between Elpheba and Glinda. Their stories are woven together in such an inextricable way, and even though life takes them down two very different paths, in the end, they admit that because they knew one another, they have been changed for good.

In today's gospel reading in the book of Mark, we come across two different people. One is a temple leader named Jairus. The other is an unnamed woman, who for twelve years has experienced hemorrhaging and is near death. And I would argue that because their paths cross in such a unique way – they, too, are both changed for good.

But Jairus and this woman couldn't be more different. A religious *insider* and a complete *outsider*. Someone who is in charge of the temple and someone who is not even considered clean enough to go near the temple. Someone able to travel with Jesus and to get a spot in his daily schedule and someone who feels so unworthy of his time that she has to push her way through the crowds just to touch the hem of his clothes.

A man with status and privilege, and a woman who isn't considered important enough to be given a name in the story.

As the story begins, Jairus meets Jesus and begs him to come heal his little girl, who is near death, but on their way to see his daughter, this woman quietly approaches Jesus hoping that if she can just touch his clothes, she will be made well. Jesus immediately realizes that something has happened, and when this woman falls at his feet, he says to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you."

I can picture Jairus, the woman, and the crowd standing there in complete amazement at what has just happened, when all of the sudden, while Jesus is still speaking, Jairus' family comes to deliver the news that his daughter has died.

I can't imagine how those words must have sounded to Jairus. Logically speaking, Jairus should have completely given up. There was no reason to bother Jesus with this any longer. And maybe, had he not met this unnamed woman along the way, maybe he would have broken down in that moment and gone home to be with his family. I mean, who would blame him after receiving such devastating news?

But I can imagine him standing there, looking into this woman's eyes – a woman he might never have met, had it not been for this moment with Jesus. I can picture him seeing this radical work of healing that has happened in her life. In this completely unexpected encounter with Jesus, her story, as different as it may be from his, intersects with his own. And I've got to wonder if the faith that has made this woman well might just be the faith Jairus needs in this unspeakable moment, too. If the faith of this unnamed woman is what gives Jairus the faith to keep trusting Jesus, anyway.

People often read this text and focus on the miracle that Jesus performs back at Jairus' home when his daughter is healed. And there are lots of questions we could ask ourselves about healing and faith and prayer – their relationship with one another – and what to do when it feels like miracles just don't happen for us as easily as they happen in this story.

But, that's another sermon for another day. Because today, I want us to turn toward the miracle that is right in front of Jairus before he even turns to go back home. There's something about his encounter with this woman changes him for good.

And just like Jairus and this woman, I believe that when you and I gather together in this place, our lives – and our stories - are inextricably woven together. We meet people we probably never would have met had Jesus not allowed our paths to cross. And sometimes, I believe it's the miracles we see in one another that give us the faith to believe in Jesus, too.

Sometimes you may sing the words of the song that I can't sing but desperately need to hear. Or you may voice the prayer that I just don't have words to pray, but I need someone to pray it

on my behalf. And maybe just by your showing up and being here, it gives me the courage to keep showing up, too.

And the thing is, you've already told me about this happening. You've told me about the people in this place who have shown up for you – just when you needed them most. And how God has woven your stories together here at Grinstead and Cherokee.

It happened when Hollon Holm and Loren Townsend showed up for Gator Blanchard and Dominique James at a marriage equality protest they were leading downtown back in 2013..” How Hollon reached out to the judge and arranged for them to be released from jail after they were arrested for peacefully applying for a marriage license. Gator said, “I’ve never forgotten what they did for us that day

It happened when Rose Hawkins was growing up in a shotgun house just around the corner from the church, and two ladies from Highland, Mrs. Wigginton and Miss Freida, knocked on her door and invited her to Sunday School one day. Week after week, they would pick her up and bring her to church. These unexpected women showed up on her doorstep – one of them would become like a mom to Rose over the years. And they were both changed for good.

It happened for Becky Smith after her husband passed away. She said, “I had been away from church for 25 years and had just started coming to Friday Church at Highland. But I didn’t expect much support from the church – after all, no one had shown when my mother died, or when my father died.” But she turned around in her seat, just before the service started, and her heart skipped a beat. She said, “One entire row was made of up folks from Highland. I held back the tears, but I just wanted to sob. Because they showed up - and they’ve been there for me ever since.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says it best when he says, “there will be days for all of us when the Christ in our own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of a brother or sister. There will be days when our own hearts are uncertain, but the hearts of a [sibling], sure.”<sup>1</sup>

It’s why Jairus and this woman, Gator and Hollan and Loren, Rose and Mom Wigginton, Becky, and so many others help us to see that we need each other. We need to hear God’s voice, to see God’s face, and to feel the movement of God’s hands and feet through the ways in which we share life with one another in this place.

A few years ago, I served as a pastoral intern at a church in Georgia, and during my time there, it felt like a division was building within the church. Two different types of people were forming among them, and they didn’t know how they could make their way forward, together. And one Sunday, a young gay man shared the following words in worship that I will never forget.

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*.

He said to his church, with tears streaming down his face, “I fervently believe that our strength comes through our diversity. We desperately need our traditionalists. We need your wisdom and your strength; your commitment and your compassion. In short, we need your faith. But in equal measure, we need our progressives. We need your vision, and your innovation, your energy and your enthusiasm. In short, we need your spirit. One is the ballast. One is the sail. Both are indispensable if we are to press forward.”

“Or, to put a more modern spin on it,” he said, “the mighty Saturn 5 rockets that took man to the moon required monumental scaffolding and powerful engines. Without the engine, the rocket will crash to earth, but should that scaffolding fail to release, then that would-be bridge to the stars becomes a cage. If we are to take to the heavens, both will be required.”<sup>2</sup>

Highland, if we are going to take to the heavens together in this post-pandemic world – we need you. All of you. Whether you’re just showing up for the very first time or whether this has been your church home for years. Whether you come to this place with much faith – or you come wanting more. Whether you come with a difficult story that you don’t think anyone will understand, or you come ready to share your story for someone else to hear. Whether you feel like an insider or an outsider to the faith.

You never know what role you’re going to have in someone else’s story – what part you will play in the story that God is writing among us.

So hear these words that Glinda and Elpheba offer to one another at the end of *Wicked*. And as you do, I invite you to look around this room at the miracles that are in front of you, beside you, and all around you, remembering that when we encounter the face of Christ in one another, we are all changed for good.

*I've heard it said  
That people come into our lives  
For a reason  
Bringing something we must learn  
And we are led to those  
Who help us most to grow  
If we let them  
And we help them in return.*

*Well I don't know if I believe that's true  
But I know I'm who I am today  
Because I knew you!*

*Like a comet pulled from orbit  
As it passes the Sun*

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<sup>2</sup> From a testimony shared at First Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia

*Like a stream that meets a boulder  
Halfway through the wood  
Who can say if I've been changed for the better?  
But  
Because I knew you  
I have been changed for good.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> "For Good," from the musical *Wicked* by Stephen Schwartz