

In 1973 researchers conducted an interesting experiment. They asked a group of seminary students to go from one building to another to complete a task. Some of them were told they would be preparing a talk on the Good Samaritan, others that they were to prepare a talk on seminary jobs. Some were told they were late, others that they had plenty of time. On the way between the two buildings, the students passed a man sitting slumped in an alleyway coughing and moaning.

Did they stop to help him?

Interestingly it made no difference whether they were thinking about the Good Samaritan or about seminary jobs. The thing that made a difference was how late they thought they were. Those who believed themselves to be late were much less likely to stop to try to assist the man. Their commitment to the experiment conflicted with their concern about him, and in the time crunch they chose to get on with what they believed to be the task.

Does that sound familiar?

In today's gospel, we see Jesus do something quite different. He is on his way to Jairus' house. This is a crisis – his daughter is dying and Jesus needs to get there right away. But Jesus stops. He looks around for the person who was just healed by touching his cloak.

This is an interesting gospel reading in that two women are healed. We don't know their names; Jairus' daughter and the woman with hemorrhages. Imagine being known to history as the woman with hemorrhages!

Let's call her Miriam so that we can remember that she was a whole person not just defined by her illness. Though I imagine that is how she thought of herself. Women were considered unclean when they were in their monthly cycle. When Miriam was bleeding she was unclean, and not only that, but anyone she touched became unclean. Twelve years. Twelve years of maintaining social distancing and being careful not to

touch. I imagine that Miriam was very careful to avoid social situations. I imagine that she spent a lot of time thinking about her illness. She spent all her money going to specialists but the doctors didn't come up with a solution.

I expect that in her mind her illness defined who she was – the unclean woman.

Imagine the hope that swelled up in her when she heard that Jesus was healing people. But she had the same problem with Jesus that she had with all the doctors – if they touched her or she touched them they would also become unclean which would prevent them from touching others or from participating in anything holy until after a prescribed period of time.

And so she came up with a daring plan. She got close enough to Jesus to touch his cloak, hoping against hope that that would be enough. And it was. But imagine her shock when Jesus stopped and instead of allowing her to creep back to the edges of society he turned the spotlight on her. Suddenly Miriam was more important than anything or anyone else. Because Jesus were asking for her, talking to her, giving her his full attention.

Even though he was in a hurry. Even though one of the leaders of the synagogue was impatiently waiting for him.

We live in a culture that is always in a hurry. And along the way we choose not to see or not to stop to help those who can't keep up. There are many groups of people who we pass by on the other side of the road. In the last year we have been made horribly aware of the systematic racism that exists which makes Black people and Asian Americans invisible and the recipients of the worst we have to offer. Those who are homeless, those who are mentally ill, those who live with autism, old people without close family... the list goes on. There are many people we choose not to see.

And we choose not to see or to act on the disaster that is overtaking the planet. Partisan politics is getting in the way of any really radical approach to climate change. And our willingness to look the other way as the planet changes intersects with our willingness to look the other way so we don't see the suffering caused by racial discrimination. There is an article in the New York Times today about the American Indian tribes whose lands and homes are being swallowed up by the ocean or are sinking into the ground as the permafrost melts and the lack of federal assistance to help them move to higher, firmer ground.

We are in too much of a hurry to notice these people living on the margins – literally living on the very edge of our continent.

But Jesus isn't. Jesus is not in a hurry. He always has time for the one who is left out.

We can apply this socially and we can apply it individually. Most of us have parts we don't want to deal with – places in our hearts and minds that harbor difficult feelings, painful memories, experiences of shame. The more we hurry on and keep busy the less we have to notice those unhealed places. We are afraid to pause and allow those difficult feelings to surface and so we keep moving.

But Jesus stops. Jesus stops everything he is doing to say, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

As you know, I will be taking a sabbatical in August and I will be away from the parish for twelve weeks. Most clergy do this about every five years but because I have been part-time for the past sixteen years I have only just become eligible for this time away. It is a time to stop rushing, and to pay attention. To pay attention to what Jesus is saying to me and to us. A time for healing and for reflection.

A time for God to show me things I have been missing. I hope it will also be a time for you as a congregation to see things that you may not

have noticed, especially in the past few months as we have met one challenge after another.

I thank you for giving me, giving us, this opportunity to slow down and notice. I also thank you for getting me to full-time compensation. Your generous giving always astonishes me.

Back to Jesus.

In this gospel reading he stands normal social behavior on its head. Instead of rushing to help the leader of the synagogue, a man of some standing and power in the community, he stops everything to talk to Miriam who has been hiding away scared to come out of her home, rarely seen in public because she has an apparently incurable illness.

This is the way Jesus is. He doesn't ignore the powerful and the community leaders but he prioritizes those on the margins. And since Jesus does that, we can be sure that God does that too.

And so, people of God, that is to be our path as well. Stopping in our rushing to notice what God is showing us. Paying attention, always, to those on the margins.