



What Matters

Mark 5:21-43

Larry DeLong

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One of the fascinating traits of the human creature is our ability to ignore. Ignore what's right in front of our faces, in fact. There's simple examples of this, like the classic "I didn't see the stop sign, officer," the modern version of which has to do with cell phones. It's amazing how narrow one's vision becomes when one is talking!

But this is in some part due to the complexity of our construction. Most every creature – if not every non-human creature in creation – spends most of its time and whatever thought it has in the never-ending battle of survival, especially *finding food*. There's a recent book that suggests quite persuasively that it was the invention of cooking that allowed humans to develop the depth of thought and reason that we possess, since cooking allowed humans to concentrate nutrition (instead of grazing all day, you eat a bowl of soup, for example), preserve provisions (so you don't have to go out and resupply every day), and so they found time to do other things, like make clothes and create writing.

This is, of course, a good thing. But it does have a serious downside, part of which is that most of us, plunked down out in the wilderness, would starve to death very quickly. We tend to stalk our game in the Safeway rather than on the savannah. And, too, being at or near the top of the food chain, we don't concern ourselves much with predators, other than polar bears and mountain lions. Watch a rabbit in your yard for a few minutes, and you'll see my point: that poor creature is basically eyes, ears, and a nose mounted on very fast legs. All the while it's chewing, it's watching out for impending doom. There just isn't room for thought in that brain: it's hard to have a quiet conversation over lunch when you're concerned about what's trying to eat *you*.

And so the problem is, with all this brain power freed up and available, we manage to find thousands and thousands of things to do which really don't relate to survival. How is that a problem? Well, to begin with, survival becomes much more than just eating and drinking.

Being human, being complex, means that we have more needs. Most rabbits probably don't ponder whether they're fulfilling their potential, whether they're

appreciated for who they are. But humans do. All but pathologically antisocial people seek *some* sort of companionship. Most of us would fare very poorly indeed without some sort of relationship with other people.

Jesus, the most human person that ever lived, seems to have spent every waking moment of his ministry either relating to others or praying for them. It doesn't take a lot of analysis to see the message of the Gospel as a relationship. God himself, especially in the prophets, seems to long for a calm, comfortable, respectful relationship with us, his creatures.

We easily miss that critical core of relationship. Many of us are guilty of neglecting our relationships for something else, something which at the time we might even have described as a "higher good": our jobs, our commitments, even humanity itself. It can be much easier to deal with the concept of "humanity" than a live human being, sitting right in front of you. Jesus keeps bringing our attention back to relationships, to other people.

In today's lesson, he does that more than once. We start out with a huge crowd gathering around him, waiting for his teaching. Now there's a great opportunity to help thousands of people, right? After all, you teach one, and that one will probably teach several others – a great multiplication of effort, easily justified as a "higher good" – rather than dealing with individuals, which can get messy. A great reason, when someone like the local notable Jairus come up with a personal issue – his sick daughter – for Jesus to put him off. "Sorry, I've got to give this lecture first. Have your people get in touch with my people, and see if we can't work something out for, say, next week, OK?"

But he doesn't do that. Jesus drops everything, and goes with Jairus to see this deeply loved daughter. On the way, another lady in the crowd, not daring to try and get his attention, manages to get close enough to touch his clothes, and is healed. Jesus knew what she'd done; Mark carefully notes this. And knowing what she'd done, really, means he didn't have to *do* anything else but keep on going to the sick little girl.

Instead, he stops, and takes the time to talk with this brave, even desperate woman, to soothe her, to make her healing complete. She might have felt that she'd taken something from Jesus otherwise; he made sure that she knew that God's grace wasn't and can't be stolen – it's always given freely.

Then a third time, as Jesus approaches the girl's house, he's told she is already dead. Yet another opportunity for him to get back on schedule, no need to go any farther. Instead, he turns to the father, Jairus, and says, "Don't be afraid." He goes into the house, gently calls the dead girl back to life, and only then goes on with his work.

What are the things that really matter in your life? I hope you edited that question a bit as it entered your mind, and instead of "what," thought "who": and thought of friends, family. As Christians, followers of this incredible Jesus, we ought automatically to think "people" first, to consider relationships before anything else. Now don't worry if you didn't, that's all right: probably very few of us do that consistently, and none of us will

ever do it as well as Jesus. But we need to *try*. And after we've got that down, start adding to the people on our list – keep it growing.

Jesus gives us an example in the story that isn't easy for us to see. It's remarkable that both of the people who received Jesus' direct action were women. Hard as it may be for 2009 Americans to realize, these two people, the woman in the crowd and Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter, were barely even human as far as that male-centered society was concerned. They just didn't rise to a level any ordinary man would even notice. Yet Jesus went out of his way for them, gave each of them, if only for a moment, his undivided attention, and restored them to life. They mattered.

So, again, who matters to you? What will you do, today, to let others matter to you? Listen for a few minutes – or few minutes longer than usual – before drifting back to the demands of a busy, busy day? Look for what need might be lurking just beneath the surface, like the woman in the crowd?

My wife Valerie just heard recently of a teacher who gave every student in her elementary class a toothbrush a while back. The next week, one of the boys in the class asked her for three more. Taken aback, she asked why: "Well, my brothers and I have been sharing that one."

A part of our growth in faith – what's sometimes called spiritual formation – is looking for these hidden needs, things that if we take a moment and focus on the person in front of us, might just open up a whole new level of awareness and caring. A sigh. A reluctance to end a conversation. Something other than "Fine!" as an answer to "How're you doing?"

Or what Jesus did – the very last phrase of this lesson, which for me is the heart of the whole thing. Here is Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, Son of God, the living Word of God by which the entire universe came into being. It's not enough for him to pay attention to these two people who were beneath notice; not enough that he gave one her life back, and restored the other from death. If anyone ever had justification that he had pressing business elsewhere, more important matters that demanded his attention, a good excuse for forgetting a detail or two because of the crush of urgency or the mass of *stuff* that needed attending to, it was Jesus.

Instead, he reminded them, in their joy over the girl – which, as joy often does, was distracting them from what was really important – of what was necessary, what mattered for *her*: he told them to give her something to eat.

What will you feed another person today?