

There’s a book that came out in 1990, by Robert Farrar Capon. The author, Rev. Capon, is an Episcopal priest with quite an imagination. So, what he wrote is a gospel according to Marvin.

It’s the story of Jesus’ life, but modernized, and with different names. Marvin is the narrator, and he is the disciple Peter’s character. Jesus takes on the name of Jerry. The Waters boys, Greg and Timmy, are the apostles James and John.

I’m filling you in on this because I’m going to tell you the story which was in the book of Mark, which we read, as Robert Farrar Capon put it in his book.

So, remember the new names. Also, when he says “The new order” he means Christianity. And it doesn’t take place in the Holy Land, it takes place in Cleveland.

“One night very soon after I got to Cleveland for good, Jerry was talking to this big crowd, when all of a sudden a well-dressed man walks straight up to him, falls down on his knees and starts asking him will he come and do a miracle on his daughter who is dying in a hospital six blocks away. So what does Jerry do? Well, like I said, one sob story and up he comes with a new set of plans for the evening: off we all go to the hospital just like that. On foot, yet.

The crowd, needless to say, is confused by this, but not so much that they break up. Most of them follow right along, making a scene that looks like a low-budget version of the storming of the Bastille. Then suddenly in the midst of all the pushing and shoving Jerry stops dead in his tracks and looks annoyed. “Somebody touched me,” he growls. Obviously, nobody knows what to say since at least twenty people a minute have been bumping into him for three blocks. But he just repeats, “I know somebody touched me. I lost power.”

Once again, this does not exactly explain things to anybody, but he just stands there with the crowd getting quieter and quieter until finally, right in back of him, there comes this woman’s voice.

“Please,” she says. “Don’t be angry. I only touched your sweatshirt, and I’m sorry if I bothered you—but it’s cured, I think.”

“What’s cured?” Jerry asks her.

“My . . .hemorrhaging,” she says. “I’ve had it twelve years. Now, one tug on your shirt and it’s gone. It’s a miracle. How can I thank you?”

Jerry looks at her in amazement. “Why should you thank a cafeteria counter? If you got what you wanted, thank yourself.” Then he smiles and says, “Seriously,

I'm glad it was there. But if you'll excuse me now, I have to go see this man's daughter."

When we get to the hospital, of course, we lose most of the crowd either outside or at the desk, but since it still looks like half a mob scene, Jerry says only the father of the girl, plus the two Waters kids and myself should go up to her room. Why the Waters boys, you ask? Well, this again is typical of Jerry—and of the not fantastically neat situations he was always kind of a magnet for. The girl's father it turns out, is the current boyfriend of Greg's and Timmy's mother who, naturally, is already in the hall outside the room as we arrive—along with the girl's mother, as well as a couple of grandmothers and aunts I never did get sorted out.

As you can imagine, it is not the friendliest looking group on earth. At the time we arrive, though, they're all at least doing the same thing, namely crying like Niagara [Falls] because the girl is already dead. Between sobs, of course, they manage to get in a few remarks about how the father might at least have been there for the death if he hadn't been off pestering some useless miracle worker, but Jerry just ignores them. "It's okay," he says. "Not to worry. She's not dead; she's just asleep."

Well, if you know anything about people, you know that in a group like that there's a lot of loose hostility looking for somebody to zero in on. What they do is go straight from tears to snotty remarks about who made him a specialist and what makes him think he knows more than the nurse who said she was dead ten minutes ago and went to get the resident to pronounce it official? Once again, Jerry just says, "Let me go in anyway. If I can't wake her up, I'll be the first to admit it."

I take this as a signal to do something, so while Jerry is still talking to the bunch in the hall, I open the door to the girl's room and take Greg, Timmy and her father inside with me. The four of us walk straight over to the bed, and since it still takes Jerry a good thirty seconds to catch up with us, we just stand there and stare at her.

In what I'm going to tell you next, it's important to pay attention to exactly what happened when. As I said, at the time I didn't understand it all; but I thought a lot about it afterwards and I came to the conclusion that in this particular case, the sequence is the clue to the whole thing. Look at it. When the four of us get into the room, the girl is dead. The nurse, who was an old pro, was sure of it ten minutes ago. The rest of us, who spend thirty seconds just staring at her, don't see a single sign of life; not a flutter of an eyelid, not a breath of any kind. Then Jerry comes into the room. But he doesn't come all the way over to the bed at first: for some reason he pauses for about three beats just inside the doorway. But right in that pause, the girl starts breathing again: quietly but obviously,

exactly as if suddenly she really was asleep instead of dead—making us all wonder, of course, if Jerry wasn't right all along.

In any case, when he gets to the bedside he certainly acts as if he was. He just takes her hand, pats it and says, "C'mon, kid, time to wake up." Then, nice as you pleased, she gives a little twitch, yawns, rubs her eyes and sits straight up in the bed. When the bunch in the hall find this out, of course, they come bursting in, scaring her half back to death or whatever. And, true to form, they touch all the nasty bases they can find: the nurse should be fired for spreading false rumors; Jerry just had the dumb luck to walk in after a mistake; if the father wasn't fooling around on the side, the kid probably would never have gotten sick in the first place. Jerry tunes it all out and picks up the phone instead. "This is room 227," he says. "We'd like a grilled cheese with bacon and a large Coke. Quick, too. After what this girl's been through, she needs nourishment."

I think you probably see what I'm getting at in all this, but let me spell it out anyway. These were two very funny miracles. So much so, in fact, that I wouldn't even call them such. As far as I can see, Jerry didn't do anything in either case. The woman with the hemorrhaging just sort of helped herself to something that was already available—almost cafeteria-style, as Jerry said. He was as ignorant of what ailment she had—and what she thought she was doing, and of how she was actually cured—as anybody else in the crowd.

But it's the dead girl that's the clincher. She came back to life, not because Jerry *did* something to her, but because his *presence*—his just being there inside the door to her room—*had that effect on her*. In other words, it goes back to what I was saying about the new order being already present and already at work in him: health and life--and, if I'm right, everything else about the new order—were simply *there*, for the asking, wherever he was. And not even for the asking, really—because the girl, obviously was in no condition to ask for a thing. It was all just there, as he said, like yeast. All you had to do was wait for it do its own thing and eventually you'd have bread. Not to mention, I suppose, cheese, bacon, and a Coke.

In any case, the net result of the scene in the hospital was that except for those of us who were in the room when she started breathing again . . . nobody gave Jerry credit for a miracle at all. And even as far as we were concerned, it still didn't seem like a particularly orthodox one, if there is such a thing. When something happens while a person looks like he isn't doing anything at all, it takes you a while before you figure out a connection.

Apparently, what struck Marvin, oh all right the author, was that Jesus' presence is healing. Jesus' presence gives life. Jesus' presence makes things better.

I believe that, too. I think that all Christians have experienced that. Think about it. Has that been your experience? It's been mine.

Now, since we are not living at the same time as Jesus' earthly life, it's a little different for us. We get Jesus' presence in different ways—in our beliefs, our prayers, our study of the Bible, our participation in church and Christian activities, thought other Christian people, and in other ways we probably don't notice.

However, it's bigger than us—it's bigger than only the people who believe in Jesus, and have committed to being Christians. Jesus' presence in the world has affected—and made better—this whole world.

Thanks to Jesus Christ, we have countries (like our own!) with laws and customs based on his teachings of honesty and mercy and goodness. We have Good Samaritan laws based on the parable Jesus told. We have hospitals named for Christian saints—just around the Metro area, we have St. Luke's, St. Joseph's, and St. Mary's—and they are all going on in Jesus' spirit and example of healing.

The world became a better place because of Jesus.

Now, I'm not going to deny that there have also been wrongs done in the name of Christianity, like the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition, and so on. But those were human wrongs, done by wrong-headed people. They were not what our Lord intended. In fact, they probably broke his heart!

But anyway, the point here is that Jesus' presence, especially for those who believe, brings healing and life and comfort and love.

That was the point in the book. What struck me in this story was different. What struck me about these two miraculous healings in the Scripture, was that no one was beneath Jesus' notice. No one was unimportant to him then, no one is unimportant to him now.

The thing is, both the people who were healed were female. That may not seem like a big deal now, but it was a very big deal then. Girls and women were not valued then, in that society. Jesus was the one to take the shocking step to treating women like ... are you ready for this ... human beings! What a concept!

Even more striking was the condition which the woman had—it was something that kept her out of society—and no doctor had been able to do anything for her except take her money, That sounds familiar, doesn't it? She was so embarrassed that she didn't even approach Jesus directly—but went for a touch of his robe. And with that, she was healed!

Jesus notices that something had happened—and when they sorted it all out, he was very glad that she had had such faith and had received healing. He didn't scold her, or say she wasn't worth it, which would have been the prevailing attitude back then.

The little girl's case was more than healing—it was raising someone from the dead. Now in this portion of the story, the Scripture is different from the novel, which has lots of embellishments. In the Scripture, Jesus took the little girl by the hand, and then the miracle happened.

Once again, Jesus saw this little girl as a real person. Maybe her society saw her as “just a kid” or “just a girl” or “too young to be a very good worker.” But Jesus saw her as a person, a daughter beloved by a father and a mother, a child of God.

That is so wonderful. No one is beneath Jesus' notice, or care, or love and concern. That goes for us too! That goes for everyone!

I like to take that specific example from Jesus' life, and apply it to the church. I believe that every person who comes into a church should receive what Jesus has to offer: welcome, love, acceptance. We don't say, oh no, you're too old, or too young. We don't turn away males, or females. We don't reject anyone on the basis of how much money they have or don't have, or any other reason.

We follow Jesus' example, and welcome all comers.

Of course, there are some times when what we need to offer is correction and guidance, and that's in keeping with Jesus' example, too. Even in this story, he shooed away the folks bent on turning a tragedy into a dramatic hullabaloo.

So, what I'd like to challenge all of us to do is two-fold.

First, let's let ourselves experience and recognize and cherish goodness of Jesus' presence in our lives.

Second, let's follow Jesus example of holding every person as worthy of respect and care.

They are tall orders, but with Jesus' help and example, we can.

Amen.

(by Reverend Sally J. DeMasters)