Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



"Healing of the Paralytic at Capernaum," detail of stained glass (circa 1525-30), by Jan Rombouts (Metropolitan Museum of Art)



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I have never held the office of superior in my community. Nor have I aspired to. I have always been part of a supporting cast and liked it there. For one thing, it helps me read the Gospels and pinpoint those also in a supporting role. Like Mary, the mother of Christ.

One day, mother and son are enjoying themselves at a wedding, with drinks all around. Oh, happy day! That is, until the wine runs out.

Of course, it is the mother who notices and tells her son, "They have no more wine."

He gives an abrupt reply — "What's that to me? My time has not yet come."

She thinks about that one, how the time came for him to be born away from home, how there was no room in the inn, and her baby boy was born in a makeshift shelter with her arms around him and Joseph's arms around them both. She looks at him now with very great love and maybe a smile. She turns to the waiters and says, "Do whatever he tells you." Then she steps aside.

Now there are six empty ceremonial jars nearby. He tells the waiters to fill them with water, so they fill them to the brim. Then he tells them to take the jars to the head waiter. And what does he discover? Water turned into the finest wine, the likes of which no one has ever tasted before.

All because the mother of Christ saw the need and put it before her son.

Now, I have no need for water turned into wine with a word and a wave. It's the mother I hold onto, and her words directed to me: "Do whatever he tells you." And I know she is there to help me hear it and do it.

Who is the savior here? Who is the accessible one? Who hears our distress? The mother, of course.

In like manner, we turn to another supporting cast. Two of my favorite people in all of the Gospels are two no-name men. That eliminates Peter, who couldn't walk on water toward the open arms of Christ in a boat. Later, he would deny even knowing him.

With a respectful nod to Joseph, who stars in Christ's infancy, my vote for memorable goes to those two no-names who carried their comatose friend to the house where Christ was inside performing miracles. And the two friends needed one badly.

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There were crowds at the front door, so they went around to the back of the house. There, the two lifted their friend up and onto the roof and over to the spot where they could hear voices below. Then they opened the roof, just enough to lower their friend down, slowly down, until their arms gave way and they let go. There's the clue. Having carried their need as far as they could, they let go and dropped their friend right into the lap of Christ.

Here is a lesson from two Gospel no-names. Get a grip on your need, whatever it is, wherever it may be. Carry it as far as you can with every strength and ingenuity in you. Then let go.

Right into the arms of Jesus Christ.

Two sister friends of mine live this Gospel daily. Having served as teachers, principal, and director of special services, they "retired." Now, they shop food markets daily, pack boxes into their car, and drive off to the homes of people in need.

They stop near a house, carry boxes of food to the door, ring the bell, and scurry back to the car, where they lower the window and wave to those who have come out onto the porch, discovered the bonanza, and wave back to them.

And the wave continues, in every season. Somehow, the funds, let alone their energy, never wanes. They are quick to say that the long arm of our community helps them.

And it's a good thing because on their way home, they stop at another family. Same run, ring, drop, retreat and wave.

Then it's home for the day.

Not quite. Five blocks from their home, they spot Crystal, hugging herself on a street corner in the freezing cold. They stop the car, hand her a pair of mittens, and speed off with her to the nearest Subway for coffee, donuts, an Italian sub, and a gift certificate for the next meal.

She thanks them and says not to worry. She will spend the night in a nearby parking garage. Or maybe in one of the shelters.

Or maybe on a park bench, the two of them think.

They open their front door, step in, let go of the day, and ask a blessing for all people, whoever they are, wherever they may be ... dropping them into the arms of Jesus.