

Sometimes it is fairly obvious what we need. Take the cases of the two central characters in today’s Gospel — Jairus and the woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages. We know little to nothing about either of them. The man at least gets his name recorded (perhaps because he was a **“leader of the synagogue,”** which may have meant that somebody actually remembered to write down his name).

All we really we know of them is their need: Jairus has a daughter who, Mark tells us, was **“at the point of death.”** The woman **“had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years.”** In both cases, the need is both obvious and severe — if the little girl is not attended to immediately, she will die; the woman faces an eternity of suffering, since **“She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.”** (I’ve had conversations with people who have been through similar circumstances.)

When you know what you need, you take steps to get what you need, if you can. Jairus approached Jesus and asked for His assistance: **“Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.”** The woman also approached Jesus, but surreptitiously, not quite sure how her approach would be received. Both show tremendous faith in Jesus’ mercy and power: they come trusting that He not only can deal with their need, somehow He will.

That is the case with Jairus: He comes straight to Jesus, puts forth his need, and virtually insists on Jesus’ response. It is somewhat less obvious in the case of the woman, who is tentative in pushing ahead, hesitant, questioning — she would not presume to come straight up to Jesus as Jairus had; in her culture that would be unthinkable. So she **“came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak,”** Her actions said: **“I don’t know if this will work or not,”** but she was thinking, **“If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.”**

So we have here two persons of faith, both in need, both seeking the help

they need from the one source they are confident can supply what they need. The conclusion for us to draw is: Then we, too, with heartfelt thanks and solid faith, can with confidence come to Jesus and seek what we need.

I want to affirm that as true. We can come before our Lord with our needs and, with absolute confidence in His love and mercy, seek His power to meet our need. In this narrative the needs are for healing: we know the diagnosis in one case: hemorrhaging — although we are not told of the source nor the site (traditionally it has been viewed as menstrual); in the case of the little girl, we have no idea from what she is dying.

The thing with what is called “faith-healing” is not the strength of your faith, but the power of God. Neither Jairus nor the woman implied that an answer should come to their need on the basis of how badly they wanted it or believed they should have it. They looked completely and solely to Jesus — in trust that He would bring things out for the best.

What about those times when we don’t know what we need? They are far more frequent than the times of obvious need. Indeed, even in those times when we think we know exactly what we need, we may be far off base. Job certainly “knew” that he needed relief from his suffering. Paul knew as well that his “thorn in the flesh” should be removed. In both those cases, God showed them that their deprivation was what they truly needed. I don’t know anyone who, in faith, would long for such an answer.

The truth is that we rarely know what is our real need. We often know what we want. We often come up with solutions to the problems we face. But meeting our needs is not the same thing as solving a problem.

A case in point:

You start out on a trip next Sunday, Independence Day — a trip to the beach or a park where you intend to spend the day relaxing, swimming, barbecuing, meeting with family and friends (of course you’re planning this outing to take place *after* church!).

You go about a half-mile, and the temperature gauge on your vehicle begins to climb, slowly at first, then quite rapidly until you see steam billowing out of the front hood (or, as they say in England, “the bonnet”). All the service (notice, I said “service” not “gas”) stations are closed; no repairman is available. What will you do?

You’re only a half-mile from home, so you hoof it home, and once in the house, you search frantically for the Yellow Pages (you have to search, because, while there is a special location where that book always *should* be; it just never is there). Then you remember: Computer! So you run to your laptop. You are looking to find that one mechanic who has decided to stay open on the holiday — you search and search page after page and you find a mechanic whose ad reads “*We are open 365 days of the year.*” Yes! One drawback — that shop is located in Westlake; you’re in Streetsboro. You scan a dozen more sites . . . you finally decide that there is no mechanic to fix your vehicle so that you can get to your holiday festivities.

“*Ah! I’ll fix it myself!*” you think. So you type in “Automobile Parts,” you look and look and — “*All right! AutoZone is open!*” It’s a mile from your house in the other direction from your vehicle — you know that all your neighbors have left for the day . . . all your friends and family are at the site you were trying to get to (in Geneva) . . . so off you walk to get the parts. What parts? Did you look to see what the problem was? Broken fan belt? Bad water pump? Timing chain snapped? Hole in the radiator? Just plain forgot to put in H₂O? Back to the car you go . . . open the hood . . . stand there and stare for ten minutes ‘cause you ain’t got a clue what you’re looking at or looking for.

What would you say was your need in that instance? Do you need a roving mechanic who happens along the street where your car is sitting idle, who pulls over, breaks out a screwdriver, and with three quick flicks of his wrist has you back on the highway heading for your outing? Is your need a new car? Do you need to take a class in auto repair?

But now, think back: Why were you heading out?

You had a day set off to relax and unwind. You had come up with the “solution” that the best way to do that was to go to this outing. Is it possible that God was showing you another alternative? Could God be telling you that what you really need is a day to contemplate, read a book, swing in a hammock? Could God be showing you that you didn’t need those six hot dogs filled with nitrates (and only God knows what else in them), along with three hamburgers with all (and I mean *all*) the fixin’s, potato salad, and pie and ice cream for dessert? Might God be keeping you from that softball or volleyball game where you annually wrench your back, twist your ankle, get over-sunned, and wind up aching and moaning for the next two weeks?

Your solution to the problem was to fix the problem. Your need might be to let the problem (your overheated car) become the occasion for the meeting of that need. We often do not know, nor do we recognize, what we truly need.

Am I saying that God is controlling every fan belt on the planet, and using His divine power to thwart our picnics and rain out our ballgames? Hmmm. He did turn water into wine . . . that was not exactly a life-or-death situation . . . He does sustain the universe by His word of power — nothing exists without His bringing it and keeping it in existence. So, yes, a fan belt is not at all beneath His attention.

But that’s not the point; here’s the point: Both Jairus and this woman [you know, I’m tired of naming him and referring to her as “this woman.”] In Greek Mark tells us that her problem was *ρύσει αίματος* (*rusei haimatos*) “a flow of blood” — so I’m going to name her (no, not Flo) “Rusei”] . . . both Jairus and Rusei came for what they thought were solutions to their problems, answers to their need: Get him to come to the house (Jairus) . . . Touch his garments (Rusei). Both wound up getting something they needed much more: an encounter with the living God, the Lord of Life. No matter what other difficulties we may face in life, that is and will remain our real and greatest need.

This is why the prophet Jeremiah expounds on how we should make use

of our time ***“The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth, to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it, to put one’s mouth to the dust (there may yet be hope), to give one’s cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults.”***

This is “good”? Not by our standards. Not according to what we think we need.

God measures differently — and though there may be many who would seek to avoid a God who allows suffering, disappointment, and grief to enter into the equation, God knows that is our need sometimes: to be brought up short from our self-adoration; to be tested like metal in the fire; to be led away from the altar of deservedness.

Jeremiah goes on: ***“For the Lord will not reject forever. Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.”*** Nor, I hasten to add, is He obligated to give abundance to anyone. This is the great myth of need: we have become inundated with the idea that we deserve nothing but blessings and should — nay, *must!* — have removed from our doorstep all manner of difficulties.

Our need is not to avoid problems, not even to find solutions when problems arise. Our real and greatest need is to keep asking: *“Where is God in this? What is He doing to which I must submit and/or conform? How can I be positioned by this for a life-changing encounter with Him?”* Because in every moment, every circumstance, every situation — He is, and will ever be, our real and greatest need.

Amen.