

Crossing Paths with Jesus
1 Kings 17:17-24
Luke 7:11-17

The pain of losing a child is a difficult burden to bear. And for those of you who have experienced it first hand know how painful it is. For the woman in this story, her whole world was falling apart. Her husband had already died and now her only son had found the same fate. She was devastated. The world would treat her without respect. As a woman she had no means to own a home and no social security to secure her future. The hope and security she had in the life of her son had been stolen away with his death. Surrounded by friends and community this grieving mother follows her son being carried out of town to the tomb where he would be prepared for burial.

Jesus and his disciples happen to be coming into town and crossed paths with the grieving widow, the crowd, and her dead son. Seeing the woman's pain, Jesus had compassion for her and told her not to weep. He then approached her son and touched the mat he was being carried on. He tells him to rise and the dead man sat up and began to speak. Jesus then gives the man to his mother and amazement consumes everyone.

The text goes on to say that the people glorified God because, "God has looked favorable on his people!" Another way to translate this line is, "God has visited his people!" We know that our lives can be changed by the encounters we have with others. The same is true when we encounter God. When our paths cross with Jesus, great things can happen. These intersections, or God-moments can hit us when we least expect it. I am sure the woman was not expecting her son to rise from the dead, but when she crossed paths with Jesus, her whole world changed and her son was brought back to life.

God-moments can happen at any time and in any place. Unexpected blessings and blessings that come from hardships can change our lives forever. A letter from a long lost friend, a song that sparks a favorable memory or a friendly encounter with a stranger can motivate us in positive ways. Sometimes the God-moments we encounter are like a banner sprawled across our front lawn, and other times God-moments are so subtle that we fail to notice them.

But in order to recognize and receive God's blessings, we have to be moving toward Jesus and not away from him. The mother in this story never would have crossed paths with Jesus had she not been heading toward him with her eyes open. It is much easier to find Jesus when we are looking for him and headed toward him.

If you've ever seen the children's book, "Where's Waldo?" then you've probably had fun trying to locate Waldo on a two-page busy and detailed city scene in the midst of a hundred or more other characters. Waldo almost always looks the same with his white and red striped long sleeve shirt and blue pants. But it takes two things to find him: First, you have to know what he looks like, and second, you have to make the effort to search for him. But he is there on the page, so eventually, those who look for him will find him.

The same is true for God-moments. First we have to know what we are looking for. But this is a little tricky because God-moments don't have just one disguise that is easily recognizable. God-moments are only recognizable when we are in relationship with God. Second, we have to keep an eye out for them. I am always amazed when I read a scripture text and then later something in that text will stand out vividly through some experience I have or encounter I come across. It's as if God is saying look and you will see, and read God's Word to know what to look for. Consider this example:

A construction crew was building a new road through a rural area, knocking down trees as it progressed. A superintendent noticed that one tree had a nest of birds who couldn't yet fly and he marked the tree so that it would not be cut down. Several weeks later the superintendent came back to the tree. He got into a bucket truck and was lifted up so that he could peer into the nest. The fledglings were gone. They had obviously learned to fly. The superintendent ordered the tree cut down. As the tree crashed to the ground, the nest fell clear and some of the material that the birds had gathered to make the nest was scattered about. Part of it was a scrap torn from a Sunday school pamphlet. On the scrap of paper were these words: He careth for you.¹

God's care is demonstrated in the compassion and care we receive in times of need. Jesus had compassion for this grieving mother and restored her son's life. This encounter with Jesus changed her life and caused witnesses to lift their hearts and glorify God. Out of tragedy came blessing. This is what happened in the town of Enterprise, Alabama.

In this southern town in Coffee County, Alabama, they have erected a monument to an insect, honoring a Mexican boll weevil. In 1895 the boll weevil began to destroy the major crop of the county, cotton. In desperation to survive the farmers had to diversify, and by 1919 the county's peanut crop was many times what cotton had been at its height. In that year of prosperity a fountain and monument were built. The inscription reads: "In profound appreciation of the boll weevil and what it has done as the herald of prosperity this monument was erected by the citizens of Enterprise, Coffee County, Alabama." Out of a time of struggle and crisis had come new growth and success. Out of adversity had come blessing.²

So too come God-moments of blessings when our paths cross with Jesus. Let us therefore walk toward Jesus, growing in our faith, reading God's Word, and keeping our eyes open so that we can recognize God's blessings and like the community surrounding the widow and her son, lift our hearts in gratitude to God! Amen.

Prayer:

Most gracious Lord,
Open our eyes that we may see the glorious blessings that surround us. Teach us to see your glory in everything we encounter and things big and small. Give us insight to your gracious ways and instill praiseful hearts in each one of our lives. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

¹ http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/god_care_of.htm

² James S. Hewett. *Illustrations Unlimited*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Pub. 1988. P. 263.