

He's been in a comic strip, a television series, several video games, and at least eight live action big-budget movies have been made about him. A musical featuring him even opened in New York back in 2011 -- the most expensive musical in Broadway history. He's *The Amazing Spider-Man*.

Now, you would think that nothing more could be said about one of Marvel Comics' most well-known superheroes. We all know his story: High school student Peter Parker is bitten by a radioactive spider and gains super strength, as well as the ability to stick to walls and ceilings. He invents a device that enables him to shoot webs and swing high above the city streets. Wearing a Spider-Man costume, he goes out to fight criminals, including super-villains such as the Green Goblin and Doctor Octopus. He's Spidey. The Web-Slinger. The Wall-Crawler.

Peter Parker is a compelling character, persecuted by the very community that he's trying to protect. City authorities are suspicious of him, not knowing if he's a vigilante or a criminal, and the local newspaper launches a campaign against the "Spider-Man menace." In addition, Parker is awkward with girls, teased by his peers and accident-prone -- in short, he's a normal young man who's easy for us to relate to despite his superpowers. We've watched him grow up from high school student, to college student, to married high school teacher, to single, freelance photographer. What more can be said? Seems like his story has been told over and over again in a variety of forms.

Like Peter Parker, Jesus has a similar problem in the sense that we think we know all about him. He has appeared in books, television shows and movies -- maybe even a board game or two. *Jesus Christ Superstar* is one of the most memorable musicals of the last 40 years. And In a poll of U.S. residents conducted by Christian Post, Jesus was second in popularity only to Abraham Lincoln.

Anyway, on top of all of this, we're drawn to Jesus because he's a suffering servant, persecuted by the community that he's trying to help. Jewish scribes

accuse him of blasphemy and they question him for eating with tax collectors and sinners. Pharisees look down on him for healing on the Sabbath, and conspire with the authorities to destroy him. Like Peter Parker, Jesus is always being attacked for doing good.

But maybe, just maybe, there's something we have missed in our many experiences with Jesus. Perhaps it's time for us to reboot the gospel and discover "the untold story." Mark tells us that when Jesus crosses in a boat to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, a great crowd gathers around him because rumors are flying about the Amazing Jesus-Man. Imagine the buzz in the crowd: One person says that she saw Jesus remove an unclean spirit from a man, leaving everyone amazed and saying, "What is this? A new teaching -- with authority!"

Another says he watched Jesus heal a paralytic and reports that all who witnessed it were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!" A third tells of how a demoniac was healed by Jesus, and then the man "went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed."

Again and again, Mark reports that people are *amazed*. The Amazing Jesus-Man. But here's the untold story of what Jesus is doing for the people of Galilee: All of his mighty acts are intended to save them. Whether they're facing evil, illness, destruction, or death, Jesus wants to come to the rescue. In fact, the Greek word for "save" (*sozo*) pops up again and again in the gospel of Mark, although it's usually reduced to bland English words such as "heal," "cure" or "get well." What amazes the crowds is that Jesus is working to rescue them, to save them.

This morning, the first person to approach Jesus in our story is Jairus, a of leader of the synagogue in Capernaum. Although you might think that he would be in league with the authorities who are anxious to stamp out the "Jesus menace," Jairus is desperate! He falls at Jesus' feet and begs him repeatedly, "My little

daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." That's how the New Revised Standard Version translates it. What the Greek actually says is that Jairus wants Jesus to lay hands on her, "so that she may be *saved*, and live."

This event was beyond extraordinary. The leader of a synagogue was an important man. For one man to prostrate himself before another was a sign of absolute subservience. For a religious ruler to do that demonstrated that Jesus was nearly without equal because of his reputation as a healer. So, on that day more than most, Jesus is a man with a mission. You can picture him striding purposefully down the street, his disciples calling out, "Make way, make way for Rabbi Jesus!"

So, Jesus goes with Jairus, and a large crowd follows him and presses in on him. And just as we have seen in the Spider-Man movies and comics, one challenge is never enough -- the superhero goes to save one person and is unexpectedly pulled aside to save another. A woman who has been suffering with hemorrhages for 12 years comes up behind Jesus in the crowd and touches his cloak, believing, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Again, the English translation is misleading. She says to herself, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be saved."

That's the untold story. No doubt, this woman really needs to be rescued. "As a result of her physical condition of unarrestable hemorrhaging, she should -- according to the Levitical purity code -- be perpetually segregated." And she was a victim of abuse by quack doctors as well -- Mark tells us that she "had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse." The woman reaches out, touches the cloak of Jesus, and immediately her bleeding stops. She is healed of her disease and rescued from a miserable life of pain, social isolation, and exploitation. She is saved by the Amazing Jesus-Man!

But wait. Like Peter Parker when his "Spidey-sense" begins to tingle, Jesus has a feeling that power has flowed out of him. Jesus spins around in the crowd and says, "Who touched my clothes?" His disciples look at him as though he's crazy, since a mob of people are pressing in on him from every side. But Jesus searches the crowd for the person he knows is out there, until the woman finally confesses what she's done. Notice, he doesn't rebuke her, but instead he says, "Daughter, your faith has made you well." Actually, what he really says is, "Daughter, your faith has *saved* you."

When we reboot the gospel and hear the untold story, we discover that the Amazing Jesus-Man has come to save us from anything that can damage, divide, or destroy us. And he does this not only through his unique superpowers, but through our willingness to trust him. Notice that Jesus says to the woman, "Your faith has saved you."

It is her willingness to trust Jesus that permits the healing power of God to flow into her. Jesus says that her faith is the source of her healing, rather than his clothes, or even his touch. She's saved by her willingness to believe that Jesus is her hero sent by God to do a rescue mission on Earth. After commending her for her faith, Jesus says, "Go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

The scene then shifts, and some people come from the house of Jairus to tell him that his daughter is dead. But overhearing what they say, Jesus says to Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe." In other words, he's challenging Jairus to trust with the very same conviction that the bleeding woman had just shown. Jesus cuts through a commotion of people weeping and wailing loudly, and enters the house. He asks them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping."

The crowd responds by laughing at him, like the abusive high school classmates who mock poor Peter Parker. But Jesus kicks them out and gathers the

child's mother and father, along with his disciples. He takes the girl by the hand and says to her, "Little girl, get up!" And Mark tells us that immediately the girl gets up and begins to walk about. Jesus saves her not only from illness, but from death itself. And the witnesses? Not surprisingly, they are "overcome with amazement!" After all they have just seen The Amazing Jesus-Man save the day.

Now, as thrilling as it may be to watch Spider-Man at the movies, or play one of his video games, the Web-Slinger has nothing on Jesus! His wall-crawling is pure fantasy, and his web-shooters are the stuff of comic-book fiction. Jesus, on the other hand, is the one with the power to save us, and this fact should not remain an untold story.

Jesus rescues us from sin through the gift of forgiveness. He saves us by working for healing in our bodies, minds and spirits. He breaks our social isolation by giving us a place in his community of faith. He rescues us from death through his promise of eternal life with God. We do not have to fear, because Jesus saves! He saves us whether we are white, black, male, female, transgender, gay, straight, rich, or poor....

And as we come to believe in him through the power of the Holy Spirit, let's live out our faith, and let's tell the true story of our ultimate super hero, the man who we confess to be our Savior, our Messiah, Christ Jesus our Lord! Thanks be to God. Amen.