



Series 1: Jesus, disability and discrimination

6 The Second Impression: Do Something... anything

By Craig Millward

I remember it as though it were yesterday. I was on a packed London tube, had just finished an article from my New Statesman magazine and was trying to insert it into a slot in my rucksack. But not having any thumbs was making it a tricky exercise and I was feeling frustrated and a little embarrassed. Sitting opposite me was a woman who was bending a little toward me and I was doing my normal self-reliant thing - trying to ignore her whilst being determined to demonstrate how competent I was.

Suddenly she spoke and reached out her hand. "Can I help you with that?" she asked, at the same time as she opened my rucksack and slid the magazine in. Seconds later she got off the train at her stop. About 30 seconds later a man next to me nudged me. "Can I ask you a question?", he asked. "Sure, I replied". He looked at me: "Was that helpful or not?"

I paused. And for once I knew what to say. "I have a choice", I replied. "I can either take offence, which is always my choice, or I can see it as a positive human connection that makes her day, and my day, brighter. I choose the latter."

The fact is that, faced with such a scenario, there is no right thing to do. And most people therefore do nothing. Most of the time I do nothing. Yet, surely, grace should lead us to offer to meet a need when it is right in front of us.

Can I suggest that you take a minute, right now, to decide what you would do if you were that woman faced with me struggling to open my rucksack. There is no right response. Just rule out the wrong ones and determine what you are going to say or do when an opportunity next presents itself to offer assistance. Then, when the time comes, you won't hesitate and a positive human connection will have been made.