

7.1.2018 Pentecost 6, Proper 8, Year B
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2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27
Psalm 130
(2 Corinthians 8:7-15)
Mark 5:21-43

...your faith has made you well; go in peace. (Mark 5:34)

Well, we run into a bit of a snag this week in our walk through the story of David. Last week, he was a boy going up against the Philistine giant, Goliath, and this week, he is a grown man, King Saul has died in battle, and David is singing a lament over Saul and Saul's son, Jonathan. There are a lot of years that we missed, so I'm going to give you a brief summary:

Saul invites David to serve him and offers his daughter in marriage.

Saul becomes jealous of David and tries to kill him on more than one occasion.

David flees from Saul and becomes a mercenary with the Philistines, of all people.

As David and his band of followers try to avoid Saul, David runs what might be described as a protection racket, offering his services to protect people from the marauding armies. For a price.

As my Old Testament professor in divinity school would write in his book "The Historical David: The Real Life of an Invented Hero," David is pretty much of a scoundrel. He murders. He causes to be murdered. He steals.

And yet. And yet.

He is beloved of God.

Jerusalem is known as the City of David because this was the place where David brought the Ark of the Covenant to reside. David is the great king, the author of many of the psalms, the forebear of Jesus.

Long before Jesus even came on the scene, the grace of God was being poured out on those who least deserved it, David being a prime example.

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The Gospel of Mark gives us a glimpse of two more people beloved of God: a leader of the synagogue and a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. They could not have been more different, from each other and from the ancient king of Israel.

Jairus is an important man. A synagogue leader had status. Position. Privilege. The idea that such a person would approach an itinerant preacher who has been wandering around Galilee is preposterous.

Well, desperation will make us to preposterous things.

His beloved daughter was sick. Dying. He had probably paid doctors and healers to restore his daughter to health without success. And so, as Jesus and his companions drew their boat to shore, he made his way to meet them.

Undoubtedly the crowds parted and allowed him through. And there, with a grief of a father for his child, he fell at Jesus's feet and begged.

Desperation will make a person do desperate things.

But while Jesus is on his way with Jairus to tend his sick daughter, we have this interlude. Mark is known for putting stories within stories. It's called the Markan Sandwich. Seriously.

And the interlude is about a woman who has been bleeding for twelve long years, the same number of years the little girl has been alive. Now, it would be bad enough to have such a malady, but in that culture, this nameless woman was cursed. The text tells us that she had tried many cures, seen many physicians, and that tells us that she could actually afford to pursue treatment. But by the time we encounter her, that is long past. She has spent everything to no avail, and then she hears that this Jesus has set foot on shore.

The woman's particular malady makes her ritually unclean according to Jewish law, and it makes anyone who comes into contact with her ritually unclean as well. That means that she is an outcast. For her to wade into a crowd is to risk abuse and condemnation. But what does she have to lose? She has no doubt been shunned by those closest to her, because such a fate as hers is surely an indication that she has sinned, that God has cursed her.

But she knows that all she needs is just a touch. Just the hem of Jesus's cloak, thinking he won't even notice. I mean, how could he know with the crowds pressing in on him as he walks with Jairus? But he does know. And he turns and asks who it was that touched him.

And the woman, like Jairus, fell at his feet.

Desperation will make one do desperate things.

She was healed. Jairus's daughter, who had died as Jesus made his way to her, was raised from the dead.

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Sometimes we just need to throw ourselves at Jesus's feet. A world seems to have been turned upside down. Children are being caged and sent alone before judges. Journalists are being targeted for violence. We lose a job. We get a scary diagnosis. We are under pressure to address all the needs of the world when we can barely keep our own heads above water.

So we throw ourselves at Jesus's feet. It doesn't matter if you are an absolute scoundrel like David. It doesn't matter if you have the status of a synagogue leader. It doesn't matter if you're sick and all alone.

Because that's how God's grace works. It is not about us. It is about God. God does not love you because you are good. God loves you because GOD is good. It is the nature of God to love, and that love extends to us and to all of creation.

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One night earlier this week, Tim and I went to see the epic Mr. Rogers documentary, "Won't You Be My Neighbor." I have been a Mr. Rogers fan since watching it with my own children when they were small. Yes, I always thought it was a little hokey, a little too gentle to be real, but, as we have learned in the years since and in this documentary, Mr. Rogers was the real deal. Gentle and kind and utterly on the side of children.

I somehow missed the incidents when certain members of the media went on the attack against Mr. Rogers, accusing him of creating entitlement in children and young people by telling them how special they are. These critics claimed that young folk had learned from this that they didn't have to do anything, didn't have

to produce anything, to be liked just the way they are. To be special just for being themselves. Those blaming Mr. Rogers insisted that a person is judged on production and contribution and work.

I believe they missed the point entirely. Mr. Rogers wasn't saying to anyone not to pursue whatever work inspired them, to grow up and be productive members of society. No, he was saying *that's not where our worth lies*.

It should come as no surprise then that Mr. Rogers was a Presbyterian minister, and all he was telling these children was about the grace of God. Unearnable and unlosable. God is going to love us regardless of anything we do on our own. In the words of Mr. Rogers, God might just be saying, "I like you just the way you."

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There are so many needs in the world vying for our attention, and it is so easy to get overwhelmed. I'm here to tell you that God does not judge you on what you do or do not do. You cannot earn your way into heaven by what you have or have not done. Grace is completely undeserved, unmerited and lavishly given to those of us who may be scoundrels, or who may be posh, or who may be broken. In God's eyes, we're all the same, saints and sinners, each and every one of us.

So don't be afraid to do the preposterous. To risk embarrassment or rejection or failure, because God will meet you where you are and show you love and forgiveness and mercy beyond all imagining.

Yes, desperation will make one do desperate things, but hear these words: "Jesus said...do not fear, only believe" (Mark 5:36).