

“Who Deserves Mercy?”

6th Sunday after Pentecost Pr8/L13 – July 1, 2018 – Mark 5:21-43/B

Grace and peace to you from God, the Creator, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Who deserves mercy? That’s a question we should all be asking ourselves these days. And then, another: How far out of the life you had planned for yourself would you be willing to go to do mercy? In Mark, chapter 4, just prior to today’s story, we can read the Drama of the Gerasene Demoniac, a mad man who Jesus and his disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee to meet. And there was mercy. For a Gentile, for a crazy old loon, for a child of God, just like us.

Today we are treated to a “Markan Sandwich” sort of a “buy 1 get 1 free” deal where you think there is only one story unfolding, but you really get two in tandem. For today we hear about Jesus, feeding soul and body, in two entwined encounters glued together by the number 12 (a Biblical number of completion; a number that indicates wholeness is going on.)

Jesus has just returned from “the other side” and enters into **Story, Part 1**. Here, he encounters Jairus’ – a leader of the synagogue (think, Council member) – who has come seeking healing for his daughter, who happens to be 12 years old. Most fathers, when asked what they want for their little girl would say, *I just want her to be happy*. But today the circumstances have changed. Now the answer is, *I want her to be made well. I want her to live*.

At this point, a nameless woman enters and we are interrupted by **Story, Part 2**. She has spent the past 12 years in exile of sorts. Imagine being excluded from your family, your friends, your people since 2006!) Inconceivable. Now, the popular belief of the time was that magical powers were possessed by holy men. So, after bleeding for 12 long years, plus *being bled* by all of those who had treated her, she reaches out to touch Jesus – well, not really Jesus, but just the tiniest bit of the hem of his garment. Imagine the indignation of crawling around the feet and legs of a crowd of people, but then she finally connects her fingers and his clothing and yes! She knows instantly in her body that she is healed.

Now, before you think she is trembling because she will be found out, consider how you might react to miraculously being healed. Overcome by awe and shaking in her skin, Jesus identifies her and hears her story. Then, making her wholeness complete – this unnamed woman who is forever identified as the Woman with a Hemorrhage, or the Bleeding Woman, finally gets a name, and a place as glorious in her village as being a child of Jairus: Jesus names her *daughter*. She is healed. Restored, She’s **family**.

So lest we forget **Story, Part 1**, back to Jairus’ daughter – who Jesus restores to life. While people are wailing one cue and the crowd is laughing, Jesus is chiding Jairus, *do not fear, only believe*; then he raises the child (in one of the few passages in the New Testament where Jesus speaks in his native dialect of Aramaic) and when she begins to walk around, he calls for them to give her food. Why is that important? Because Ghosts don’t eat. Dead people, don’t need food. But the living do.

I met Mary at our recent Synod Assembly in a workshop on short term missions. Not unlike our characters today, she comes from a tiny little village in Benton and Pettis counties called Ionia (or Iona) Mo. – all .15 miles of it, which listed 88 residents in 2010 census.

Mary has lived there all her life, and she has always been a Lutheran. She has a brother, also Lutheran, and she married her husband even though he didn’t have much use for the church. Her family are farmers, and so she and her husband are farmers as well.

Awhile back, her husband and her brother were working the field when her brother's boy fell off a truck and was run over by tractor that was following them - the tractor that was driven by Mary's husband. But what might have been a family-splitting life-crushing event, became a story of love and mercy. Her brother came to their house that very night, and forgave her husband, even made it clear that this would be the thing that drew him in, that helped him know that no matter what, he belonged to the family. Her husband told Mary there and then, that if a man could behave like that because of his faith, than that's the kind of faith he wanted to have. And that's when Mary's husband joined the church.

There is amazing power in making people whole again. Forgiveness, compassion, love and mercy are not just words, they are the power of God - and - they are the *only* answer to sin and fear. Mercy is what Jesus does. Over and over again. For Jesus, it's never about status or wealth or position or fear or possession or disease. It's about life. It's about wholeness. It's about restoration. It's about **relationship**.

Mercy. Forgiveness. Compassion. Love. These are the attributes of God in which we are privileged to share, should **we** choose to live out the Kingdom of God. We know where God stands, it's clear in our Old Testament reading tis morning from Lamentations:

*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning...*

*Although the LORD causes grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
for (wait for it)
the LORD does NOT willingly afflict or grieve anyone.*

Jairus and the woman had "nothing to learn" - only an invitation for the life that Jesus changed to become a *changed life* each day for the rest of their lives. A changed Jairus in the synagogue; a changed woman in the village; a changed child growing up. Each of them received God's gifts. None of them deserved it. And yet they approached Jesus believing, and humble. Jairus, falling at Jesus feet; the woman, creeping up through the crowd from behind.

And what was The World's response to a life lived connected to God with every breath, every thought, every faithful step? What was The World's response to Jesus and his followers? What will The World's response be to you? It's not pretty: they were skeptical, and they laughed at him; they chided him, they didn't believe him. They just could not comprehend why a rabbi, a Jew, would *willingly* become unclean to touch a bleeding woman, and a dead child. But God knew. And God smiled.

No one deserves mercy, God just loves us enough to extend it. That's what Jesus did every day he walked upon the earth. He offered mercy to those who do not deserve it. Today, Jesus just keeps calling out to us, *follow me*, because now **WE** are his body in the world. And if we dare to follow him, we, too, are on our way to the cross, giving our lives for someone else. Someone who might not deserve our sacrifice.

Undeserved mercy - It's the classic definition of what we call **Grace**. Amen.