

## Sunday closest to June 8

Proper 5

Year B

RCL



1 Samuel 8:4-11, 11:14-15

Psalm 130

Mark 3:20-35

### The Collect

## The Collect

O God, from whom all good proceeds: Grant that by your inspiration we may think those things that are right, and by your merciful guiding may do them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

1 Samuel 8:4-11, 11:14-15

All the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, “You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.” But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to govern us.” Samuel prayed to the LORD, and the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”

So Samuel reported all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”

But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, “No! but we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.”

Samuel said to the people, “Come, let us go to Gilgal

and there renew the kingship.” So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they sacrificed offerings of well-being before the LORD, and there Saul and all the Israelites rejoiced greatly.

Psalm 130

*De profundis*

- 1 Out of the depths have I called to you, O LORD;  
LORD, hear my voice; \*  
let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.
- 2 If you, LORD, were to note what is done amiss, \*  
O Lord, who could stand?
- 3 For there is forgiveness with you; \*  
therefore you shall be feared.
- 4 I wait for the LORD; my soul waits for him; \*  
in his word is my hope.
- 5 My soul waits for the LORD,  
more than watchmen for the morning, \*  
more than watchmen for the morning.
- 6 O Israel, wait for the LORD, \*  
for with the LORD there is mercy;
- 7 With him there is plenteous redemption, \*  
and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

**2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1**

Just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—“I believed, and so I spoke”—we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Mark 3:20-35

The crowd came together again, so that Jesus and his disciples could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.



“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

## SERMON

Have you been following the stuff going on in Pike County? Some guy from way up the holler has been holding – I guess you'd call them tent revival meetings – and hundreds of people are showing up. Sometimes you can't get in or out of the parking lot for the people. Now, he's started doing “healings”. People with disabilities, and this is the part that particularly concerns me, people with mental impairments, are flocking to him. He lays hands on them, a great hoot goes out, and a “cure” is announced by the people.

As you can imagine, the Pike County Ministerial Association is not thrilled with this. A lot of the things he is reported to have said don't agree with the teaching of the Main Line churches and some of the more fundamentalist pastors have even said that he's demon-possessed. The mental health people in Pike County are

concerned because his teachings seem to indicate that magic can cure mental illness. They are seriously not happy about that. The whole thing is stirring people up and dividing the community!

The latest word is from his family, who are very concerned about his sanity. They've actually been trying to take him by force and get him the help he needs before he harms himself or others. Despite their efforts, he has now disowned his family, claiming only those who come to his revivals as his true family.

And there it is: a retelling of our Gospel passage, but set in Pike County. How did you react to it? Did you listen to the reports of healings with skepticism? Maybe you didn't form a judgment at all, but just wrote it off as something people in Pike County might do. Whatever your reaction, the question raised is this: is there room in 21<sup>st</sup> Century understanding for the Holy Spirit, or is

our commitment to an unexceptional world, one in which miracles just don't happen, so strong that accounts like this are automatically written off? Come to that, was there room in 1<sup>st</sup> Century understanding for such a thing? Doesn't appear that there was. Even Jesus' family thought he was nuts.

When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.”

My sources tell me that the Greek word for “restrain” in this passage means to take by force. This was serious business, indeed. The people in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century were just as committed to an unexceptional, predictable and unsurprising world as are we.

Why? Why do we pray so earnestly, “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”, then get suspicious when faced with the exceptional actions of the Holy

Spirit? Why are we so much more comfortable confining God safely away in heaven than we are celebrating His presence in our world?

My old law partner, now a judge, has a distinct preference for doing things “the regular way”, whether we're talking about the right way to cook green beans, or the wording of a legal document. (Particularly on the issue of green beans. Don't get me started.) Jeff sensibly wants things done “the regular way”. There's little room in the law for flights of fancy, but such a preference serves us poorly in our relationship with God. Our God is God of the exceptional. When made to choose between the exceptional and the unexceptional, we are most comfortable with the latter, so if we hear of some guy in Pike county or Capernaum doing healings, our go-to position is that he's nuts and so are the people who are attending his revivals. Unless the person doing

the miracles is Jesus. Then, we normalize what should shake us to our core. We accept the account of a very visibly dead man raised from the dead without the slightest sign of surprise. It's a Jesus thing. Even after all this time, the stories of Jesus should raise the hair on the back of your neck. You must NEVER housebreak them! You must labor to protect their unexceptional essence.

This preference for living in an unsurprising world seems built into our very genes. Someplace in the darkness of our makeup, there is a voice demanding that we live in an unexceptional world, one like everybody else. That dark voice was the moving force behind the demand for a king which the elders presented to Samuel.

All the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint

for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.”

That's what we need – a strong king to protect us and lead us to success and safety. Someone we can look at, and trust to do the right thing even, and maybe particularly, when it means that we turn our backs on God. Remember, these same people had been led up to then by Samuel, the Prophet of the Lord.

But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, “No! but we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.”

Why in this world would I make up an outlandish Pike County healer in order to present you this Gospel account? The answer is that I worry that we have normalized the life and death of Jesus so completely to fit it into our unexceptional world without causing upset

that we have missed the point entirely. Know this, church: JESUS CAME TO CREATE UPSET. Jesus came to inject the exceptional into our death-ruled unexceptional world. It is we who have converted the earth-shifting presence of Jesus in our world into business as usual. We must stop doing that. Now. Jesus never was and never is “business as usual”. There is NOTHING unexceptional about Jesus. The church is not the place to run and hide from the issues of the day. The church is where we commune with God Himself to be strengthened and gain His direction to go about His business in the world.

It is our love of an unexceptional world which stops us, time and again.

Samuel prayed to the LORD, and the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you,



but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you.

God brings the exceptional into our world, then we fear, and reject Him, so strong is our love for the unexceptional. We learn from John's Gospel

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Yet, we arm our border patrols with military weapons and find it acceptable to separate children and infants from the parents who were fleeing violence and horrors in their own countries because we fear them. If we loved them, we'd find better ways to accomplish our goals. It is the job of our churches to open a way into our unexceptional world through which the exceptional presence of the Holy Spirit can enter.

Be about your Father's business, church. Be about  
your Father's business.

AMEN

## BENEDICTION

God's house is not an unexceptional resting spot safe from the conflicts of the world. God's house is the entry point for the exceptional power of love to enter the world, and God's people are the transmitters of that love. Jesus's command to follow him is a command to align our loves and longings with his – to want what God wants, to desire what God desires, to hunger and thirst after God and crave a world where he is all in all – a vision encapsulated by the shorthand “the kingdom of God”.<sup>1</sup>

Be about your Father's business, church.

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

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<sup>1</sup> James K.A. Smith “You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit” © 2016, James K.A. Smith

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Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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