

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Sunday closest to June 29

Proper 8

Year B

RCL



2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Psalms 130

Mark 5:21-43

The Collect

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2 Corinthians 8:7-15¹

As you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you – so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something – now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may

¹ The issue being discussed is the collection of funds for the saints in Jerusalem, as understood after the counsel of Jerusalem

be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written,

“The one who had much did not have too much,
and the one who had little did not have too
little.”

Psalm 130 Page 784, BCP

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 morn-
ing.

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.

Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus² came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged 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.” He went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages³ for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on

² He’s a big shot

³ cf. Lev. 15:19-33. Her flow of blood made her ritually unclean and untouchable. She must overcome social and ritual boundaries to approach and touch Jesus. She’s a nobody.

you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'⁴” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”⁵

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?”⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” And immediately the girl got up and began to walk

4 Although the woman, acting merely on Jesus' reputation, was healed, Jesus' disciples continue to be ignorant of His power. They provide an obstacle to public disclosure of the miracle by wondering at Jesus' claim that someone had touched Him.

5 It is her faith, not magical emanations from Jesus or His clothes, which has made her well

6 Now the messengers provide the obstruction. Jesus advises faith, as in the previous healing.

about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

SERMON

The unofficial nick-name of the state of Missouri is “The Show Me State”. This may come from an 1899 speech by Congressman Willard Vandiver who declared that:

“I come from a country that raises corn and cotton, cockleburs and Democrats, and frothy eloquence neither convinces nor satisfies me. I’m from Missouri, and you have got to show me.”

Whatever else might be wrong with Missouri, they have this much right. If I am to teach anything, I must do it by example, not by rhetoric. That's such a fundamental thing that it has even entered our language. If you're going to instruct someone on how to do something, you say you'll SHOW them how. How many of the ladies have had the experience of giving someone a recipe only to be told that, “It didn’t turn out like yours”. Yet, when you SHOW them how you do it, it

turns out perfectly? Or how many of the men have tried to advise someone on some issue of maintenance or something, then gotten frustrated and said, “Oh, come on. I’ll show you?” Today, I want to show you that the Gospels are four individual accounts, each with its own point of view, and how to read them with integrity. Folks that try to mush all four Gospels into one honking big quarry where they can go dig for verses that agree with whatever point they are trying to make read without understanding. Instead of hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, they wind up with a collection of corn, cotton and cockleburs.

So, what are some of the differences in the Gospels? The time of writing and the community to which they were addressed are big differences. Mark’s Gospel is the earliest. John’s is the latest. John’s Gospel is addressed to a community of believers at the end of the first centu-

ry who have had more than two generations to think through the implications of Jesus' presence upon the earth. They are also struggling through the painful separation of church from synagogue, with hard feelings on both sides. Mark's Gospel is addressed to people about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem who have not had the time or tools to process what happened, and thus don't have the language we take for granted with which to talk about Jesus. John explains Jesus to a community who has had time to digest the remarkable appearance of God's Own Son upon the earth. Mark shows a community who are just becoming aware that something completely unforeseen has happened to the world and they have no idea how to relate to it. It's no good trying to explain what has happened to them. They need to be shown. Mark's is the Missouri Gospel.

I recall a discussion from a class I taught some years

ago. I wanted us to get a feel for how we all understood Jesus, just as Mark is trying to do for his readers. “Who is Jesus?” I asked.

“The Son of God”, one student replied.

“OK...what does that mean?” I asked.

“It means He’s the Messiah,” was the answer.

“And who is this Messiah?” I asked.

“Jesus!” came the answer from all the class.

We need to do better than that. We need to understand what Mark is showing us and Mark is kind enough to set it out in his first sentence:

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ,
the Son of God.

The passage we have today, and, indeed all of Mark, is intended by Mark to SHOW us who Jesus is. Keep that in the back of your mind this year. Mark is showing us who Jesus Christ is. Everything he writes is in pursuit

of that goal. With that in mind, let's look at the passage today, and see what Mark is showing us. I think you'll be surprised, because it is going to disagree with something you have thought about Jesus all your life. Let's begin.

You may remember that last year we spoke of intercalation – Mark's way of starting one story, then interrupting it with another, finishing that story, then finishing the first story. We saw that in the cursing of the fig tree, where the story of the fig tree served as a frame around the story of Jesus' closing down the Temple. This passage is a bit like that. We start off with the surprising arrival of a Synagogue official named Jairus. Mark tells us that Jairus

... fell at his feet and begged 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.”

Jairus is an important man. He's leader of a Synagogue and sufficiently famous that we know his name. This is not a man, one would suppose, who is comfortable with begging, but here he is, on his face before someone he understands to be a miracle worker, begging for the life of his daughter. Well, maybe Mark is showing us that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is a miracle worker. We'll see as the stories develop.

Jesus agreed to go with Jairus, and a great crowd followed along to see what will happen. Somewhere in that crowd was a woman. She is not a big shot. We don't know her name. She has had "an issue of blood" for twelve years. We live in America. We don't understand what that means. The people of Jesus' time knew well what it meant. Leviticus 15 specifies:

²⁵If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her impurity, or if she

has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, for all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness; as in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean.²⁶ Every bed on which she lies during all the days of her discharge shall be treated as the bed of her impurity; and everything on which she sits shall be unclean, as in the uncleanness of her impurity.²⁷ Whoever touches these things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening.

This woman was a complete social outcast. If you even touched her clothing, you became unclean until you could launder your clothes, take a bath and even then you were unclean until the evening came. That means that until the laundering and bathing were done, and for the rest of the day, anyone touching YOU became unclean and they would have to go through the same purification. Don't you know that her life for the past twelve years has been a real basket full of puppies?

Two people have approached Jesus for a miracle. One is a big shot with a desperately ill daughter. Another is a social outcast who is ritually unclean, and by that uncleanliness excluded from contact with the community. Here we have the answer to that first question, is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, a miracle worker? Mark's answer is "No". Mark is showing us that Jesus is not a miracle worker. Surprising, huh? Bet you thought He was a miracle worker. That's only because 2,000 years later, we tend to read without understanding. A miracle worker is someone who does some hocus-pocus, usually for pay, that restores, it is hoped, health. In this intercalation, Jesus does nothing. He is on his way to the house of Jairus to see the desperately ill daughter. Behind him and unknown to Him, an unnamed woman and outcast from the community, creeps up.

She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

The cloak was Jesus’ most outer garment, furthest from him. That is what she touched, and she immediately felt that she was healed. This is not how miracle workers are supposed to behave. Miracle workers work miracles. Jesus worked nothing. He didn’t even see the woman approach Him. What is Mark showing us? That Jesus’ clothes are magical?

Jesus is quick to scotch that idea. He demanded to know who touched Him.

But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

The woman hasn't been cured by magical emanations from Jesus' clothes, or by some hocus-pocus Jesus performed. Her faith and certainty was that Jesus was special, unique, unheard of. Jesus was something she could not explain in words, but she was sure that even to touch Him would bring healing. That faith made her well.

It also took some time. I can imagine Jairus, sweating and fidgeting while this inner story played out, thinking, "This woman is nothing! Come on! Come to my daughter!" And then, the messengers arrive.

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?"

Only someone who has lost a child can begin to connect with the anguish that tore through Jairus' heart at these words. This unimportant woman has robbed him

of what little hope he had. He must have been furious!

But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.

Now we see why Mark included the story of the woman. It was not only to add dramatic tension during which the little girl died. Mark is showing us that the unnamed woman was healed because of her belief in the power of Jesus to do so. Jesus is advising Jairus to do the same. With incredible strength of faith, despite what he had just been told, Jairus continued on with Jesus toward his house, into an impossible situation. His daughter is dead. As deprived of reasons to do so as the woman had been, Jairus put one foot in front of the other, walking with Jesus. The messengers asked, “Why trouble the teacher further?” Why, indeed?

This is the place, I think, where a lot of people get lost in the underbrush. A lot of people read this story as saying that if you believe in Jesus' power, think pure thoughts and click your heels together three times, Jesus will serve up anything you wish for. Those who take this message are confusing Jesus with Santa Claus. Just as Mark is showing us that Jesus is not a miracle worker, but something unique and unheard of, neither is Jesus Santa Claus at our beck and call for miracles. Jesus is something else, and if Mark could simply tell you what Jesus is, he would, but he can't. Instead, he shows you, in the house of Jairus.

The house of Jairus was in turmoil, people weeping and wailing loudly. Jesus stepped into the house and said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him.

Well, of course they did. They had seen the dead child. They had washed her body and laid her out on her bed. This guy has just walked in the front door and said she is only asleep. I'm surprised they didn't do worse than laugh at him.

Jesus answers their laughter by putting them all outside, except for Peter, James, John and the child's mother and father. The door to the house closed behind those who had laughed from lack of faith. The latch thudded into place on a silent room filled only with death, grief, hope, faith and someone named Jesus. The small party turned to gaze at the still form of the child upon the bed. The three disciples stood apart from the family. The girl's father stoically looked upon the body of his beloved daughter, while his wife wept quietly beside him, her hand at her mouth. Together, they watched as this Jesus, this Christ, walked to the bed, took their

daughter's cold hand and said, "Little girl, Get up!"

And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about.

Through their tears of joy and amazement, Mark gives us a second answer to the question, "Is Jesus Christ, the Son of God" a miracle worker? Mark tells us that Jesus strictly ordered them that no one should know what He had done. Jesus is able to work miracles, yes, but Jesus is not a miracle worker. A miracle worker would wish his fame to be spread widely. Mark is showing us that Jesus does not want to be known as a miracle worker. The good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God is something greater than that.

What then is this good news? Is it not that God, the Creator of all there is, God who spoke the Big Bang into existence with a word, is now walking His Creation with us, in the silent rooms filled only with death, grief,

hope, and faith which we inhabit? Mark will show us more than that before he is finished.

AMEN

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

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