

Psalm 130
Mark 5:21-43
June 30, 2024

Along the Way

From time-to-time, when looking at the lectionary texts for a given Sunday, one can run into a wall, a lack of interest or excitement about any of the choices. In such cases it is always good to be reminded that the lectionary is a human creation, a creation of the church, and is not given under the same conditions as the scriptures themselves.

Such was not the case this week. In fact, it was the opposite. All of the selections are compelling. I selected two for reading, and two not to be read, but in no way am I de-valuing the ones not read. As a matter of fact I would like to mention them briefly.

In the texts that are not read, there is the inspirational story about the friendship between David and Jonathan, son of King Saul, David's predecessor and inadvertent rival.

As a matter of fact what makes the friendship between David and Jonathan powerful *is* that Jonathan was the heir, but David would be the king. This kind of situation did not usually result in a friendship.

Both Saul and Jonathan were killed in war. At the occasion, David sings a lament that wrings the heart and lifts up the soul. It is called the lament of the bow. Just some excerpts;

“Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon thy high places!
How are the mighty fallen! . . .

Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!
In life and in death they were not divided;
they were swifter than eagles,
they were stronger than lions. . . .

How are the mighty fallen
in the midst of the battle!
Jonathan lies slain upon thy high places.

I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan;
very pleasant have you been to me;
your love to me was wonderful (get this),
passing the love of women.
How *are* the mighty fallen . . .”

Or there is the text in 2 Corinthians 8 in which Paul exhorts the church there about the offering he is collecting to take back to the home church in Jerusalem, even though they were ideological opponents some of the time; some of Paul's tormentors came from there. There had been a famine in Judea, and Paul set aside his sometimes challenging relationship with them to help out, his One Great Hour of Sharing, if you will.

For good measure he wasn't afraid to challenge the church in Corinth by speaking of the other Greek churches that were somewhat less well off than they were and had nonetheless given generously. He wasn't afraid to put them on the spot.

Then we come to the texts we have read, in the reading from the Psalter for the day, we find in the 130th psalm, one of my favorites, a prayer of longing from a position of pain; we do not know the source of the pain. Perhaps the failure of the nation, perhaps some personal situation, or the general pain of the human condition;

Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord!

2 Lord, hear my voice!
Let thy ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

3 If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with thee,
that thou mayest be feared.

5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

6 my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope *in the Lord!*
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is plenteous redemption.

8 And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.”

Such a heartfelt longing, an attitude of the heart we do well to nurture.

And then there is the great gospel text from the 5th chapter of the Gospel According to Mark. In it there are two stories, one sandwiched between the beginning and the ending of the other. It is about a mature woman and a young girl.

Jairus, we are even given the name of her father, was a leader in their church, the synagogue. He met Jesus one day with the petition that Jesus come to his house because his daughter was sick to the point of death. He believed that if Jesus touched her she would be healed. Of course, Jesus consented.

Along the way there was an older woman who had been sick for as many years as the young girl had been alive. She had a hemorrhage and had tried everything, spent all her money. Jesus was her last resort. She believed that if she touched him, or just his clothing, the hem of his robe, *she* would be healed.

There was a scene that caused a delay. It seems that when the woman touched his robe he felt the power go out of him, and he stopped to investigate. In that delay the young girl died. At the healing of the woman representatives from the household of Jairus came with the news of the girl's death. There was no longer any need to detain Jesus.

But, as you all know, Jesus continued on to the house where the girl was anyway, where he found mourners making a scene. At his insistence they were ordered to stop and told that she was only sleeping; and at that statement they laughed.

I have always wondered about this laughter. How could they go from genuine sadness to laughter so quickly, even if it was an incredulous laughter? Finally, he went in and healed the girl with the tender words, “little girl, get up.” And she did.

As is the theme of Mark’s gospel, the incident caused the news about Jesus to spread, even while he instructed them *not to tell anyone*. He told them to give her something to eat.

The gospel in a nutshell is that along the way Jesus is met, usually in the course of ordinary life, and at these encounters the remarkable happens. Healing and liberation happen. Forgiveness and reconciliation happen. But even if they seem to happen in the living out of everyday life, these are not ordinary happenings.

They point to the character of God who made the world and sent Jesus into it to liberate and to nourish, and by his sacrifice to forgive and to mend. Beware of the ordinary, for God sometimes meets us there.

Admittedly these miraculous events do not happen to everyone all the time, although they are common enough that if we are honest, we will have to admit that we have witnessed, or maybe experienced, at least one *along the way*.

They are not ends in themselves, but point us to the larger work of God, which is the redemption of the

world, and our redemption, giving meaning to *our* lives;

to our work, the contributions, no matter how small, to the good of our community and the world; to our offerings and to the sacrifices we make along the way; even to the tragic history of the world, to which we often give such high hopes and then are disappointed at its catastrophes and failures, made even more tragic because our hope was placed in the history, or in the people, rather than in God, in whom we have been told to place our trust;

who meets us nonetheless with steadfast love and plenty of redemption, and with healing and reconciling power, and who redeems *us* from all *our* iniquities.

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