

“And They Laughed At Him”
July 1, 2018

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

8:7 Now 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. 8:8 I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. 8:9 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. 8:10 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-- 8:11 now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. 8:12 For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has--not according to what one does not have. 8:13 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 8:14 your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. 8:15 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."

It's great to be back. After a week in the always beguiling Montreat and a longer week as a commissioner for the Presbytery of St. Augustine in St. Louis, my plan for the day was to directly share some about the General Assembly – you know, tell some stories about the experience. There's a lot to share. But two things happened. First, I walked in to the middle of an excellent VBS complete with its own river running through it. Then I sat down at my desk and read today's gospel lesson and bumped into the same Jesus I'd seen at work at the General Assembly. It was obvious to me, even as mentally weary as I am, that these wonderfully intertwined stories in Mark may be more reflective of the business of the church than I can be. I'd still like to share with you about the St. Louis experience so, if you want to hear all about and ask questions about General Assembly come to Sunday School next Sunday morning. There's a lot to tell.

But for today: here's the gospel from Mark 5:21-43. If you were here last Sunday you know that Jesus and his disciples got in a boat and went to the other side of the sea of Galilee. It turned out to be a rough ride to the land of the Gerasenes where they received less than a warm welcome. Today's scripture picks up the story with Jesus and the disciple return. You can follow along if you wish on page 39 in the New Testament of your pew bibles:

5:21 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. 5:22 Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet 5:23 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." 5:24 So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. 5:25 Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. 5:26 She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. 5:27 She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 5:28 for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." 5:29 Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. 5:30 Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" 5:31 And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" 5:32 He looked all around to see who had done it. 5:33 But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. 5:34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." 5:35 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?" 5:36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." 5:37 He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. 5:38 When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. 5:39 When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." 5:40 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. 5:41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" 5:42 And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. 5:43 He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Jesus had no way of knowing what was awaiting him upon his return. But he does know that on this day, as every day, the level of human need that he encounters increases as his reputation as a healer increases. Just as soon as he's off the boat without even time to have shower and grab a bite of lunch, one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and 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." By now Jesus is receiving a lot of attention. And people, being people, who have need are doing their best to make that need known to Jesus. Even people who it would seem would be in the opposition to this self declared son of God. BUT, Synagogue leaders have children, too. And children get sick. And parents, like Jairus, will do whatever it takes to get their child some attention. Even appeal to a man that's headed to a wanted poster on the wall of thy synagogue identifying him as a possible trouble maker. If he can heal, he can heal.

Now what Jairus discovers about Jesus is what people who encounter Jesus discover. Jesus didn't stop to discuss the man's religion or his politics – he went with him. This guy's 12 year old daughter is ill. A child that should be up and playing and learning how to make lentil soup is about to die. Jesus, Jairus and the entire entourage on storming through the crowd when something happens that calls the whole mission to a halt. Unbeknownst to Jesus who is striding alongside of Jairus there is close by a woman who has a physical condition that's difficult to

put into delicate terms. Let's just say it like Mark says it. "Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages 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." This illness in these days was difficult enough but it also carried the added dimension of rendering her ritually unclean. So she is in this culture ill, unclean and female. Three strikes. And yet she has, like Jairus, heard of Jesus. And just as much as he want his 12 year old daughter made well she wants her 12 year old disease put to rest. So she does what she knows she's not supposed to do. She reaches out and touches him. Well, in point of fact she touches the hem of his cloak. And in her moment of combined bravery, faith and hope – she knows instantly she is made well.

You'd think that would be it for her in this story. You'd think she'd simply sneak, giddily, back into the shadows to figure out what to do next. But Jesus stops short. Dead still. He feels power emanating from him. And he says, "Who touched my clothes?" For the first time in our little stories people, in this case his own disciples, kind of grin uncomfortably and say, "Uh, Jesus are you kidding? Look at all these people. How are we supposed to know who touched you?" But Jesus looked all around to see who had done it. And this woman, knowing what had happened to her, that she was healed, takes her new found state of well being and comes to him in fear and trembling, falls down before him, and tells him the whole truth."

Now why was she afraid? It was against the law to touch and adult male in her condition. Much less a rabbi. Much, much less a rabbi walking along beside the leader of the synagogue. Can we imagine her relief when she hears Jesus say, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease?" But she didn't have time to express her thanks or joy because in that moment the news came from Jairus house to Jairus that the 12 year old had died. They said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" While Jesus had been dealing with this woman, this person Jesus identifies as "daughter" which means 'daughter of Israel,' child of God, the daughter of Jairus had died. Everything and everyone must have frozen in that moment. Everything and everyone but Jesus who looks straight at Jairus and says, "Do not fear, only believe." Lets go. Have faith. She's not dead, but only sleeping. Jesus cuts down on the size of the entourage and takes off again.

When they arrive there's the expected signs of grief. A 12 year old is dead. So much promise gone. Such a young life, ended far too young. So many 12 year olds. So many children. But this is different. Jesus is here. Let Mark finish the story. "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 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.“

And they laughed at him. They did not take him seriously. Really the force of the words in Greek are, “They ridiculed him.” And he paid them no attention whatsoever he simply did what Jesus does. Jesus wasn’t laughing. He was healing. He was making whole. He was intervening in the life of a poor unclean woman on the street and a child of probably the richest man in the village in the bedroom of her home. Because that’s who Jesus is and it is what Jesus does.

Jesus is no stranger to laughter, to derision, to doubt, to ridicule, to questions about his motives, to scorn. But it never stops Jesus from doing what Jesus does. Love us.

There’s a lot of people out there that mock, laugh at and ridicule the effort of Jesus’ body which is evident in the church today. People who would laugh at our efforts to feed some children or house the homeless as if those tasks were even more formidable than taking a child by the hand and uttering, talitha cum, and having her rise up, walk and get something to eat.

There are people who would ridicule the ultra liberal Presbyterian Church (USA) for being so bold as to remind the powers that be in this nation, even and especially on the cusp of the day in which we boldly celebrate the victory of independence for a people – almost everyone of who came to this land as an

immigrant or whose parents did, without papers or permission, that Jesus the one whose name we so proudly call upon, said, 'let the children come unto me and forbid them NOT.'

They laughed at him to derision but he paid them no heed and said, "talitha cum, little girl, get up." We happen to be in a church that knows Jesus is serious about caring? About justice? About what is right in the eyes of God and not in the pomposity motives of fools. A woman risks her life, do we understand she could have been stoned, she risks her life for a chance, just a chance at healing and wholeness. How can I, a believer, a child of God, a Christian, not be bold enough to criticize what is wrong before I dare celebrate what is right?

The PC(USA) is boldly saying there is no one, from the child of rich man to a woman unclean on the street, that Jesus would not defend, or heal, or save. NO ONE! Red, yellow, black, white, brown, caucasian, asian, Hispanic, African, LGBTQIA+ that Jesus doesn't love. That Jesus didn't die for. And if our sensibility, or our upbringing, or our prejudice, or our abject fear of the other, of the different, get in our way so that when we see Jesus in their presence we want to laugh at him, to ridicule him for loving all of God's children – please know this Jesus isn't laughing. Jesus is only loving. Read the gospel. The only thing Jesus truly despises is intolerance.

Jesus comes to us to heal us and make us whole. And we are called to be Jesus in the world today. Maybe if the world ridicules us. Makes fun of us. Laughs at us for loving one another. Maybe we're doing what we are supposed to be doing.