

“Though He was Rich He became Poor for Your Sake”
+ 5 Pentecost B +
2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43
June 28, 2015

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day.

Having traveled 1300 miles by car and 1300 miles by plane in the last two weeks with so many new and familiar faces to connect with in very different settings what I noticed was that the one thing we didn’t see in Arkansas that we saw in Chicago and see here every day in St. Paul at the highway entrances is people asking for money. What’s odd about that is that Arkansas is the 2nd poorest state in the Union.

The night before our son’s wedding we partied on Madison Street in Forest Park a rather trendy strip of fine eateries and sports bars – not unlike Grand Ave. but all of these “toney places” are just one block from the church I served. For 20 years now from October through April St. John Lutheran in Forest Park is a shelter one night a week for the homeless – Jacob’s new father-in-law gets up at 4 am on Saturdays to volunteer there (and he’s not even a member of that parish). What seems odd to me is that it is in the cities where there is greater access to social agencies and opportunities for aid that we are surrounded by supplicants asking for money to simply survive.

In the Gospel for today we have 2 supplicants. 2 people anxious to have Jesus meet their desperate need using different methods – as distinctly different as these two people who could not be more different and yet more alike. Mark presents us with a man and a woman; a “leader of the synagogue” and a nameless face in a crowd. We see a desperate father with a sick child and a desperate woman whose 12 year history of bleeding had kept her at the very edge of society.

Jesus has recently returned from the Decapolis (the unclean county of germy Gentiles) and has gone back to Galilee, to friendlier territory where large crowds continued to gather around Him. Suddenly the crowd splits in two as Jairus falls to the ground at the feet at Jesus’ feet to beg Him to come and “lay (your) hands on her so that she may be made well and live.” Supplicant #1 is on his knees begging from Jesus. Of course, Jesus would go with Him. Jairus was a “leader of

the synagogue,” an important man, a wealthy man who became a leader because he helped pay the bills of the synagogue. But there’s a little wrinkle here you ought to know about. Back then among the Jews, just as today among the Arabs in the Middle East, no self-respecting Jewish man of any station in life knelt at the feet of another. Feet were “unclean,” literally, and touching another person’s feet would require a strict purification ritual. Jairus having come from the bedside of someone sick and dying was unclean and by asking Jesus to come and “lay (His) hand on his daughter, Jairus was asking Jesus to make Himself ritually unclean.

If there was anyone who knew about being ritually unclean it was Supplicant #2 , the interloping lady who threw herself at Jesus and grabbed the hem of His garment. She, too, had a problem—a problem that made her unwelcome—unwelcome at worship in the synagogue or temple (that blood uncleanness thing), unwelcome in a jostling crowd because whomever she touched also became unclean. Because of her condition she was unwelcome even among her own family. They weren’t allowed to use the same furniture as she, sit at the same table or to give her a hug or a kiss without becoming unclean.

It is thought that perhaps this nameless woman made a dive into the crowd just to “touch” Jesus’ clothes to spare Him the trouble of a purification ritual—since she only touched His clothes anonymously. Had people seen her touch his clothes Jesus would have to get new ones and burn the old ones (without touching them physically after taking them off, of course).

Oh there are a lot of details in the Gospel – too many to consider all of them but the one phrase that reached out to me is where the woman says, “If I but touch His clothes...” or “If only I can touch His clothes. I think we are all “If only...” people when we daydream and especially when we pray. “If only” is the language of desperation when all we need is for God to give us a break. If only I God would get me a job with better pay, if only God would make me well, if only God would make my child obey me or my spouse love me like they used to or my boss respect my work...if only God would give me what I want then everything would be ok. The trouble is “if only” prayers and thinking often limits us from seeing what God has done for us and limits our ability to see our greatest need and the needs of those around us.

We pray earnestly but God seems silent. We don’t get the miracle we are so certain we need. And the miracles we read of in the Bible – well, they seem like a mockery of our deepest

desires. Until we humbly come to the feet of Jesus – the sinless, nail-scarred feet of Jesus and consider “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.”

Jesus gave up the glories of heaven and sacrificed His very life to give us the gift of faith and the healing presence of the Holy Spirit each step of our life in this world and into eternity. Jesus came and touched all of the filth of humanity – didn’t concern Himself with the uncleanness of others. He came to cleanse humanity and make all who would believe whole, well, and righteous in God’s sight – washed in the waters of baptism. Jesus, God Incarnate gave up the heavens and concerned Himself with healing our ills.

You wouldn’t know it in English, but the word that means “to heal,” also means “to save,” and translators use the context to determine which meaning to use. But what if the Gospels always meant both—that a person could be healed and saved, or saved and healed---that an outcast woman would not only be set free of her disease but also saved from the very thing that put God at a distance – the awful sinfulness of humanity – your sin, my sin – the sin in which we all live?

What if a desperate father would see his daughter not only healed (from death?) but saved and restored to his family and to the family of God? (Oh, we do see that in the miracle of baptism – but so often fail to grasp the miracle that God works in the water and the Word).

The New Testament says that God made Jesus “to be sin for us” so that in Him we could become the righteousness of God” and that’s what I think this Gospel is getting at. It is getting at a “healer-Savior” who never hesitates to dirty Himself with our diseases—spiritual, emotion, physical---the whole gamut of what’s wrong with the human race. As Jesus takes our dirt upon Himself, we get clean—not “just had a bath” clean—but so clean, so clothed in righteousness that even God won’t hold His nose when we come before Him because “Though He (Jesus) was Rich He became Poor for Your Sake.”

Here in the Midway, on the streets of Chicago and down in Arkansas the poor, the needy, the outcast and marginalized are in need of the love and care that we, God’s people, can provide. Jehovah has a great challenge before you today considering a long-term partnership to make this a ministry center to aid all people in need. Like Jairus in the Gospel Jehovah has been

blessed with great resources. By God's grace I know you will continue, regardless of the decisions made today and the weeks to come, to use all that you have and are to reach out with healing, with the Gospel, with God's life changing grace. That's who you are - and though I will not be with you as your pastor I will hold you to that task even as I will continue to hold you in my heart. Amen.

Now may our almighty and merciful God who always hears our prayers, defend us against all harm and danger and grant us the grace to grow in faith and hope.