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"Fairness and Grace" The Rev. Garrett Lane (06/30/2024, The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost)

Let us pray.

Almighty God made the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts

be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Amen.

The Olympics are coming up and whether you are really into the classic track and field,

hammer, throw, long jump, all the things, whether you like that or maybe swimming is the

thing that you like to watch, or perhaps you're into newer things.

Rhythmic gymnastics, okay, sailing, not a new thing, but Olympic sport.

I was curious to whether or not you are into any of these things.

Rhythmic gymnastics just sounds like something that I should not be doing and like no one should

be doing, but I don't know.

But when I think about the Olympics, we, when I'm watching the Olympics and maybe when

you're watching the Olympics, we like to applaud when people get what they deserve.

If they are a very competitive and compelling athlete, we cheer.

When they get on stage and they're given a medal or not given a medal, we cheer, we think

it's fair.

We have this sense of fairness.

Whether it's the Olympics that are happening in Paris this summer, and we cheer and we

cheer that they've worked hard, or whether it's somebody graduating from high school or

college or coming to the end of a very long career, we think that that's a fair, good

thing to cheer for.

We have this sense of fairness.

There's other things that we cheer about when we think it's fair to that are a little

darker.

If somebody is weaving it out of traffic on I-35 and 10 miles later, you see the state

trooper pull them over.

I'm cheering.

I don't know about you guys, but I am like, yes, God is just. Or your neighbor's dog, it constantly barks, constantly, and it also gets out on occasion.

And whenever it gets out, you're cheering because they are getting what they deserve, chasing that dog down for the next hour and a half to try to get it back, sweet, sweet justice.

We like to be able to say who is right, who is wrong, and we like to have a sense of fairness.

One of the best movies to encapsulate fairness, justice, is this movie from 2000 where Russell

Crow plays a Roman general, turned gladiator, Maximus, in the film, gladiator.

He is out to get the justice, to get the fairness that he deserves.

This man has been backstabbed, and he goes from being this very high-ranking general to

a this lowly slave gladiator, and he fights his way to the top, and eventually comes face-to-face

with the man that stabbed him in the back and is now emperor.

He has a line from this movie that just always stands out to me, and I'm going to read it,

and not in the Russell Crow voice, but I will read it a bit of it for you.

So upon seeing the guy who stabbed in the back, who he's worked so hard to get close to,

he says, my name is Maximus, decimus, meridus, commander of the armies of North Baba-Baba,

fathered to a murdered son, husbanded to a murdered wife, and I will have my vengeance

in this life or the next.

It's really good.

Justice.

It's this very black and white view of fairness and justice at first in the film of getting

what Maximus deserves, what's been taken from him, his lands, his family, all these things,

and getting back at the man who betrayed him.

But beyond gladiator, beyond our neighbor's dog, beyond the highway, all of these things,

we like to have a hold on what is fair, and what is right, and what we deserve.

Getting what you deserve was a thing for ancient people as well.

It's not something new that's kind of sprung up.

Getting what you deserve in the ancient world though came with some caveats.

When you were sick, or if someone in your family had done something to harm you, or harm

other people, or it could be many things, but if something bad, if someone is even down

on their luck, you might see that this person, and then they'd say, oh, this person who's sick, who's down on their luck, who's lame, who's blind, all of these things, they must have done something to offend God.

There's got to be some reason why they are the way they are. They're living with some incredible secret, some type of thing that they're keeping hidden, but some God knows about it, and they're getting punished for it.

That's where Mark opens up.

There's passage that we have from Mark about these healings, and these stories of healing speak directly to this sense of fairness that we have. Speaks directly to the grace that Christ gives, not to one, but to many.

The Gospel of Mark does this goofy thing where he shoves stories within stories.

He's like a dog on a walk that sees a squirrel or a bird and pays very much attention

or pulls on the lead and then comes back to the walk.

So we have the story where Jairus, this leader of the synagogue, comes to Jesus in verse

22.

This man has a high station, a leader of the synagogue.

He's likely respected.

He's held in high regard.

He's willing, though, to throw himself at Jesus' feet when he's desperate, and he's

willing to put his reputation on the line.

This man is very desperate, because his daughter is dying.

And so Jesus says, yes, I'll go to your home, I will heal your daughter, I'll come see her.

But on his way to Jairus' home, there's a woman that shows up, and the crowd is thick,

Mark says, it's dense.

And in verse 25, Mark says that this woman had been hemorrhaging for 12 years, which is

just a very polite way of saying that she had some kind of menstrual bleeding that was

continuous that she suffered with for 12 years.

She had spent, Mark says, all her money on doctors, on physicians, but does not get better,

continues to remain bleeding.

This woman, though, due to her bleeding, would have been ritually unclean by the religious

practices of the day.

So her family and friends wouldn't have been able to touch her.

They wouldn't have been able to change her sheets to be near anything

that had touched  
her, to be close to her clothing.  
She would not have been able, it wouldn't have been right for her to  
go out into crowds  
and touch other people, therefore making them ritually unclean and not  
being able to  
go to the temple, not being able to do some of the religious things  
that she wants to  
do, or even just the basic societal things that you would do by going  
out into the world.  
She's desperate.  
She throws whatever reputation she has left out into the window as she  
goes into this  
crowd, touching people and touching just the hem of Jesus' robe.  
Jesus says, someone touched me, and it's like Disney World following  
the release of  
school in May.  
The crowds are that dense.  
His disciples are confused, how are you trying to find someone in this  
crowd?  
But he pauses to find this woman.  
He calls her daughter, we have two daughters in this passage, Jairus's  
daughter, and  
this woman.  
And while he's interacting with this woman who's been bleeding for 12  
years, Jairus  
it gets word that his daughter has died, that she is dead, and she  
doesn't just seem  
to die, she's not alive anymore.  
So this respected leader of the Jewish synagogue who, his household  
has people crying outside,  
his daughter has her own room, meaning that their wealthy family has  
just lost his daughter  
because Jesus, the teacher, decided to stop and decided to talk to the  
poor, unclean  
woman who Jairus might have known, but they still go to the house.  
Jesus still goes to the house, and he takes three disciples with him,  
and he takes Jairus's  
daughter by the hand, and he tells her to get up.  
There are two images of this scene.  
The scene gets depicted in a lot of religious art, and I, these two I  
really like.  
The first one, you'll notice, Jesus is, it's a really dark, a dark  
scene.  
There's light on the daughter, and you can notice, we'll come back to  
this, the touching  
of the hands is really kind of an important point here.  
And then this next one, she's not yet alive.  
He hasn't touched her yet, and Jesus is standing and walking in, and  
she's pale.

She is definitely white with death, not alive.  
He speaks to her in Aramaic, in a phrase that also, little girl get  
up, little lamb get  
up, it's tender.  
He asks for food to show that this isn't some zombie, this isn't a  
ghost, but this girl  
is alive now, let's feed her.  
It's not some parlor trick.  
The work that Christ came to do to heal us, to give us new life, he  
came to do for all  
of us.  
We are all not getting what we deserve with the grace of Christ.  
Fairness in this place, in the Christian life, turns into this wonky,  
lopsided thing where  
people think that they are going to get something, and actually it's  
something for everyone,  
not just you, but I don't need to tell you about the times in your own  
life that are unfair  
or the times in the lives of people you know that are unfair, whether  
it's taking test  
after test to try to figure out what's wrong with the illness that you  
or someone you love  
is experiencing, whether it's the people that are in the throes of  
depression and anxiety  
and can't hardly care for themselves or those of others, whether  
you're barely hanging  
on after a best friend is no longer with us.  
Or maybe even like gyros, you're wanting to know where God is and why  
God's taking  
God's time and seeming to stop at all of the places before God gets to  
your house.  
When God comes into our world, when Christ enters our world like what  
we see in this story  
that Mark gives us, resurrection drips off of him.  
The overflowing abundance of completely unfair, mercy, and love enters  
our world through  
Jesus Christ, the friend of sinners.  
One theologian talks about it in this way.  
The scandal that people hear when they come and hear the gospel is not  
some scandal about  
morality.  
It's not some, don't do the sex, drugs, and rock and roll.  
People don't get upset about that.  
What they get upset about is that this grace is for everyone.  
Is that something that should be mine and is not for other people, is  
not for the people  
that I don't really want to be around.  
It actually is, and it ties us together, and it binds us together, and  
wraps us all around  
the cross.

The beauty of Mark's telling of this gift of grace, of resurrection, and health, is  
it acceptable to bring what you have to Christ, not what you will be in the future, not  
the potential that you have to be a good person, not all of the really bad things or tiny  
bad things that you've done in the past, but you show up as you are. Jairus shows up as he is.  
He throws down his potential, he throws down his reputation. This woman just says, I just want to touch the hem.  
The hem is like where the stitching on your pants and on your dresses. That's the hem down there.  
It's just if I can touch this little piece of him, I will be healed. Because Christ is resurrection, and he doesn't bring, he doesn't show, he doesn't explain,  
he doesn't modify, he doesn't symbolize, he doesn't talk about resurrection.  
He is the resurrection, our ever-present help and trouble and hope. There's something that happens in verse 23, and we can see it in this portrait.  
Something happens in verse 23.  
Mark says that Jairus asks for Jesus to come and touch his daughter so that she might live.  
The church has long been a place of healing and of rest and respite for people.  
And in the earliest documents we have about what are Christians doing right after Jesus  
leaves and these new communities are happening?  
What are these people doing?  
Well, they're coming together for a meal, they're baptizing, and they're going out into  
the community, and if somebody is sick, they're telling members of the community to come  
pray with them, come touch them, come anoint them with oil.  
This is some of the oldest practices that we have in Christianity or some of these deep  
desperate cries for help.  
To be clear, when I'm talking about healing here, I'm not talking about charlatans, tricksters  
or even televangelists, I'm talking about people that are in their weak moments, that are  
in their moments where in our society, we don't want to see anyone, I don't know about you,  
I don't want to see anyone at the hospital when I'm sick, when I'm weak, when I'm hooked  
up to things, I don't want people to see me that way, but they reach out to a priest or  
a pastor to come and ask for prayer.  
This is something that we do that's in our prayer book, and so this is a targeted ad,

you can think of it that way too.

You're here, you're at church, I don't have to listen to your phone to know that you're not well.

You're here, we are all here because we're not well, and this is something that you can

do, it's a part of our ministry, Andrew and I and all of the priests and other people

at this church go to folks that are in the hospital and pray with them and touch them.

My friend, I have a friend who has a story about being sick in the hospital and he had

two decisions in front of him that were both not great.

He had a hospital chaplain come to him and pray with him.

He doesn't remember the name of the chaplain, he doesn't remember what the prayer was, he

doesn't remember a whole lot about the situation, but what he talks about, and if he was here,

he'd tell you about, he can still feel the hand that was on his shoulder when this chaplain prayed for him.

He can still, he has that moment of connection with that chaplain, with that pastor in a way

where he was so weak, he was given strength, he was given a hope to be able to make a decision

and it's just such a tender thing, it feels so trite even talking about it right now, but

if you've ever been there, or if you know someone who's been there, I think you know

what I'm talking about.

We modern people think that salvation is somewhere in the future, somewhere far off, years down

the road, after we die, just far away and not here right now.

What we see in this passage is that Christ brings resurrection to us today, that Christ

brings resurrection, that the salvation that is brought to us is not done by anything

that we do, but by what Christ does.

We read in Mark about the healing, about the resurrection, and it's not some form that

gyros had to fill out and submit and then the disciples took it in and stamped it and

gave it to Jesus, he goes right to his house.

There is no line, there is no queue, there is an outpouring of mercy that shows up when

we realize we are not as strong as we think we are, and when we reach out to our Lord

in faith.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, give us the strength to know that we depend on you, give

us peace in our  
moments of weakness and give us healing through your Son, our Lord  
Jesus Christ, in his name  
we pray.