

The Strange Economics of Grace

a sermon

by Dan Griswold

Trinity Reformed Church

July 1, 2018

Mark 5:21-43

The Bible verses I just read are, for me, kind of a double treat. It's like two stories in one! It starts as an account of a healing, with a distraught father coming to Jesus asking him to help his little girl.

Won't he please help? Yes, he will!

But then, as Jesus goes with the man, he's interrupted. And so there's another healing story that begins, and ends, with a woman who is suffering from a chronic illness reaching out to Jesus in faith and finding herself made well.

From that point, the first healing story picks up again, and continues on its way. Yet then it is no longer about a healing, but a restoration, a healing-from-death, as Jesus brings the little girl back to life.

Like I said, two in one. A double treat. Not to sound disrespectful, but I think of it as kind of a sandwich story. Or a jelly donut. Or, if you want to get really fancy, an éclair. (Mmmmmm.)

Anyway, what I mean is, it's one treat inside another.

So I think it would be a mistake to look at only one of these or the other,

either the older woman or the little girl,
either the healing or the raising from the dead.

Because they belong together. There's something important, really important, in their being together. If we split them apart and consider them apart, then we may miss the point.

Jesus was on his way to Jairus' daughter, having responded out of compassion to the pleas of this father whose supreme concern was the survival of his little girl. So Jesus had agreed, and began to follow Jairus to his house.

Jesus was on a mission, a mission to heal the little girl. It was a mission of mercy. It was a mission of love. It was a mission for which Jesus was called and equipped. This is why Jesus was there, to glorify God by blessing God's people,

healing them,
teaching them,
guiding them,
challenging them,
saving them.

This was his mission, and the reason why, as I said, he was on his way. Yes he was on his way, making his way to see the girl so he could heal her.

And then he was interrupted.

Along comes another person, a woman sick and poor and alone in a crowd of people.

(Do you know what it's like to be alone in a crowd? To be lonely when in the company of others? To be isolated when surrounded?)

She has suffered for twelve years with an illness that has isolated her from others, kept her away from family and friends and even the temple, made her the object of whispers and the subject of gossip. She might well say that this disease had ruined her life.

She sees Jesus, up ahead. She'd been looking for him. She believed that he could heal her. But there are so many people around. She doesn't want to bother him. She doesn't want to embarrass herself. So instead she just goes up to him and touches the edge of his cloak.

And with that one touch, she is healed.

She thought she could slip away unnoticed, no one knowing what she had done, not a soul aware of what had happened.

Hah! Fat chance!

Jesus knew. He knew "that power had gone forth from him" (Mark 5:30).

Yes. *Power* had gone forth from him.

Would there be enough left?

Now, that may seem like a silly question. I mean, this is Jesus, after all.

But I mean that quite seriously.

Because, in our experience, power is a finite resource. It can be used up. We can find ourselves with very little of it left:

after work,
after play,
at the end of a long day.

We can be diminished,
depleted,
the tank empty,
the well just about run dry.

We can be tired:
physically,
emotionally,
mentally taxed,
suffering from decision fatigue.

The same, too, with *time*. We have only so many hours in a day, and days in a week. When our time is taken up with one thing, then we don't have it for another thing.

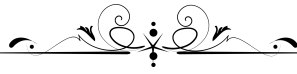
Time and energy, they are connected, they have a shared economics, the economics of scarcity, the economics of real life. Because those who

use up our time,
waste our time,
abuse our time,
interrupt us when we're trying to get something done
with our limited time,

they diminish our energy, and they deplete our power.

So, in the normal course of things, the question surely is whether there would be enough left. Power had gone forth from Jesus. He knew it. He sensed it. Time had been taken up from Jesus, putting in jeopardy the life of this little girl.

Would there be enough power for her? Would there be enough time for her?



“Who touched my clothes?” Jesus asked.

His disciples thought he was joking. Or that he was imagining things. Or that he had gone daft.

“No” to all three.

And she knew it.

The woman who had touched his clothes, the woman who from that touch had been healed, she heard him ask who had touched him. And she was terrified.

At once several questions crossed her mind:

Had she ruined everything?

Was she in trouble?

Was he going to scold her?

Was he going to berate her for taking from him

what did not belong to her,

what belonged to someone else,

what she did not deserve,

what she had no right to receive?

Would there be enough left?

Because she, too, knew what we know: that power and time are finite resources, that they have limits, and we are limited by their limits. She knew, as do we, that life is a zero-sum game, with winners and losers. She knew that in the economy of “good things,” she was a loser, excluded and impoverished.

But Jesus comes to her,

not to scold her but to bless her,

not to take her healing away but to confirm her in it,

not to accept the premise that power is limited but to overrule it.

And then, from there Jesus moves on, to the little girl, to the one he had set out to help. But when he gets there, the girl is already dead.

Had he run out of time?

Had he run out of power?

No.

His power is not used up. His time has not run out.

Talitha cum, Little girl, get up!

He reaches into the life of that girl and brings her back to life, overruling the expected and conventional and natural limits of power and time.



You see, my friends, the gospel is not a zero-sum game. The good news of Jesus Christ is not a limited resource. The blessing of Jesus does not neatly and obviously divide the world into complete winners and total losers.

When Jesus blesses someone else, it doesn't mean that he can't or won't bless you. There's plenty left for you:

plenty of his power,
plenty of his time.

And when Jesus heals you, forgives you, loves you, there's plenty for others. You need not fear that what you have will be taken away when another needy soul appears before Jesus and he blesses that person, too.

These are the strange economics of grace. To those of us who think
we don't count,
don't matter,
don't measure up,
Jesus points to a different accounting.

These are the strange economics of grace. To those of us who see life
as a vicious fight for scarce resources,
as a winner-take-all battle,
as all about competition,
Jesus points to a different accounting.

These are the strange economics of grace. To those of us
who fear that we will lose the grace we have received,
who clutch our blessings, afraid they will be taken away
by strangers and newcomers,
Jesus points to a different accounting.

With Jesus, there is plenty.
With Jesus, there is enough for all.
With Jesus, there is *always* room at his table.

For he is the living embodiment of the strange economics of grace.
But they shouldn't be strange.
Not any longer.
Not for us who have received his grace.
Not for us who have enjoyed his blessing.
Not for us who have touched his cloak.
Not for us who have heard his voice: *Talitha cum*, Little one, get up!
And as we hear his voice, and enjoy his grace, and by the Holy Spirit are joined to Jesus, in a gracious economy that is no longer strange to us because we know it from the inside, then we are empowered to engage others with his different accounting.

With *us*, there is plenty.
With *us*, there is enough for all.
With *us*, there is *always* room at the table.

*Now to him who by the power at work within us
is able to accomplish abundantly far more
than all we can ask or imagine,*

*to him be glory in the church
and in Christ Jesus to all generations,
forever and ever.
Amen.*

Ephesians 3:20-21, NRSV