

They had Names You Know
A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
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Mark 5:21-43
7-1-2018

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

I spent the better part of fifth grade memorizing the opening of the Declaration of Independence, the preamble to the Constitution, and the Gettysburg Address. These are good words. Really, really, good words. And their power still stirs me when I hear them spoken aloud.

But as I read today's lection, I couldn't help but wonder: What kind of unalienable rights should be given to hemorrhaging women? And how perfect can unions ever be if they don't protect little girls with fatal illnesses? And no matter how steeped in liberty, or how dedicated to our proposition of equality, can our sisters in this world ever be free if we don't give them so much as a name?

I'm not here to indict our forefathers for the sins of patriarchy. We don't have enough time for that today – come to the weekly Bible Study, and we can explore that topic in depth. And I'm not here to indict the men of the Jewish side of first-century Galilee either.

Today, I'd rather focus on a man who decided to claim personhood over gender, and whose ideas of radical love and equality are still sending shockwaves through our world.

So let's get to the text. And let's get to that man, who acts like men should.

The text tells us that Jairus was a leader in the synagogue. And he was wealthy, too. His twelve-year-old daughter was very sick, so sick she was close to death. And grieving, Jairus falls on his knees, and begs Jesus to heal his little girl. Jesus obliges, and they begin to make their way to Jairus' home.

On the way, they encounter a crowd, all clamoring for Jesus' attention. There's a woman among them. She's been sick for twelve years, suffering from a hemorrhage that won't heal. It's one, that because of patriarchal rules, prevents her not only from a sense of normalcy and intimacy with her husband, but also prevents her from worshipping in the Temple.

And there's an added twist. She's seen too many incompetent physicians and specialists over the years. Her once vast wealth has been drained away by malpractice, and pharmacy bills, and co-pays. She's been pushed to the margins – just another number left to fend off the consequences of an over-sized

doughnut. And even if she wanted to complain to her local representative, she can't. Remember, women didn't have names worth recording in stories back then, let alone rights.

And because she's been diminished in stature, this woman doesn't think she has the standing to plead for healing face-to-face with Jesus – that's only reserved for important people like Jairus. But unlike Jairus, this woman doesn't put her faith in the power of men, she puts her faith in God. And so when Jesus passes by, she touches his robe, and her whole world changes in an instant. She can feel that she is healed. And so can Jesus!

And he turns to find who has done this. Not out of anger, but out of curiosity. Who is it that is SO bold, and SO faithful, and SO strong, that she would do this? And his gaze meets hers, and trembling with fear, she says, "It was me, Lord." And he says, "Go in peace, daughter, your faith has made you well."

And you may not think this is a big deal. But it is. Jesus doesn't heal people like some mechanic tinkering with machines. He doesn't take a ticket, complete his job, and say, "Next." Jesus sees the hurt AND the humanity in every person he meets. And he offers God's healing and God's peace.

Of course Jairus is stuck in a world bent on privilege. And he's anxious now. Every moment Jesus tarries here with this "person," or with all of these other deplorables, is a moment he's not healing my daughter. And Jairus' worst fears are realized. Word reaches him that his daughter has died. And his faith that was so public and so pronounced just an hour ago has now disappeared.

But Jesus doesn't act like most men. Thank God!!! Jesus doesn't ask for a loyalty oath. He doesn't hold grudges. He displays a sense of humility. And creativity. And vision. And a little flexibility, too. Jesus says, "She's only sleeping. Follow me and see." And somehow, somehow, with hands of healing, he helps this little girl come to by saying, "Talitha cum," or "Get up, little lamb." And she does. And there is new life. Complete with God's blessing and God's peace.

This is the kind of world Jesus intends to build one relationship at a time: a place where both the marginalized and the privileged, the young and the old, the named and the unnamed, the believing and the doubting, the public and the private, EVERY PERSON, is offered God's presence, is offered God's healing, is offered God's peace, is offered all of God's possibilities.

The kind of world Jesus invites us into doesn't have quotas. It's not a zero sum gain. There's a grace that's inexhaustible. And a table that'll fill you up fuller than a smorgasbord. And there's no need of labels, save one: Child of God.

And it seems to me, Mark's story is kind of ironic. Here is a writer, recounting for us the story of someone who is challenging every social norm; not just challenging them, obliterating them. But Mark's author is still stuck in a world, much like Jairus, where there's a fear that too many people, with too much access to what Jesus is offering, is a bad thing. And so lesser folks, hemorrhaging women, and dying girls are stripped of their names.

Well don't you go believing for a second they didn't have names. They did. They were me and you, even if their narrator was short on detail. But if it helps, let's give them what Mark's author wouldn't.

How about *Grace*? She's the kind of woman with the courage to reach out and demand (with the most amazing sense of humility!) the peace, and the blessing, and the healing, and the dignity that are hers.

And how about *Dawn*? After twelve years in a frail body, a budding teenager is offered new life, as fresh, and as expectant as a new day. And in her, is the hope for the kind of world that will be.

They've got names, no matter how hard those who write their histories seek to diminish them.

In Caesar's world, and Pharaoh's, too, and even in Jefferson and Lincoln's worlds, Grace and Dawn, and millions of their nameless sisters were not afforded the pursuit of their happiness, nor the promotion of their general welfare, nor the declaration of their equality. Not in spoken word. And most assuredly not in written word.

Some of that has changed. But certainly not enough. And while many women of privilege have secured their rights and their dignity, there are still far too many in this nation and in this world, who are counted as less than.

But in God's world, there are no fractions. People are whole. No matter what. And if we are to be helpmates in the coming of God's kingdom, we've got start working for a world where all PEOPLE, are endowed with certain unalienable rights – In spoken form. In written form. In living form.

Men, we've got to start being men who act like Jesus. White men, straight men, rich men, educated men, documented men, healthy men, Christian men, American men, privileged men – we've got to start acting like we live in the Galilee, bound not to the nonsense of powerful systems, but bound to the bright and beautiful love of God. And we've got to start faith-ing it – that is, we've got to start doing more than talking about it – we've got to start faith-ing that God's love is enough for us. That it's bigger, and better, and brighter, and more wonderful than being part of a boy's club. And that there's enough, more than enough of God's love to go around.

And women, you've got to keep shouting your names, Grace and Dawn, and Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth, and Susan B. Anthony, and every name of every mother and daughter and sister and aunt and niece and cousin, until the stories give you your due. We need to hear them. Our sons need to hear them. And our daughters, too. Because every time we call a name, we acknowledge the worth and dignity of every person. And every time we know the person behind the name, we catch a glimpse of God in our midst: Children of God who are good, decent, worthy, unique, beloved products of God's creative spark.

Women, and men, we need to be people who live like Jesus. And if we can live in such a way, then one day soon we'll know a place where all persons are granted life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

May it be so. And may it be soon! Amen.