



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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JULY 1, 2018
THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

God's Ironic Grace Mark 5:21-43; II Corinthians 8:7-15

Many of you will remember the 1996 Grammy nominated hit by Alanis Morissette titled, "Ironic." For a while, it seemed like it was being played on every music station dozens of times each day. The tune was catchy and the lyrics were memorable, even if a bit unnerving:

An old man turned ninety-eight
He won the lottery and died the next day
It's a black fly in your Chardonnay
It's a death row pardon two minutes too late
And isn't it ironic . . . don't you think

It's like rain on your wedding day
It's a free ride when you've already paid
It's the good advice that you just didn't take
Who would've thought . . . it figures¹

As popular as it was, the song created a negative buzz. Music critic Bob Harris pointed out, "If it rains on your wedding day, that's a coincidence, not an irony. If you win the lottery and drop dead before claiming the money, it's good luck followed by bad luck. If you meet the man of your dreams and then meet his beautiful wife, it's a bummer. But if a song called "Ironic" contains no irony, is that in itself ironic?"² Ms. Morissette responded to such criticism by admitting that she and her co-writer "were not doggedly making sure that everything was technically ironic."³ That sounds ironic to me.

Something else that sounds ironic is found in the two stories we just read, one of a man desperately seeking help for his deathly ill daughter and the other of a woman desperately seeking help for herself. In the first story, we meet Jairus, a leader of the synagogue who anxiously waits for Jesus'

¹Glen Ballard and Alanis Morissette, "Ironic," *Jagged Little Pill* (Maverick Records, June 13, 1995).

²Bob Harris, *New York Times* article as cited by AZLyrics; <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/alanismorissette/ironic.html>

³Alanis Morissette as quoted by AZLyrics; <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/alanismorissette/ironic.html>

boat to run ashore and then falls to his knees in the wet sand, begging Jesus to come to his house and lay hands on his dying daughter. It is a moving scene, one that any parent can understand. We will do anything to save our children.

Some Jewish leaders like this man might have wanted to run the other way when Jesus showed up in their villages. Whenever he went to a town, Jesus always went to the local synagogue and trouble often followed. Scribes and Pharisees would show up from Jerusalem and challenge him on points of the law such as the keeping of the sabbath. Jesus would interpret scripture and explain things in ways they were not used to hearing. The arrival of Jesus could be just as upsetting for some as it was thrilling for others.

Leaders of synagogues had many responsibilities which included leading services, deciding who would read from the scroll and preach, and settling disputes among the people. We assume the leader of the synagogue also determined who could and could not attend worship based on the holiness codes. In other words, they decided who was “clean” and who was “unclean” according to religious law. For instance, a leper was unclean until his skin condition cleared up. Any one who handled a dead body was unclean until a period of cleansing was accomplished and they could be admitted to synagogue. A woman was considered unclean during her monthly cycle and was not allowed to enter the sanctuary.

The man on his knees begging Jesus to save his daughter was a prominent member of the community, an authority in the synagogue, and a desperate parent.

The second story is of a woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years. She had spent all of her money on doctors and faith healers, none of whom had been able to help her. Moreover, because of her condition, she was excluded from her faith community, not for a week or so every month, but for twelve long, lonely, agonizing years. Any one of us who has had a chronic condition that brings physical and emotional agony knows how desperately you seek a cure.

This woman, whose faith had not been diminished by being barred from worship, heard about Jesus and how he had healed all kinds of terrible diseases and conditions. Unlike Jairus who was an insider, she was very much an outsider and could never be so bold as to approach Jesus in such a public way as the synagogue official did. She knew that Jesus would not

speak to her, a woman, in public and as a woman declared unclean, he would never dare touch her with those saintly hands of his. She thought, however, that if she could touch his robe, barely rub the threads on the hem, the power of this man might just flow into her body and heal her. She was right!

The irony of the stories is that this woman interrupts Jesus' travel to the house of the synagogue leader, perhaps the very man who had declared her unclean and unfit for worship those past dozen years. In her desperation for help, she delays Jesus getting to Jairus' house. While Jesus is confronting this woman who barely felt the fabric of his robe and declaring her healed, friends come and tell Jairus that he need not bother Jesus any longer because it is too late, his daughter has already died. Isn't it ironic that her only opportunity for healing and re-entry into the community of faith interrupts the only opportunity the leader of her community of faith has to save the life of his daughter? Isn't it ironic that the saving of this woman's life resulted in the loss of his daughter's life?

Jesus, however, seems unfazed and unhurried by these circumstances. The only thing that gets to him is the suspicion that someone in the crowd of people had touched him. With dozens, maybe scores of people pressing in around him as he walked through the streets of the village, Jesus detects that someone touched him and he stopped to find out who it was. Having healed the woman, he continues onto Jairus' house where he takes the girl by the hand, calls her name, and restores her life as well.

Ironically, perhaps, because of his actions, now Jesus is the one who is ritually unclean, not once but on two accounts. Having contact with the woman, unclean for twelve years because of her hemorrhage, makes him unclean. And touching the girl who is dead also make him unclean. However, once each of these women, the young and the older, experiences Jesus' touch, they are made whole and fully alive. No one is unclean and excluded. Both are welcomed back into the community.

Although it has some complicated elements, this larger story of two women who came to life is a simple story of the grace of God offered by Jesus. Through the grace Jesus so freely offers, there is no uncleanness, there is no exclusion, there is life and wholeness. Like the pop song which purports to be about irony, it turns out that there is nothing at all ironic about God's grace in terms of who receives it or when or where. It is available to all of us, at any time and in any place.

This is truly gospel—good news for us all. The other good news that we celebrate this week is that we live in a nation where we can practice our faith unfettered by the constraints of government or any other authority. We have the freedom to reach quietly and unnoticed for the hem of Jesus' garment or to beg boldly for God's intervention in our lives. We experience God as best suited for us and receive God's grace regardless of who we are.

God in Christ invites us to reach out to touch his grace and he reaches to take our hand to share his grace with us. The only irony might be that when such grace is offered freely, we neither reach nor receive. But no, that would not be ironic. That would be sad. Happily, however, God in Christ will pause and wait or hurry on to meet our need. That is truly something we can all celebrate. Amen.

July 1, 2018

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

In the economy of your grace, we are all rich beyond measure, O God. Your goodness cannot be calculated in wealth or possessions, in good fortune or lack of suffering, or even in the gifts and abilities we have for our blessing is the gift of your presence moment by moment. And in those moments, whether our circumstances be happy or sad, relaxed or stressful, abundant or lean, good or bad, we are not alone but are held in your caring and powerful hands. Thank you for that gift which provides us with all that we need in this particular moment or in any moment life offers to us.

That being said, O God, we call for your attention this moment when our need is abundant. We mention in our hearts family, friends, strangers, and ourselves whose needs of body, mind, and spirit are beyond what we can provide. We thank you for the provisions you have already made and ask that healing and health come to us all. Hold us tightly in those moments of uncertainty and fear. Walk before us when danger approaches. Lead us when the way is uncertain. Wrap your arms around us when the pain is more than we can bear. And dance with us when joy is the gift of the day.

In the week to come, as we celebrate the birth of our nation, we offer our gratitude for the many ways in which you have shaped and blessed who we are. We thank you for the courageous, insightful, selfless, and visionary people who set our course and have guided us throughout our history. We pray for our President, our Congressional leaders, and the women and men who keep us focused upon justice for all of us. We pray for our governor and state legislators, for our mayor and city council members. We pray for each and every citizen of this good land and ask for openness to your guidance and willingness to serve the common good.

It seems that your people have always lived in trying times, O God, and these days are no different. We ask especially that you lead us to be good citizens of our city, state, nation, and world as we live out your calling to follow Christ in making community wherever we are.

Thank you, O God, for this moment and for that grace that is ours now through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.