

Sermon Preached June 28, 2015
Year B, Proper 8
St. John's Episcopal Church
Beverly Farms, Massachusetts
The Rev. Stephanie Chase Bradbury

Grace, peace, and mercy is yours, from the Triune God. Amen.

There once was a doctor who had a “four-year-old daughter. On the way to preschool, the doctor had left her stethoscope on the car seat, and her little girl picked it up and began playing with it. Be still, my heart, thought the woman. Gee, my daughter wants to follow in my footsteps and be a doctor! Then the child spoke into the instrument: ‘Welcome to McDonald’s. May I take your order?’”¹

In the Charles Dickens classic, A Tale of Two Cities, the famous opening line begins with “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” Today’s gospel lesson could be similarly titled, A Tale of Two Daughters.

Jesus is by the Sea of Galilee healing people and there are great crowds pressing around him. Then a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, comes before Jesus and falls to his knees. As a leader of the synagogue, Jairus is likely a prosperous man with a high social standing. However, in the face of the horror of possibly losing a child, the leader humbles himself before a man hated by the Pharisees. He tells Jesus that his little daughter is dying and begs him to heal the girl. Social norms & religious rules and power have become irrelevant to

¹ <http://www.5jokesaday.com/content/daughter-jokes>, 6/27/15

Jairus when confronted with what is truly important. In light of his humility and request, Jesus agrees and begins to follow him while the crowds follow Jesus.

One of those in the crowd is a woman who has been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. Now, there is some important background to note. First, this woman has been suffering and in pain for many years, and it was getting worse. Second, she has spent all her money trying to find a cure, which means that at this point she is penniless. Third, since she seems to be responsible for her own finances, she is likely either widowed or divorced. A woman without a man has virtually no status. She is alone. Fourth, under Jewish law at the time, a woman who is bleeding, whether from her menses or otherwise, is considered ritually unclean. She is supposed to be separated from the community during this time. Since this woman has been bleeding for twelve years, she is considered a complete outcast! A woman in chronic pain, penniless, alone, no social status, and cast out from the community. You could not imagine a more marginalized person. The people in the crowd, were they to be aware of her unclean status, would be furious that she was there touching people and making them unclean too! But she, like Jairus, is desperate, and in her desperation social norms & religious rules are irrelevant. She is jostled in the crowd, touching everyone, and then has the audacity to reaching out and touch Jesus' cloak, presumably making him unclean as well. Immediately, her hemorrhage stops and she is healed.

Jesus knows right away that something has happened, turns around and asks the crowd who touched him. The woman is terrified. She probably fears Jesus is going to call her out for touching him in her unclean state, setting her up for all sorts of punishments. She bravely comes

forward anyway and confesses what happened. Then Jesus completely surprises her by not calling her outcast, or sinner, or treat her as less-than because she is a woman, or unclean, or marginalized. Jesus looks at her and calls her “Daughter.”

He then continues with Jairus to see HIS daughter, even though at this point, some people had come to say she had died. Jesus is unfazed, and comments to Jairus, “Do not fear, only believe.” They go to the home where Jesus takes the child’s parents and three of the disciples and enter the girl’s room. She is in fact dead. Another note about Jewish law here is that touching a dead person also makes one unclean. But again, Jesus does not care about the religious law, and scripture explicitly points out that he “took her by the hand.” He touches her and in doing so he raises her back to life.

Two daughters. One is older, poor, outcast, and very sick. The other is young, rich, privileged, and dying. One actively reaches for healing, the other passively accepts what is given. And Jesus loves and heals them both. They are both daughters. Jesus sees them both as part of God’s family. In the Kingdom of God there are no insiders or outsiders.

Some current events have taken place over the past few weeks which affirm this truth. They are signs of the Kingdom already arriving.

- 1) The racist shootings in Charleston reminds us that there are those who still see black people as outsiders. Yet the families of the victims rose above their hate to forgive the shooter. They refused to see the shooter as an outsider.

- 2) While I cannot comment as to whether the Affordable Care Act accomplishes this, the need for healthcare for all people, regardless of their economic status, is a right, not a privilege. Jesus clearly shows in his healing of women from both ends of the economic spectrum. The poor are not outsiders.
- 3) The Supreme Court ruling on Friday which declares same-gendered marriage legal in all 50 states reminds us that GLBT people are not outsiders.

Such events give me hope that the Spirit is stirring in our midst! Rich/poor, male/female, black/white, healthy/sick, gay/straight. From Jesus' perspective, no one is unclean. He touched the untouchables and in doing so, raised us all to new life. Because once we welcome the "outsiders" into the "insider" tent, all kinds of glorious and exciting new things can blossom! Like the two daughters, we all win.

You may have heard that yesterday was an historic day in the life of the Episcopal Church. During General Convention, we elected our first African American Presiding Bishop. Bishop Michael Curry of the Diocese of North Carolina was elected on the first ballot in a landslide! I was privileged to have Bishop Curry as the preacher at my ordination 19 years ago, when we both were in the Diocese of Maryland. In those days he was a well-respected priest and recognized as an exceptionally powerful preacher of the gospel. I was once speaking with his Senior Warden who confided to me that on Bishop Curry's first Sunday with them at his church in Baltimore as their new rector, he so enthusiastically gestured and pounded his notes in making his point during the sermon, that he broke the pulpit! They had to hire someone to make an extra sturdy pulpit to survive the remainder of his tenure with them. During the past 12 years Bishop

Curry has become an outstanding bishop for North Carolina. He is brilliant, educated, accomplished, has an abiding faith and a ready sense of humor. I am thrilled, and our church is blessed, that he was elected our new Presiding Bishop.

I want to close with a story that Bishop Curry once told years ago, which speaks to our gospel today. It is a great illustration of how, by welcoming outsiders, those who are considered unclean, by seeing them as Jesus sees them, we all become blessed. The story also shows the Episcopal Church at its best. Bishop Curry said,

“There was a woman who became an Episcopalian in the 1940s. And she was dating a young guy who was a licensed preacher in the Baptist tradition, and she took him to her church. Both of them were African American; the church where they went was all white. This was in the 1940s in the segregated heart of America. When she went to communion, he sat in the pew because in those days if you were Baptist you didn’t take communion in an Episcopal Church and vice versa, and so he sat in the pews. She went up to take communion. She was the only black person in the congregation and he waited to see what would happen. Because not only were they taking the bread, but he noticed that they were all drinking from the same cup. And he had never seen black folk and white folk drink out of the same cup, or from the same water fountain. So she went up to take communion and the priest came... and was giving out the bread. ‘The body of Christ, the bread of heaven.’ Then the priest came along with the chalice... ‘drink this in remembrance that Christ’s blood was shed for thee.’ And he got to the black woman, ‘the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ given for thee, preserve thy body and soul.’ [as he lifted the cup to her lips] And that man said that ‘any church where black and white drink from the same cup

has discovered something I want to be a part of, and that the world needs to learn about.’’

Bishop Curry concluded with, ‘‘That man and that women were my parents.’’²

Amen.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USOMZpGheBc>