

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

“And a great crowd gathered about him.”

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‘Jesus came into the ruler’s house, and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd wailing.’ The noisy crowd wails also inside you, vying to shout down the word of Grace. The noisy crowd makes a tumult in your heart, its voice breeds discontent, resentment, appetite. The tumult in your heart makes you dissatisfied with your wife, with your work, with your life, with your church, with the president, with your children, with your neighbor, with your friend.

You spend, and you splurge, and indulge every desire; if you have the means, you take that big trip, you go on that big cruise, and yet you are still empty, still unsettled. Peace they bring not, only disquiet. Then the noisy crowd turns on you. Failure, it shouts; liar; hypocrite; has-been, reject. The voice of the crowd grows still louder, taking over your soul, until you begin to agree with it. Yes, I am a failure; I don’t deserve to live; everybody hates me, and yes, I hate them. You come to believe the noisy tumult, and even come to strange peace with it. I am a sinner, God judges me, but who is to say that there really is a God, who is to say what sin really is? My life, your life, all life, it has no meaning... just enjoy what you can, for soon, so soon, it is over.

All this is the voice of death. That is what the noisy crowd was doing, that crowd assembled outside the ruler’s home. They were there for death. His little girl, a twelve year old girl, is dying. The wailing of this crowd merely continues the wail that has gone up across this world for millennia, since death came to this blighted sphere.

Jesus arrives in contradiction to this crowd. Our Lord Jesus has not come to make your life a little better. He has not come to take the edge off a little; give you some cosmetic improvements, make you comfortably numb, give you some simple

advice on living a more fulfilling life. Our Lord Jesus has come to silence this crowd, the noisy crowd wailing over this little girl's death, the noisy crowd wailing in your heart, the noisy crowd in the stress and tumult of every city and town and mind and soul. *'Let them sit alone in silence.'*

Then, Our Lord says about the little girl the most astonishing thing: *"Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping."* *"Make room"* Jesus says, "you are in my way", "you are crowding me." *'Make room.'*

How much like baptism this is! "Depart thou unclean spirit, and make way for the Holy Spirit." Jesus first evicts the noisy crowd, the crowd of death has no place where Jesus is. The crowd of ridicule, the crowd that accuses, the crowd that torments, the crowd that brings insatiable desire and humiliation; Jesus evicts them. *'Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping.'*

Well, she is dead; but not to Jesus. Jesus makes dead ones alive. Jesus takes things from the domain of darkness, and transfers them to his kingdom of light. Jesus takes twisted, corrupted, poisoned things, and restores them, revivifies them, recreates them: a new genesis, a beginning which shall have no end.

Where is this dead girl's faith? She has none. She doesn't even have faith. *But be of good cheer*, for Our Lord does even that. He takes the one that can do nothing, and does everything for her. Jesus takes the one that has nothing, and gives everything to her. Where there is death, the Lord brings life.

But before He does this, Jesus is interrupted, he is interrupted by a woman with a flow of blood for twelve years. She has spent all her substance on doctors, but *they have only made things worse, not better*. In the great scheme of things, this woman is unimportant. She is unnotable; she is even unclean. She cannot enter the Temple, the house of prayer. How dare she approach the Christ, the house of the Most High

She has no business being anywhere near the Lord. She has no purpose being anywhere near the ruler of this synagogue, and the serious business of healing his daughter.

The ruler with the twelve-year-old daughter, *that* is important. In every worldly structure, that twelve-year-old daughter jumps to the head of the line. But Jesus makes himself available to this unimportant woman; he allows himself to be

interrupted. He allows this woman, by grace, to jump the line. She is in the dirt, unclean, unloved, without friends, without hope. To say she has faith is correct, but that does not say enough, for faith must have an object; it must have the Lord as its object.

She doesn't just trust. She trusts in Jesus. She doesn't just hope; she hopes in the Lord. Her hope is modest. *'Just the hem of his garment, if I can only touch that....'*

In the darkness of despair and death, you may feel like this woman; almost nothing to hold on to.

Don't shy away from this; acknowledge it. Confess that you have failed, confess that you have missed your chance, missed your opportunity; that you have nothing to give, nothing to offer; that you are as good as an uncured woman, as a dead girl cut down before her time. For down there, there where the mourners gather, there in the dirt, with the unloved woman; that is where Jesus acts. *'Let him put his mouth in the dust, for there, he may find hope.'*

The work of Jesus regenerates; makes new. Every time we baptize, we are reminded of the words of Jesus: *'Unless you receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child, you shall by no wise enter therein.'*

Today we see that writ large in a little girl that cannot even stretch out her hand, pull herself up, or lift up her head toward her savior. Jesus raises her up, declaring to us, that *unless you receive the kingdom of God, not as a little child, but as a dead little girl, you shall in no wise enter therein*, which is to say, it depends nothing upon us, but entirely on the Lord.

Do you have nothing to give? Nothing to offer? No way to help yourself? Now you are precisely in the position of that little girl, and now Jesus will act.

'Unless you receive the kingdom of God as a dead little girl, you shall by means enter therein.' But you shall enter, for in Jesus you were washed, in Jesus you were cleansed, into Jesus you were baptized; in Jesus, the voices of the maddened crowd, their ridiculing laughter, the tumult of the raging voices crying out for your defeat are silenced. The words of the world matter not. The words of your heart matter not. The words of the slanderer, accusing you of your sin, have no weight. One word alone matters. The word of Jesus, who baptized you. [The Word of the Jesus, whose kingdom will have no end.]

In him, *all things are made new.*

Therefore, knowing this newness of life into which we have been raised, St. Paul encourages us: *walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work.* What are those good works? Quite simple. *Honor your father and your mother; love your wife; submit to your husband; care for your children, give away your money, do good to your neighbor, acquiesce to worldly authorities, pray for your enemies.* And then go to bed, and say your prayers, prayers to the One who forgives sins. And after you die, Jesus will come to your bed, like he came to the ruler's daughter, and he will say:

'Little girl, little boy, I say to you, arise.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Lamentations 3:22-33; 2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 13-15; Mark 5:21-43.