

### 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

II Samuel 1:1, 17-27; Psalm 130; Mark 5:21-43; II Corinthians 8:7-15

**II Samuel 1:1, 17-27** begins with the words, “After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag” (II Sam. 1:1). King Saul of Israel, together with three of his sons (including the heir apparent to the throne, Jonathan) had been killed in a battle against the Philistines in Gilboa (I Sam. 31:1-13). David returns from a successful battle against the Amalekites to discover both his sovereign’s and Jonathan’s deaths. This situation, in turn, makes David the likely successor to the Israelite throne.

But there is no rejoicing on David’s part in this turn of events. Banned by Saul from the Israelite court, David had become a soldier of fortune, selling his services to the highest bidder. And the highest bidder was the king of Ziklag – a Philistine city. When the news broke of Saul’s death, the Philistine city around him erupted into celebration. But David could not join in such celebration. David mourned the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, and did so by writing a lamentation that was later taught to the people of Judah. Built around the refrain, “How the mighty have fallen” (1:19, 25, 27), this lamentation mourned over both Saul’s and Jonathan’s death – Saul’s, because he was king of Israel; Jonathan’s, because David loved him (vs. 26). It is a most powerful lamentation.

Beginning with the refrain, “how the mighty have fallen”, the first part of the lamentation mourned Saul’s death as head of state. “Your glory, O Lord, lies slain upon your high places! How the mighty have fallen! Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon; or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice, the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult. You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor bounteous fields! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more. O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you with crimson, in luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel” (1:19-21, 24).

Gath and Ashkelon were major Philistine strongholds, and Gilboa was the site of Saul’s last battle. David prayed that the news of Saul’s death would be kept from the Philistines; otherwise, they would rejoice over Israel’s significant defeat as the daughters of Israel had earlier rejoiced over the defeat of the Philistines (cf. I Sam. 18:7). Israel’s defeat at Gilboa was more than simply a military defeat, David declared. Rather, Israel had been deprived of its primary leaders – the king, the prince and its primary decision-makers. The “shield” of Israel – its royalty who gave direction and stability to the nation -- had fallen.<sup>1</sup> So, now, not only Saul, but also the nation must be mourned.

But David continues in his lament. “How the mighty have fallen in the midst of their battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan, greatly

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<sup>1</sup> The way David develops this argument is intriguing. He states that “the shield of Saul” will be “anointed with oil no more”. This is not a ritualistic act that he is referring to. Shields at the time of Saul and David were leather, not metal, and they were conditioned and preserved by rubbing them with oil (cf. Is. 21:5). But it was not only shields that were anointed; so were kings (I Sam. 2:10) on their being chosen to the throne. Thus, the term “shield” is used to denote a king, sovereign or chieftain because he “protected” the people. Thus, when David states, “the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul”, he is referring to Saul himself, and not simply to his armament. It is as if he were saying, “sovereign Saul, no longer anointed with oil, is now dead and can protect Israel no longer”.

beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women” (vss. 25-26).

Here, the lament changes profoundly in tone. In the former lament for Saul, David wept not so much over the personal loss of Saul (he was, after all, David’s enemy), but over what his death meant to the nation. It is for David a public death, because it is a public tragedy for the state and its people. They are now vulnerable to attack and to enslavement by Philistia, because their “shield” can no longer protect them. It is a public tragedy.

But in the case of Jonathan’s death, it is a private tragedy for David personally, as well as a public tragedy in that there is no successor to Saul prepared for the throne<sup>2</sup>. It is not the public loss of Jonathan that is of such great pain to David; after all, he is more qualified to be king than was Jonathan. But the loss to David is a personal loss, the loss of his closest friend and ally, the loss of one “greatly beloved to me”. David calls him “my brother”, because Jonathan’s love toward David “was wonderful, passing the love of women”. Jonathan’s love for David had been proven over and over again (I Sam. 19:1-7; 20:1-42; 23:15-18) as he consistently placed his commitment to David ahead of his own self-interest, even ascension to the throne. As Saul had once scolded Jonathan, “Do (you) not know that as long as (David) lives upon the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established” (I Sam. 20:30-31). But now, the war with Philistia had removed Jonathan as well as Saul from the throne, and David felt only the greatest of pain in the loss of his closest “brother”.

David then draws to the close of his lamentation. “How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished” (27). It is a day for sorrow, not for joy; a day of loss and not of victory. There will come a day when David will need to act decisively to assume the leadership of Judah and then of Israel, and to complete his anointing as king (I Sam. 16) with his coronation (II Sam. 5:1-5). But this is not the day! This is the day for mourning -- a day for mourning the public loss that has befallen Israel and the private loss that has befallen David!

**Psalm 130** is also a hymn of lamentation, if not for the death of Saul than for an unnamed tragedy that has come upon the land. But it is also a hymn of victory, for it concludes with the command and call, “O Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is steadfast love” (vs. 7).

Psalm 130 is a rich psalm that captures God’s work in us and in our midst. It begins, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my cry! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications” (130:1-2)!

The psalmist acknowledges the unfathomable mercy of God in verses 3 and 4. If God were to “keep score” of our misdeeds – whether as individuals or as a nation (a community) – no one and nothing would be acceptable to God. But acceptance by God does not depend upon our making ourselves acceptable. It is based solely upon the steadfast love and forgiveness of God.

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<sup>2</sup> There is a fourth son of Saul’s, Ishbaal (also named Ishbosheth). He is crowned king of the ten northern tribes of Israel by Abner, commander of Saul’s army (II Sam. 2:8-11). But being fourth in line, he had never been prepared as had been Jonathan to be king, and was totally inadequate for the job. He reigned for only two years before being removed from office.

In that light, the instructions of the Psalmist are twofold. First, “wait for the Lord” (vss. 5-6) – that is, wait for his merciful intervention in our lives and in our nation. Second, “hope in the Lord” (vss. 7-8) – that is, live in an attitude of expectation for God’s intervention and the acting out of God’s steadfast love!

Wait! Hope! This is the essence of authentic response to God. Whether as a community or as an individual, live your life in expectation of what God will do in and through you and/or in your situation. And you can live in such expectation, “waiting” and “hoping”, because you know that God is not a vindictive deity but is rather one who loves you and your people more than you love yourself. So Psalm 130 tells us to “wait” upon the Lord and to “hope” in his work in our situation, trusting that God will do what is best in that situation!

**Mark 5:21-43** is the story of two “daughters of Israel” – one privileged and wealthy, the other exploited and segregated – but both radically transformed by Jesus. It is the intertwined stories of the healing of Jarius’ daughter and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood. What makes this story so powerful in its first century context is the significant commentary it makes on the Jewish honor culture in which Jesus and the Jewish people lived. That subtlety is unfortunately lost on 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans who don’t understand that honor code.

American culture basically determines the status of a person based upon his accumulation and management of wealth; it is that wealth or his association with people of wealth (e.g., in the case of a politician or a celebrity) that determines his influence. Other factors impact that status (for example, if a person’s wealth was gathered through organized crime activity, he would be less respected than if he had gained his wealth through manipulative and ever-so-slightly legal means). But it is a person’s wealth that primarily determines one’s status in American society.

That was not the case in Jewish society at the time of Jesus. One could be wealthy and have little status (e.g., Zacchaeus), or one could have little wealth but very high status because of his knowledge of the Mosaic Law or his position in society. Thus, most rabbis were not nearly as wealthy as were priests, but had high status because of their role as teachers of the law (in fact, the word “rabbi” literally means “my teacher”). Consequently, honor was of greater importance than one’s wealth. And it was the honor that you held that determined your status in society.

This story of the intertwined healing of the hemorrhaging woman and the raising of the young girl from the dead cannot be understood unless one realizes that it is a clear criticism of the honor culture of that society. It is twin miracles that demonstrate that Jesus did not respect class status, but instead had a preference for the poor.

The story is simple enough. A member of the Jewish elite comes to Jesus for help, because his twelve-year old daughter is critically ill. Jesus agrees to go with the man to heal his daughter. But on the way to heal her, Jesus is stopped by a woman who has been hemorrhaging for twelve years. He stops his journey to the little girl to attend to this woman, and she is healed. As a result, however, that delay has eventuated in the little girl’s death. But the story doesn’t end in tragedy. Instead, Jesus comes to the ruler’s home and raises his daughter back to life.

First, this member of the Jewish elite and the woman are meant to be seen as polar opposites. The man is called in the text “a leader of the synagogue named Jairus”. That is a technical title, high on the honor code of Israel. A “leader of the synagogue” (in some translations, a “ruler” of the synagogue) was not a person who was a Pharisee, rabbi or scribe – that is, one who held an ordained or academic position. Rather, it was an office of high importance for a willing wealthy lay person. Wealth was necessary to fill the requirements of this position. A “leader of the synagogue” was responsible for financially maintaining the building, paying for its upkeep and being the primary contributor to any building expansion or renovation.<sup>3</sup> He was also responsible for the conduct of synagogue (not temple) worship and the selection of the public readings from the Torah. Thus, the first person with whom Jesus deals in this story is a very powerful person ecclesiastically, economically, politically and in the eyes of the people.

The woman with the issue of blood is the exact opposite. Levitical law proclaimed that a person having a constant flow of blood was both physically and ritualistically unclean (Lev. 12:1-8; 15:19-30). Therefore, she must be ostracized from society. She was disqualified from marrying (and if she were already married when the issue of blood began, she was to be permanently separated from husband and children), and was not allowed to participate in synagogue or temple worship. Consequently, because of her illness, she is without status, nameless and only identified as belonging to the crowd.

But Mark is also careful to point out, “she had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse” (5:26). This woman was doubly poor. Not only had she been perpetually segregated by her society for her hemorrhage. She had been exploited for her illness, for she had both “endured much” under physicians, but she had also been exploited by them, in that they took her money but provided no relief. Consequently, she had been reduced to poverty. Thus, she was the direct opposite in status, power and position to Jairus.

But the point of the story is that both people are in need. Both desperately need the help of Jesus, and recognize they need his help. They may be at the polar opposites of their culture’s honor system, and in wealth and power. But they both need Jesus! So both turn to him.

Jairus falls to his knees before Jesus, breaking all convention and protocol in his desperate search for healing for his daughter. And Jesus agrees to go with him to heal that daughter. But on the way, Jesus is stopped by the hemorrhaging woman who touches him, hoping to be healed. Jesus’

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<sup>3</sup> Both Gentile and Jewish societies in the Roman Empire were not societies with strong public works programs. The local or empire-wide governments built and maintained very little - buildings used directly by the government (like the Senate building in Rome), military encampments and the famed Roman roads outside cities were about all the government would build with tax dollars. Most public buildings and roads within cities were built and maintained by private citizens, called “benefactors”. Thus, Herod built the Temple in Jerusalem from his personal funds, and the emperor Vespasian built the famed Coliseum in Rome from his personal funds. Following such examples, a “leader of the synagogue” would assume the same responsibility toward his synagogue. It was expected that its members of means would be “benefactors” and pay for its building and maintenance. The understanding of the Graeco-Roman world’s role of “benefactor” was presented in the groundbreaking research of Bruce W. Winter (cf., *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* in the series, “First-Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World”. Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 1994).

mission, as far as Jairus was concerned, was to “lay his hands” on his daughter (4:23c). But, instead, the desperate woman “lays hands” upon Jesus and is healed.

When Jesus stops and calls her forth, she now falls at Jesus’ feet (5:33), just as had Jairus. And Jesus touches her – not once, but four times (5:27-31). By doing so, he is made unclean by her uncleanness. And he will later touch Jairus’ daughter (thus, technically, making her unclean as well – even though she is dead). But instead of uncleanness moving from the woman to Jesus, healing has moved from Jesus to her!

The significance of this story as woven together by Mark is revealed at this point. This woman was at the bottom of the honor scale. But she has intruded upon Jesus’ mission to heal a daughter of one who was at the top of the honor scale, and caused Jesus to stop in his mission to attend to her.

And what is her punishment for such an obvious affront of social convention? Jesus says to her, “My daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease” (5:34). She is rewarded for upsetting the order of things! She is made into Jesus’ daughter – a daughter of the Messiah! And she has been elevated to the top of Jesus’ “honor scale” because of her great faith – for it has been that faith (and not Jesus’ touch of healing, because her healing occurred when she unobtrusively touched him) that had both saved and healed her (the Greek word here translated “healed” also means “saved” or “redeemed”). For this woman who had been a social outcast for twelve years, her “healing is only complete when Jesus has publicly identified her, commends her faith and declares to all that she is healed and cleansed”.<sup>4</sup>

But this delay has cost Jairus dearly! During the time Jesus spends paying attention to this anonymous woman, Jairus’ daughter dies. It appears that Jesus’ original mission is aborted. Jesus’ compassion and commitment to the poor has cost Jairus his daughter’s life! Those coming to inform Jairus say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” (vs. 35)

But Jesus will not be put off from his mission. He insists that they continue to Jairus’ house, where he goes inside with Jairus and his wife. He now takes the dead girl’s hand (making Jesus unclean again, as well as carrying to the girl the uncleanness of the hemorrhaging woman who was at the bottom of the honor structure of that society) and says, “Talitha cum” – “Little daughter, get up”! And she does! She gets up! She lives! And another daughter is healed and saved that day!

Ched Myers profoundly summarizes the depth of this story by commenting,

“Mark shapes this story to intentionally juxtapose the two extremes of the Jewish social scale. The little girl had enjoyed twelve years of privilege as the daughter of a synagogue ruler, yet was now “near death” (5:23). The statusless woman had suffered twelve years of destitution at the hands of the purity system and its “doctors”; yet she still took initiative in her struggle for liberation. The object lesson can only be that if Judaism wishes to “be saved and live” (5:23), it

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<sup>4</sup> Sproul, *The Reformation Study Bible*, op. cit., p. 1424.

must embrace the “faith” of the kingdom: a new social order with equal status for all. This alone will liberate the lowly outcast and snatch the “noble” from death”.<sup>5</sup>

**II Corinthians 8:7-15.** When Barnabas and Paul began their mission to the Gentiles, they did so without the permission of Peter, James and John, the leaders of the Christian movement. Rather, they were sent forth by the Church in Antioch and were accountable only to them (Acts 13:1-3). The official endorsement by the entire church upon their mission to the Gentiles didn’t occur until the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35). At that Council, Paul and Barnabas appeared before the leaders of the church and presented their case for the winning of Gentiles to Christ without their first becoming Jews. The Council agreed with them, and James (the recognized head of the entire Christian enterprise) gave them a written endorsement that they were to present to any questioning group or church.

In Paul’s recollection of this strategic event (Gal. 2:1-10), he wrote, “When James and Cephas (Peter) and John, who were acknowledged pillars (of the church), recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do” (Gal. 2:9-10).

This “remembering of the poor” became a very important matter to Paul, dominating much of his ministry. In every church that he planted and among every Christian group with which he worked, Paul stressed the importance of the Christians giving of their plenty to benefit the poor. This, in turn, led to Paul’s periodically raising what came to be considerable offerings from his churches (Rom. 15:26; I Cor. 16:1; II Cor. 6:10; Gal. 2:10; Eph. 4:28) that he and others would carry to Jerusalem for the church to distribute to their poor (Acts 20:1-6; 24:17). In this way, Paul was creating for a Gentile church the enacting of the Christian manifestation of the Jubilee that Jesus so stressed that Israel should be observing (Luke 4:18-19). In that Christian Jubilee, the church would intentionally and continually redistribute the money of its people so that none were either too rich or too poor, but that all was held in common (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37). The Epistle Lesson for today’s lectionary is an integral part of that tradition.

Paul reminds the Corinthian Church that, even though they are injured by their party spirit, they are also an extremely talented and gifted church. And he names some of those gifts – faith, articulation of the gospel, theological astuteness, eagerness to practice their faith, love for one another even in the midst of their conflict. But they lack one thing, Paul suggests; they need to learn how to be generous with their money, especially in regards to the poor, and to manifest that generosity by contributing to his collection for the poor within the Jerusalem church (8:7).

He further states that he doesn’t want to command them to give, but for giving to be the natural outpouring of their faith. To support this argument, he reminds them of Jesus. “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (8:9).

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<sup>5</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), pp. 202-203.

Jesus, of course, was not financially rich. But what Paul is doing here is to connect money with relationship with God. In one sense, Jesus was profoundly rich – in that he was the Son of God, and lived in the abode of God in heaven. But, “for your sake he became poor”. He “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:7-8). Jesus gave up all his privileges, even constantly being in God’s presence, came to earth, lived among them and died for them “so that you might become rich”. Therefore, just as he became poor so that they might become rich in God, so the Corinthian Christians should be willing to share their wealth so that others might “become rich”.

Thus, good motive on our part is not enough. It is not enough for us to say we care for the poor, or that we intend to work for justice or righteousness. “Our deeds must be our life; when we are dead, our actions must speak for us”.<sup>6</sup> So our true commitment to Christ will be demonstrated every day by the way we use our money – whether we use that money to benefit ourselves and our own family, or whether we will use it so that “by (our) poverty, (others) might become rich”.

Paul’s intentions for Christians and their money is summarized by a quotation from what would be the Bible of his day – the Torah (Exod. 16:18). “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little”. This quotation from the Law refers to the distribution of the manna that sustained Israel’s life in their wilderness wanderings. When the people gathered the manna, they shared it with one another. Those who, because of their circumstances, were unable to gather sufficient quantities of manna were given manna by those who had gathered more than what they needed. The result was that, no matter who you were nor the circumstances surrounding your gathering of manna, everybody had sufficiency so that all were nourished and none went hungry. In fact, intriguingly, if you gathered more manna than you needed and you hoarded it, all that you gathered would go bad on you on the day you gathered it and – because of your greediness - you would thus have deprived yourself of all your manna (16:20-21).

Thus, by reminding the Corinthian Christians of that dramatic story, Paul is simply stating that wealth exists for sharing. The biblical principle Paul is espousing is that our wealth is not ours to do with as we please, to hoard it or to build up our estates. Rather, all that we have is a gift from God for us to use so that all can benefit and none go hungry, are in want or are poor. There is no excuse for poverty to exist anywhere in the church – whether it is in Corinth or whether it be at the uttermost parts of the world. And there is no excuse for poverty to exist anywhere in the world. To rebalance wealth was what the Jubilee was about, what the earliest church sharing their wealth with each other was about, and what Paul’s collection for the poor was all about!

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<sup>6</sup> Penned by America’s first millionaire, Stephen Girard, in his will leaving his entire estate to the creation of a boarding school for orphans (1831).