

September 3, 2017 “Grace: It’s In The Details” Matthew 9:18-26

There is a reason we must continually return to the concept of the saving grace of God. In these times outside the circle of the church there is little time spent considering God’s love for us as being a significant detail when it comes to life. And even inside the church, we who contend that we believe find it harder and harder to swim against the cultural stream of secular times. We are at the very least tempted to place great stock in the significance of what we do, rather than what we say or profess to believe.

One of the favourite movies in my collection of DVDs is called City of Angels. The story takes place in one of the greatest hives of secularity on this continent...the city of Los Angeles. And the story is a love story. An angel has fallen in love with a woman named Maggie Rice. She is a heart surgeon. The angel met her when a patient died during surgery. The angel was there to conduct the man who had died to heaven.

Later in the story the angel asks her if she believes. Typical of our times her reply is, “I don’t think so. I used to think I had it all figured out, but...now I don’t.” On another occasion the angel asks her “This was a good day?” And she replies, “Yes. I didn’t kill anyone today.” I repeat sometimes we are just so certain that our works are what life is really about. If we are sure we did things right, we tend to presume we have things under control. The fact is, the grace of

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God is most often revealed in tiny little details that we are tempted (notice I keep using that word!) we are tempted to think are not even important in the greater scheme of things.

Jesus had crossed the sea of Galilee. He was sought out by a delegation, and they had a significant question to ask. They were followers of John the Baptist's ministry. John the Baptist was calling people (Jews for the most part) to repent of their sins and live for God. He was baptizing those who expressed a desire to do so. Literally washing them of their old life of sin yes, but also of do's and don'ts and setting them on a road of faith.

Here is one of those interesting moments of grace. Their question to Jesus was, "How is it that we and the Pharisees, (John the Baptist was not a fan of the Pharisees) How is it that we and the Pharisees fast and your disciples do not?" There is an undercurrent of an accusation here. Jesus disciples are always having fun. They eat and drink and never seem to deprive themselves of these basic pleasures. I learned that John the Baptist was a member of the community, the monastery at Qumran. That community had a very strict code of rules. John left it to bring his ministry to the Jordan river. His message was that it is time for people to clean up their act. His disciples ask Jesus what amounts to, "How come we and the Pharisees fast, and you and your followers do not?" Jesus talks about wine and wineskins. He says, "You cannot put new wine

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in old wineskins or they will split and the wine will be lost.” The faith to which Jesus calls us is not the Jewish religion reinvented or reformed. Jesus calls us to something new.

I mention that because it is a heavy topic. Obedience to commandments versus, faith in God’s action to redeem us from our sins. And there is no question it is a subject that needs to be handled with care. Jesus does not get the chance to go deeper into the subject. He is interrupted by a ruler from the synagogue in another community. The man was distraught. He was in grief. He kneels before Jesus and pours out his woeful tale. “My daughter has just died,” he says, “but if you will come and put your hand on here she will live.”

Jesus does not say, “Excuse me. I was dealing with these followers of my cousin’s ministry and you interrupted my train of thought.” Jesus is calm, cool, and gracious. He is not upset by the interruption and HE immediately changes direction in response to this man’s need. The man is a ruler from a congregation. He is either the priest or one of the elders. He is an authority figure in Jewish society. He is also desperate in his journey. Life has served up one of its tragic moments. We tend to be impressed by the fact that he turned to Jesus with his problem, his pain and his grief. He makes a statement about Jesus that we in many quarters might hesitate to make. “My daughter has just died. Come and put your hand on her and she will live.”

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People heard him. He said it in front of them. He was not embarrassed to make this plea. And there is no question it is the plea of faith. He has said publicly that Jesus, he believes, has the power to roll back the power of death. To restore life. Who can do such a thing except God Himself? There is no question what he has said could get him in deep, deep trouble. Many of his fellow priests or elders would say this is heresy! He could lose his job for having dared to say what he has said about Jesus. At this point the man does not care. He believes Jesus can save his daughter....his family...his household.

The grace of God is visible in the details. The man appeals to Jesus for the mercy of God. Jesus immediately left the theological discussion on fasting and set off for the man's house. His disciples and the crowd that was part of this event followed him. The details of what happened even at this early point make certain things plain. This ruler of the synagogue, recognizes Jesus as God in the midst of life. That makes his plea a prayer, a request. And Jesus has no problem whatsoever responding. Grace, the grace of God, is in the details of life and living.

That would be an interesting thesis were it in isolation. But it's not. Jesus and this grief stricken father, the disciples of Jesus, and a portion of the crowd that Jesus was ministering to, in the first place set off for the man's home. In the crowd there is a woman. She suffers from bleeding. She has

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tried the route of seeing doctors. She has spent a lot of money on that in fact, and she is no better for doing so. This woman gets an idea. She draws the conclusion that if she can get close to Jesus, and if she can reach out and touch HIM. She will be well. But again, remember the details with accuracy. She does not even want to touch Jesus. She seeks to go unnoticed. All she wants to be able to accomplish, is to touch the fringe, which is part of the hem of HIS garment.

She succeeds. She pulls it off. She gets close to HIM. She gets down. In the midst of the crowd she reaches out, she touches HIS hem. She does not get trampled. She does not cause a pile up on the roadway. She does not trip Jesus. And she gets up. And the crowd comes to a sudden halt. Not only that Jesus turns toward her. This story is also recorded in Luke 8 and Mark 5. What becomes evident when you put all the details together is this...her attempt at anonymity is completely blown. Notice it becomes the occasion for another interruption. Jesus wants to know who touched HIM. The disciples are amazed that Jesus thinks it is possible to identify who touched him in the midst of this crowd and the urgency with which it was moving. Matthew tells us Jesus from the first, turned and saw her.

I'm sure her heart sank at being discovered for having done something...wrong. And of course she was right. Not in her wanting to be healed. But she is like every one of us a

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sinner. And Jesus gaze I am sure communicated that HE knew everything she had ever done, just as it did with some others. But here is what is in the details. Jesus addressed her. "Take heart, daughter, your faith has healed you." The grace of God is in the detail of her desiring to be saved from her affliction, and the Son of Man's commitment to redeem her.

The journey continues. O yes, a ruler whose daughter has died. Not forgotten. Not set aside. No...I just can't do more today! The arrival at the man's house finds the theater of a funeral in full stride. The flute player is playing mournful music. The professional mourners are wailing and carrying on. Jesus takes charge and dismisses them. "The girl is not dead but asleep," says Jesus. They laugh at HIM. She is dead. The house is cleared of the mourning crowd. These houses by our standards are tiny. But everyone who was part of the mourning scene is put out. In the quiet that descends, Jesus attends to the business that has drawn HIM here.

Jesus goes in, takes the girl by the hand, and she gets up. And the news of what happened in this little house spread throughout the Galilee region. Even death cannot stand against the power of the grace of God in HIS unique and precious Son. The grace of God is in the details. In a busy day full of interruptions....Jesus hears the need of each one who turns to Him. He supplies grace...grace....God's grace.

Let us pray;

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Almighty and living God, Jesus our Saviour, Holy Spirit present and with us, grant that we might be aware that little details in our daily routines are in fact occurring because you are real and near and loving us beyond our deserving. Help us to think in these terms which are not normal to our fallen world and nature. Help us to see that your grace is always present and always a part of our experience. Give us eyes to see, and voice to praise your name. Amen