

SERMON SERIES: THE WALKING DEAD 2
MARK 5:21-43
MARCH 6, 2016

It's time again to return to high school literature and those books you read way back when. Johan Goethe's *Faust* is known to be his masterpiece, and by some accounts, one of, if not the most important pieces of German literature. While this work is enormous spanning five parts and written over decades, its premise is simple. Faust is a seemingly successful scholar who has become unhappy in his life. After considering suicide, he makes a pact with the devil, known as Mephistopheles. Faust is willing to trade pleasure, wealth and women in this life for his soul. He gets the whole world and loses his soul.

The genius of Goethe's version of Faust, because there are many, is that it's not just about what happens to him after he dies, it's about his time among the living. While he acquires much, there is often collateral damage. People die around him. Loved ones go mad and die. Faust has it all and yet still loses his soul.

This epic story has given rise to the adjective, "Faustian," seemingly making a deal with the devil. Now of course, we all know better than that. No one here would sign in blood with a cloven-hoofed being. No one here would sign on the dotted line with a large red demonic being. It's unthinkable to consider vocalizing this deal, "I will trade you my soul for all the world has to offer."

That's just what happens. It's just subtle. We are prone to selling off pieces of our soul in exchange for things that will not make us happy. We easily mis-prioritize our lives in a way that does not protect our souls. Augustine was fond of saying, "Sin is disordered love." It is the right things in the wrong order. Sin is rarely something so obvious as brokering deals for souls with cloven-hoofed and comedic looking devil figures, but we still are prone to make deals with the devil. It's in the small things we do. In the priorities we leave behind. In the things left undone. In the lives that are disordered.

Last week, I introduced you to this series called *The Walking Dead*. This series is meant to prepare your soul for Easter. The title is meant to evoke our propensity to becoming the walking dead. As an illusion to the TV show of the same name, people are chased by life-consuming zombies, but their biggest threat is not the dead, it's the living. As the TV show goes on, their biggest problem is not losing their lives but losing their souls as they justify evil behavior. As they become less human and less humane, they preserve their lives but lose their souls. It's actually an excellent look at how insidious losing your soul can be.

How do we keep from losing our souls? Well to answer that question, we are looking at different resurrection stories in the Bible, stories of the walking dead. We are studying the walking dead so that we can learn what it means to be truly alive. Our big focus for this series will be about the state of our souls. As a foundation for this series, we are talking about the weight of our souls and what they are. We are pushing back against the *Looney Tunes* fallacy that our souls are wispy versions of us. Instead, that our souls are fully integrated selves. It's our bodies, our wills, our emotions and our actions. It's who we are in total.

A great example of the reality of this is the resurrected nature of Jesus. He had his scars but he was also flesh and blood. Not a ghost floating between rooms, but his whole self; different and yet the same. When we die, the Bible says we will be resurrected and offered new bodies. We often talk of our souls going to heaven and think of ourselves like Casper-like angels, but we have new bodies. We are whole-complete beings.

When we ask, "How do we keep from losing our souls?" We are not just talking about what happens after we die. Just like Faust, just like the walking dead, our souls can be chipped away in this life. We can give up what is important to us. We can become disintegrated. When who we think we are and how we act are incongruent, our souls begin to crumble. The goal for a soul is to be fully known and fully loved. Honest. Congruent. Balanced. Integrated. This world and this valley, specifically, are constantly making offers we have a hard time turning down. We don't sell our souls to cloven-hoofed demons, but in being a

workaholic. We don't sell our souls to red-tinged demons, but in disordered love that puts God, family and friends in subservience to the rat race of this valley.

So, we are looking at resurrection stories. Moments of death, that tell us quite a lot about what it means to truly be alive and it has everything to do with priorities.

Mark 5: 21-24

Jesus has just returned. This man has been frantically looking around and he hears Jesus has gone to the other side; he sees a boat returning and hears the murmurs that it is Jesus. He is watching the boat return and every second is feeling like an eternity. You notice that Jarius says, "My daughter is dying." He doesn't say she is really sick. She is in the final moments. She was sick a month ago, and she was very sick two weeks ago. Today she is dying and this man is waiting on Jesus. As soon as Jesus becomes clear, he fights through the crowds and begins to earnestly plead with Jesus. It says this man "polla parakaleo" out to Jesus. Parakaleo means to urge or exhort. It already has a strong level of compulsion to it but it says polla (much) parakaleo. The picture here is clear - this man is frantic. Speaking quickly and loudly and repeatedly. This man knew time was of the essence and he was putting himself out there.

This picture is all the more potent because this man was a synagogue leader. This man was not a Pharisee. He was a man that even today, we would say, "Jesus should help that man." Synagogue leaders were respected lay leaders who had great responsibility. They might roughly be the equivalent of our Elders. The priests would do their job, praying, teaching, sacrificing etc. and these synagogue leaders would do everything else. Synagogue leaders were usually successful people who helped lead the congregation and helped carry out the logistics and programming of the worship service. This was a successful, respected, godly man, who gave his time for the sake of his church and his family. He is pleading for his little girl. The phrase here for little girl is one of affection, *thugatir*. Here it is in its diminutive form, my little daughter, my precious one. My little princess needs you; you can almost hear him frantically pleading in front of Jesus.

Jesus should have clearly prioritized this man. He was a worthy man. He had a problem that could not wait.

Then Jairus' pleading was answered. Jesus agrees to go with him. His plan was working. Now the only issue was their race against the clock. His daughter was minutes away from death. He is probably grabbing Jesus by the arm, half to show him the way and half to quicken his pace. Time was of the essence. Everyone could feel it. Then the story continues.

Mark 5:24-34

The large crowd is pressing in and you have to imagine that Jesus is being pulled along by Jairus who is frantically pushing against the crowd. Then a woman who has had an issue of bleeding for 12 years reaches out to touch Jesus' cloak. This isn't an act of faith in the cloak but the one wearing it. This woman's issue isn't fully described but most people believe this had something to do with problematic/continuous menstrual bleeding of sort. This is an important detail. Jewish law declared menstruating women as unclean during the time of their cycle. These women were to withdraw from society while they were on their cycle and when it was complete, the woman would ceremonially wash herself and return to the community. This woman with continuous bleeding then was continuously unclean. It says she has had this problem for 12 years and she had spent all of her money on doctors looking for a cure, but nothing had worked.

Here is what we know and what we can infer about this woman. This woman was poor. She was a living/breathing beacon of uncleanness. Because she had been treated by several doctors, the news and rumors of her condition were probably widely known. Because of this, she was untouchable and people viewed her as cursed by God. On top of all this, she was probably single because a high value was procreation in this culture and this problem meant that she could not have a child so no one probably sought to marry her. This woman is a fringe person. She was a person that people would avoid and generally believed it was a waste of time to interact with her. On top of all of this, this woman shows extreme boldness and faith in reaching out to Jesus because the prevailing religious sentiment was that her

uncleanness was transmittable. If she touched the Rabbi, she would be making him unclean.

This is a story about priorities and this woman wasn't one. She was a fringe person with no influence, no wealth and nothing to offer, and she had this problem for 12 years. What is one more day?

This woman is instantly healed and Jesus realizes that something has happened. Here is where the story got interesting. Jesus says, "Who touched my cloak?" Keep in mind, this was the fully divine Son of God, who although limited was able to see the hearts of men and had a special level of wisdom, insight and vision that no one before or after has had. All of that to say, he knows who touched him. This is not dissimilar to the story in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned and they hid from God, and God asks Adam and Eve, "Where are you?" In that moment, God was not asking a geographical question. He was asking a spiritual question. Where are you? Adam and Eve had just sinned, they realized they were naked and they had sewn fig leaves together to cover their own nakedness. The problem of sin was now apparent as they suffered shame and they made a quick fix solution that made human sense and then they hid. In a similar fashion, this woman knows Jesus has been healing people and she reaches out to touch him. She tries to not involve Jesus in her healing. She thinks, "If I can just touch his cloak. If I can do the work, then I will be healed." Then she hides and Jesus says, "Where are you?" This isn't a geographical question. This is a spiritual question.

Returning to the story and his fast paced action, Jesus' disciples are shocked by his question. They cry out, "There are people everywhere. Everyone is touching you. Why would you ask who touched me?" I don't think the disciples are giving Jesus a lesson in common sense. I think this retort comes from the sense of urgency they feel on Jairus' behalf.

You have been in some version of this situation before. You are rushing to make it to a dinner party, or a recital or the airport and your spouse is lagging. They have been all day.

You have been anxiously corralling and cajoling them and now you finally have them at the door with one foot over the threshold when they say, "I would like to bring a snack for the car. Do you think I should go with an apple or an orange?" In that moment, you cry out, "Apple or an orange? It doesn't matter. If you need one get one." In that moment the elevated nature of your voice might make it sound like you hate apples and oranges, but you are responding to the overall urgency and it is manifesting in your response.

"Who touched your cloak?" It could have been anyone. Beneath that statement is the urgent feeling that precious seconds are ticking away. Then Jesus does something interesting. He keeps looking. I think the disciples half expected Jesus to be like, "Oh yeah-the little girl..." and snap out of his odd question. Instead, he keeps looking. Time is of the essence for this important, successful man, who is well loved and respected, has a daughter in great need and Jesus stops for this poor, untouchable, unclean woman. What in the world is going on here?

God's priorities rarely look like ours.

In this moment, time is of the essence for Jairus. Each second that passes is evaporating so quickly he can feel it. The pressure could not be any higher. His daughter is in the final moments of her life and it appears there is still a glimmer of hope. He has found Jesus and together they are quickly moving towards his daughter, and then Jesus does the unthinkable. He stops. He takes a detour. He doesn't conform to the priorities in this man's head.

Mark 5:35-38

Jesus didn't make it on time. There was hope for a moment, but everything just didn't work out. The little girl had died. In fact the story said, while he was telling the poor, untouchable, unclean woman that she was well, it is announced that the little girl had died. Keeping her alive was Jairus' top priority, and seemingly that wasn't a priority for Jesus.

Mark 5:39-43

The human understanding of priorities had expired. This girl was dead, but Jesus brought her back to life. He swooped in and changed the whole paradigm. By stopping for the fringe woman and tending to her soul, Jesus made a bold statement about values. While it would have been economically and socially valuable to rush to Jairus' daughter and save her at the last moment, Jesus instead tarries with a fringe nobody.

That's because all those who believe will be resurrected on the last day, just like this small girl. This is a grand reset of priorities. If we have the promise of eternal life, it should change what we do with our lives and the lives of others in the here and now. Jesus was foreshadowing a much bigger story line. We all need something bigger than the alleviation of temporary sickness. We need complete resurrection. Problems of finances, health and relationships are temporary, but our relationship with God is forever.

Jesus upends their priorities to remind them of what matters most, the hope of resurrection. The little girl had lost her life, but this woman had likely lost her soul. She was probably angry with God, distrustful of faith and distant from other believers. So Jesus makes her a priority.

Remember, Jesus is a time waster.

Jesus was rushing along with Jairus, the important, respected person, to heal a helpless little girl when he stops for a poor, untouchable, unclean woman. This woman had lived her life; this little girl was just starting out. All of a person's natural instincts in this moment would have said, "Jesus don't waste your time on this woman." By the world's standards it was a waste of time. She had no status to help advance Jesus' message. She had no money to contribute to his cause. If anything she would hinder the cause because of her uncleanness before God. By the world's standards, she was a waste of time.

Mark 5:34

I want you to see what Jesus does for this waste of time - he embraces it. Time is of the essence, Jairus was an important person who could repay Jesus, an important person that might help advance Jesus' cause, and he had a sweet sympathetic story of a dying little girl. And yet, Jesus stops for this unclean, untouchable, poor nobody, and he calls her "thugaire" the same word, daughter. I want you to be reminded of something that you probably already know; this father was passionately seeking to save his daughter and at the same time the Heavenly Father was passionately seeking to save his daughter. This passage reminds us of the precious nature of all those who bear the image of God. They, we are all, sons and daughters of the most high king. No matter how poor, unclean or untouchable they are. No matter if they cannot repay you or do you a favor in return, they are God's children.

With that in mind, I want you to see that Jesus was a time waster. Not by God's standards but by the world's standards. The world says use your time to advance yourself, to benefit yourself and to do things that benefit your situation financially, politically, professionally. God's economy is completely inverted with regard to this, which means by the world's standards you should be a time waster.

I encourage you to waste some time for the kingdom. I have told you this before but a synonym for wasteful is prodigal. Prodigal is reckless and wasteful expenditures of resources. The prodigal father was reckless and wasteful with his grace, with his love, with his time, and he expects us to do the same.

Conversely, there are many things that the world values as great uses of time that God views as wasteful. Take a look at your calendar and the expenditure of one of your greatest resources. How are you using it? Waste some time with your family. Refuse the urge to stay late. Waste some time serving in this church. Refuse the urge to show up, consume and then

leave again. Waste some time with the least of these in your sphere of influence. Refuse the urge to only love the loveable.

At the beginning of *Faust*, when the main character meets Mephistopheles he asks who he is. Mephistopheles answers that he is “part of the power that eternally wills evil and eternally works good.” This sets the tone of the story. It shows the thin line separating our priorities. It shows how easily we can delude ourselves into disordered love. Faustian deals are rarely loud, bombastic and obvious. Instead, they are little bits chipping away. They are subtle subtractions that lead to scrambled priorities. You can make a deal with work. You can make a deal with power. You can make a deal with alcohol or sex. You can make a deal with pleasure.

God has topsy-turvy priorities. If your current priorities are perfectly sensible and explainable, you may have a problem. Only when the world tells you that you are wasting time. Only when the world tells you that you aren't being wise. Only when the world tells you that you are missing out. Only then, you might have your priorities straight.