



## THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Proper 8

2 July 2006

Lamentations 3:22-33

Psalm 30

2Corinthians 8:7-15

Mark 5:21-43

My guess is that most of you know about the NIMBY phenomenon. NIMBY of course stands for Not In My Back Yard. Sure, we need shelters for battered women, but Not In My Back Yard—not near why I live. We need low-income housing, but Not In My Back Yard, not in my neighborhood. After all, we have to look out for ourselves, our neighborhood, our property values.

A close relative of NIMBY-ism, not nearly so widely known is OIMBY-ism. OIMBY stands for Only In My Back Yard. Feed the hungry, for sure, but let's start here, in Denver—or if we really have to go beyond our immediate surroundings—let's start with the hungry in the United States. Yes, it's great to support the Rocky Mountain Synod and the whole Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, but look how much more we could do in our own back yard if we weren't sending more than 15% of our offerings to the work of the church beyond our own parish. Why can't we keep that 15% so that we can do more, right here where we live, among ourselves and our own? OIMBY. Only In My Back Yard.

Neither NIMBY-ism nor OIMBY-ism are new phenomena. My hunch is that they're as old as humankind. Putting *I*, *me*, *mine*, and—if need be—*ours* first might even be the larger portion of what we call “original sin.” If we listen closely to the structure of this morning's Gospel, we hear not only the lurking OIMBY-ism and NIMBY-ism of St. Mark's audience, but ours as well. The story begins with Jairus, a much respected leader of the religious community, coming to Jesus and begging Jesus that his daughter, lying at home near death, be healed. And, since Jairus isn't just any person, of course Jesus will go with the religious leader to grant his daughter healing. Who could be more deserving? Besides, Jairus and his daughter—they're tribe, they're part of the family. And observant to boot. We take care of our own first.

But while on the way to the house of Jairus, a fly from outside the back yard finds its way into the ointment: an unclean woman enters the scene. She is *Other*, she is *not us*; compared to worthy Jairus, she is not deserving of one ounce of attention. Now, normal women are unclean once a month and need to remain in the confines of their homes only a few days. This woman, however, has had a flow of blood for twelve years—never clean—therefore virtually worthless, needing to be shunned, an outcast. What's more, the good religious people know that this kind of affliction, lasting as long as it has—resistant to therapy and getting worse—this kind of affliction can only be a punishment from God. The unclean woman's flow of blood is only a symptom of some other sort of evil lurking within her heart. She probably has a right to live and even to seek healing, but let her do it elsewhere—get her away from us. NIMBY: we don't want her in our back yard. And while all this fal-der-al is going on with this . . . this . . . undesirable, time is a-wasting. The truly deserving, good Jairus and his innocent daughter, are being kept waiting. And now, look what you've done Jesus—power has gone out from you and this undeserving outcast has been healed. You've not only wasted some of your power on this outcast, you've also rendered yourself unclean by letting her touch you. Now you really shouldn't enter the home of Jairus even if you do have some healing power left. Why can't you restrict your healing to those who are a part of your tribe, your nation, those who are clean in the sight of your own religion?

And then come people from the religious leader's house. Too late, Jesus. The daughter of Jairus is dead. "Not so!" says Jesus. "With God there is always great abundance. There's more than enough of the gifts of God to go around—more than enough to provide for the outcast, the outsider AND to provide for those who are in the back yard. It's not ever a question of either/or. There is an abundance of the gifts from God—for all—without exception." In the God of Christ Jesus there are no insiders or outsiders—there is only abundant grace for any and all in need.

St. Paul in this morning's second reading is writing to a congregation with a severe case of OYMBY-ism. The Corinthians are out for themselves, not really interested in contributing to the needs of those outside their own community. Look, says Paul—there's an incredibly poor community—in another part of the world—and even they are giving out of their poverty to the needs of people beyond their own back yard. And here are you Corinthians—a bunch of rascals who, nonetheless, have received God's grace abundant. God has overlooked the raunchiness of your lives and has proclaimed you to be as completely righteous as Christ. So now, how about being who you are? Be Christ! Give to the needs of those outside your own backyard; you've got way more than enough. Furthermore, you can bet that if and when you have needs—even the poor of Christ will provide for you. Commit yourselves to the healing, to the binding up of the wounds of the world, for that is who you are in Christ, individually and as a community.

The United States is well-known—or perhaps one might say infamous—for trumpeting itself as a Christian nation—and yet, this richest, most powerful empire the world has ever known is dead last among the industrialized nations in the percentage of gross national product it contributes to humanitarian aid outside its borders. A case of Only In My Back Yard? Would that it were so.

You, the Saints of God in this community, you live out well your new life in Christ. Though small, you give away a higher percentage of your resources than 99% of the other communities in the Evangelical Church in America, and you still have great abundance to minister to people locally and you continue to be good stewards of this building and the other resources you have received in trust from your forbears in faith. You walk well in the footsteps of the Christ who is alive within you. May this community and each of you in your daily vocations be leaven for the larger community that we may collectively be a people that gives extravagantly of its great riches that there may be a fair balance between our present abundance and the great needs of the rest of the world.