

Proper 8 - June 29, 2025

Luke 8: 26-39

“You think things are bad now...”

1. I admit I don't understand why some people want to watch truly gory things.
 - a. When I was little, my dad would take me to this little barbershop to get my hair cut as he also was getting his hair cut.
 - b. In my memory the barbershop was very clean, with four, maybe five barber chairs, plus a row of chairs facing the barber chairs for people to wait for their turn.
 - c. It was old-fashioned, with a leather strap hanging from each chair where the barber would do the very fine sharpening needed for the straight razor which would be used to shave the client.
 - d. Its neighborhood was a bit rough.
 - i. This was definitely very unpolished.
 - ii. This was unlike the neighborhood where we lived.
 - iii. Dad seemed at ease with the barber and the clientele, able to travel between entirely different social realities.
 - iv. I would just take it all in, wide eyed, ears also wide open.
 - v. The men talked about people I didn't know (probably politicians), and there were jokes which made everyone laugh but I couldn't understand.
 - e. There were piles of magazines near the chairs for the people waiting their turn.
 - i. Dad must have known the selection of magazines wasn't PG, because he never let me near them.
 - ii. Except one time I snuck a peek at one which was being read by the person sitting next to me.
 - iii. I recognized on its cover a yellow logo I had seen on a newsstand downtown.
 - iv. It was a cheaply printed magazine basically full of black and white mug shots and accident and crime scene photos. I kid you not.
 - v. Think about a scary Halloween movie, or a police show, only this was for real. And for sale.
 - f. Why would someone want to look at pictures of suffering and death like that? Why would someone PRINT such things?!
2. In today's Gospel passage, there were crowds lined up to witness first-hand the gory parade of people being taken on a forced march on their way to their crucifixion.
 - a. Of course, I know why the Romans created these tragic parades (to stir fear in the people they dominated) but why would everyone willingly GO to see it?
 - b. Probably for the same reason that one graphic magazine had subscribers:
 - i. They distanced themselves as they saw someone else's pain, and as long as it was someone else's, maybe it wouldn't be theirs.
 - ii. Or maybe it was a fascination with gore, or maybe they felt it could be a good luck charm to keep away the bad luck of being the one on the forced march.
 - c. One poor guy was picked from the crowd to carry the cross for Jesus the rest of the way (probably because Jesus wasn't strong enough to do so after being beaten).

- i. Simon from Cyrene (present day Libya) was minding his own business watching this live horror movie, and he couldn't very well say no to the Roman soldier who grabbed him and made him carry the cross. Yikes.
 - ii. I can imagine that the people standing next to Simon were so glad THEY hadn't gotten picked!
 - d. There were some there who grieved openly – a group of women were devastated because of what they were witnessing.
 - i. They were wailing or Jesus.
 - ii. And Jesus says the strangest thing: don't cry for me.
 - 1. Cry for yourselves. Worry about yourselves.
 - 2. You can't distance yourself from this painful parade, like Simon of Cyrene knew first hand.
 - 3. You can't stand there and think this has nothing to do with you.
 - 4. Because it does.
 - iii. Empires are cruel by definition.
 - 1. Those who oppress do so for their own greed and enjoyment.
 - 2. And they play dangerous games with those under their thumb. Cruel games.
 - 3. And all of us stand by and hope it won't be us next.
 - 4. Hoping it won't be us in that terrible magazine some day.
 - 5. Hoping it won't be us being dragged into the suffering.
 - 6. Jesus says, watch-- if they do this to an innocent man, can you imagine what they'd do to any of you, innocent or not?
- 3. You and I witness 21st Century images of painful parades on our phones, computers or TVs. from the comfort of home
 - a. We see cities in Gaza being bombed back to the stone age
 - i. and their residents huddle under refugee tents grieving their dead,
 - ii. or they walk for miles for meager rations only to be shot at for not staying in line.
 - b. We see grainy video of massive bombs hitting their target or satellite pictures of bombed mountains a world away hiding a military site while talking heads spin propaganda about the damage inflicted on it.
 - c. We see distressing images of immigrants being roughly arrested by masked people only to find out many of those taken didn't get due process or fair treatment.
 - d. To be sure, some people willingly tune in because they think THEY will never be on such pictures or videos,
 - i. that somehow they are safe from the forces which create that terrible visual parade.
 - ii. Somehow they think they're on the right side of the fighting.
 - iii. And some also watch and weep, distraught such unfairness and suffering is allowed to happen to those people.
 - e. And Jesus says to us here and now: look around, not at the parade of images, but at the audience, take a look at ourselves.

- i. Jesus calls out the cruelty, trying to shake us awake, so we can't distance ourselves from the suffering.
 - ii. Jesus calls us to lament the pain and injustice, and tries to root us back to God.
 - iii. Like with the lament in Psalm 42, which we sang at the beginning of worship and which we've used for the liturgy today. In verses we didn't read it says:
 - ⁹ *[God] You are my mighty rock. Why have you forgotten me?
Why must enemies mistreat me and make me sad?*
 - ¹⁰ *Even my bones are in pain, while all day long my enemies sneer and ask,
"Where is your God?"*
- f. Jesus knew about lamenting.
 - i. Lament was a part of his hymnal – the Psalms. It was everyone's hymnal
 - ii. But lamenting isn't hopeless and it certainly isn't about comparing our relative safety to the tragic lives of others
 - iii. Lament is about acknowledging the pain (ours and that of others) and calling on God to intervene, to hear our prayer, to act with justice
 - iv. Lament seeks to hold God accountable for God's promised love. Let me say that again.
 - v. And so a lament psalm like today's fits Jesus' call for us to lament:
 - ¹ *As a deer gets thirsty for streams of water, I truly am thirsty for you, my God.*
 - ² *In my heart, I am thirsty for you, the living God.
When will I see your face?*

And ends with

¹¹ *Why am I discouraged? Why am I restless? I trust you, Lord!
And I will praise you again because you help me, and you are my God.*

- 4. We are living through a moment in history when we can't afford to distance ourselves from those suffering injustice or violence.
 - a. Because if that violence happens against unsuspecting people minding their own business, it can happen to any of us.
 - b. I say that not to frighten us, but to remind us that God sides with the people pushed to the margins, and calls us to solidarity, just as Jesus walked among us as one of us to be close to those living through empire's cruelty.
 - c. We lament because we long to be with God as much as a deer looking for water.
 - d. We lament because we face our discouragement and restlessness and turn to the only one who will help, the God we praise.
 - e. And we lament not as an act of despair, but it is a courageous act of faith
 - i. We hold God accountable for God's promise, and we cry out
 - ii. We hold on to each other, daring never to lose sight of our humanity
 - iii. As people of faith we walk away from watching from the sidelines the painful parade and instead with courage we choose to
 - 1. stand up against this shocking injustice,
 - 2. stand up against thrusting nations into wars on a whim,

3. stand up against destroying the lives of people to boost political poll numbers,
4. stand up against selling out the poor to fill the pockets of the rich.
5. A life of faith is difficult, with challenges and tests, with lament and tears. But it is not a life on the sidelines. It is a journey to long for the God who in the toughest moments will stand by us and see us through.