

Calvary United Methodist Church
September 22, 2019

OUTRAGEOUS GRACE
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

Luke 8:22-25

I invite our children to come forward for our children's message. I'm glad you are all here. The first service I only had one come forward and I thought I was going to have to ride this boat by myself. Hmm... I'm glad you are all here today and I want to talk a little bit about faith. In the story that I am going to share today it talks about Jesus. And one time he was with his friends out on a boat going across the sea. A big waves came. Have any of you ever been in a boat out in the big waves? It is one thing to be on smooth water, but when the waves get really big it can be a little frightening. So, let me tell you a little bit about this story:

One day Jesus and his followers got into a boat. He said to them, "Come with me across the lake." And so they started across. While they were sailing, Jesus fell asleep. A bit storm blew up on the lake. The boat began to fill with water and they were endanger. The followers went to Jesus, woke him and said, "Master! Master! We will drown!" Jesus got up and gave a command to the wind and the waves. And the wind stopped, and the lake became calm. Jesus said to his followers, "Where is your faith?" For the followers were afraid and were amazed. They said to each other, "What kind of man is this? He commands the winds and the water and they obey him."

So, can you imagine what it would like to be on smooth water? How many of you have ever gone out on water that's pretty smooth? Swimming pool, rivers, streams, ponds? And then when the wind comes, even on small lakes, the waves can be big and if you are in the ocean literally the waves can be as high as this or higher, if you have seen the pictures of the big ships out there with waves around them. (Child speaks.) They were high? (Child speaks again.) That's a big wave. She was just saying that this summer they saw waves taller than me. That's a big wave. So, I know that if I was in a little boat like this, I would be very much afraid. It's one thing to be calm, and there are a lot of times you're probably calm when you come to church. All is well and the days are well, but sometimes when we see storms, and you can imagine what it was like with Jesus and his friends to look out and say, "Oh, my! We've got to go on water like this." And I'm not sure about you, but if I were in that boat, I would really be afraid. How about you? Pretty frightening. Pretty frightening.

But they woke Jesus and he calmed the storms. Now, that's beyond our imagination because we weren't there, but this boat's called the USS Faith. It remind us that in faith in God, when we have storms in our life, God will calm us down.

Some of you are in school now, right? Have you ever gotten to school and forgot your homework or you books or some assignments? Did you have a panic like, "Ah! What's going to go

on here?” Like flailing all over the place? “I don’t know what to do! I can’t get hold of it. I’m going to be in trouble with the teachers! I won’t get a good grade.” Did you ever do that? Or maybe some of you have forgotten things at homes, you get to work, like your running shoes or your other shoes or something that you really needed and we really panic and we just need to have a little faith saying, “It won’t be good, it won’t be happy, but it will smooth out. Everything is going to be okay.”

But sometimes the things that make us really afraid and flail our arms, go around like the hurricanes and tornadoes and the storms of life. I mean, one day our house could be like this and everything is fine and the next day the storms come and it can be really a wreck. And God says afterwards, “Those houses get rebuilt.”

Even in the severest storms of our life, we have faith. There are a lot of times I flail my arms around like, “Oh my gosh! I forgot to cook supper and friends are coming over.” Or you get a bill and adults do this: they get a bill like the roof is leaking and they have to fix it and it wasn’t in the budget. Or the car breaks down and it wasn’t in the budget. Or something else occurs and you know what? God says, “Chill! Everything will be okay.” And I guess in all the situations where you’ve done things like that, it’s okay, isn’t it? We might be sad, we might be unhappy, there might be some problems, there might be some losses. Like at school if we forget to study for a test, we might really panic, but you can study hard and make up the differences.

So, there is all kinds of faith, and that was sort of like a struggling faith, we don’t know what to do, but sometimes our faith is stronger when we prepare. How many of you can swim? Did you just learn to swim just like that? Most people have to take lessons, don’t they? And when we practice, someone gets in the water and they hold you and say what? Paddle your feet. And then a little bit later: make your hands go or float on your back.

We learn to swim like we learn our faith in God. We practice our faith. And so when we practice on the faith we know that when we have problems and when in our fun times with God that we have faith because God is with us. We’re not alone. Our faith is strong.

And so we don’t have to struggle alone. You know that your friends, everybody in this house calls ourselves Christians. That means we are your friends, more than that we are your family. And if you need us, we try our best to be there to help each other.

And sometimes we cling on. When I was in Boy Scouts long ago we had to take a small canoe out in the lake and we couldn’t touch bottom, it was like 20 feet deep. We had to flip the canoe over and then flip it back and then make our way to shore. And that is sort of like a clinging faith where we are just like holding on if your boat was trying to sink, and you hold on and most of the time these smaller boats have flotation in them and they won’t sink.

That’s like when you are holding on to God saying, “I just had a loss in my life, I am very

sad or I'm sick. I have to really hold on through this tough times because we know we'll make it."

I'm not sure about you, but when I'm going through a tough time I like either my family or friends or people I trust. Have you ever been sad and you just want to get a hug from somebody? Why does that help, do you think? (Child speaks.) They are there to protect you. That's excellent because God is here to protect us and sometimes it's through each other and all these people in this room. We, as Christians and all around the world people call themselves Christians. And so we are here to try to cling on to one another. And that gives us a faith that gives us a real resting place, because when I'm in the arms of people I trust and especially the arms of God, I say, "You know what, God? I don't know how I'm going to pay the bill, maybe, or I'm not sure someone that I love is passed away or maybe I'm real sick or something changes in our work or in school or with friends, but you know you are going to be okay because God is with you."

It's like you have one of these. What's that called? A life preserver. And so, when you are in trouble out in the water, what do they do? The life guards throw them out and you grab it so you don't sink. God is our life preserver, all the time he is preserving our life. He is saving it. He is rescuing us and that is so we might believe and so that we might know that we can trust God all the days of our life.

I wouldn't get in a big storm in this boat, but I certainly pray that God will always give me faith to know that whatever situation I face, I am okay. God will be with me because God is always present.

Can we pray together? Heavenly Father, sometimes we have troubles in our lives. Sometimes we get sad and we get broken and disappointed and heartache, but You are our God who says You are always with us. Bless these children this morning and all of us as we gather in Your name that we might always have faith and find strength and rest in You. Amen.

Thank you for coming up. Have a wonderful week!

Message:

Luke 16:1-13

Our lesson today about outrageous grace is about God's Kingdom and about where we place our trust. We can't love this world so much and the one to come because we are responsible stewards with all that we have. We, you and I, are gifts of God and all that God has given us is for the Kingdom of God and so when I looked over this, I thought, "What is it about God that He looks upon us?" And God looks at us like any grandparent or parent when they have this infant turning into toddler turning into young child, turning into teens, sometimes you look back and say, "My gosh, they are just amazing, aren't they? Look at them taking those first steps. Look at them beginning to converse with you. Look at them as they grow in the years." And God stands in amazement thanking the possibility of what we are to become and

sometimes God looks at us and says, "How wonderful they are! Look at my children, how great they are."

God must sit and think a lot and then like any parent, someday this is gone. I think sometimes God must be smacking God's head saying, "I've given them everything. Everything they have, everything they could ever be. What are they doing? Why aren't they playing well?" Do you ever say that to your children: play better together, right? We don't do that very well, do we?

How is it that God, who is so gracious, so outrageously gracious, gives us all that we have and we want to cling to all that we have? We don't want anyone else in on the love. We don't want anyone else or all the things we have. We just want life our way. God is saying, "What?" You see, God gave us life that we might be life givers, that we might be the people that bring His light, His salvation, His gift of not life alone here, eternal life! What a precious gift, to know that it's all in God's hand.

Psalm 116.5: The Lord is Gracious and Compassionate.

And therefore He expects us to be gracious and yet among our families we don't get along real well. Among those we call family within the Christian church we don't get along so well. In our neighboring communities, in our country, in the world, we struggle, we fight and God says again, "My children, my children,"...what's the story in the Psalms, like a hen I will bring you in under my wings, as he looking over Jerusalem and saw him fighting. God must truly be that hen that wants to bring comfort to us and yet we can't see God's goodness.

Part of the reason we don't is we sometimes, I know you won't want to hear this, we think we are better than others. Do you ever get that idea? We think we are better than someone else, tooting our own horn. I remember when I moved, every part of our state you move people use different expressions, and this person came up to me and said, "Watch out for that person. They are a no-account." Did you ever hear that one before? A no-account. In other words, their life is meaningless. I don't know if I've ever met anyone whose life was meaningless. We've talked about those kind of things, right? Watch out for that girl...she's trouble. Watch out for that guy...he's been trouble since the day he was born. Boy, it's nice to know we are perfect, isn't it? We all got through our teenage years just fine. Those early 20s, you were just the perfect child all the time. We look down on other people. Gert Behanna years ago I listened to one of her tapes. She said her parents taught her that, but she looked down on people who looked down on people. I think our God would do that.

God says we're better than this. We are one another's family. We are children of God. We are brothers and sisters of the family. We need to not tear down, not rip to pieces. We need to uplift, up build, strengthen, guide, direct, everything that's possible is what God would want us to do for one another.

In this story today it reminds me of another one about a man who is called the Penitent. He wasn't like those other poor people. I want you to hear this story, in Luke 18:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you I'm not like the other people---robbers and evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all that I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. You can almost picture him humbling himself because he knew he had done badly. He could not even look to heaven by beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Lest we forget...we are not perfect. You know that. We don't need to grovel because God said, "I just invite you to do what? Repent and change." You don't have to grovel. You don't have to come back time and time again for everything we have done wrong. What God wants to see is repentance. God wants us to go from going the wrong way to going the right way, doing the right thing, loving the right way, forgiving our neighbors, loving as God has taught us. That's all God is asking, that we do the right thing and to remember how blessed we are.

I was on vacation last week and I went to where this church group went about five years ago to work with Lakota Sioux Indians, Native Americans. And I realize more and more every trip I take how blessed I am. That is the poorest county of the United States, the Pine Ridge Reservation. Can you imagine being 60, 70 or 80 and carrying water to your house because a lot of the residents there still don't have running water? I have often said I could deal without electric, don't like it but I can, but, boy, water, drink, bath, laundry, showers? You don't have water, you don't have much. Do you know what it's like that your nearest store is an hour away from you? Do you know what it's like when you live in an area, the other year they told us a story between prom night in May and graduation, 9 youth suicides because of the hopelessness. Do you know how blessed we are? And sometimes we get the idea that we are blessed because we are good. You know what? We are not blessed because we are good, we are blessed because God is gracious. I don't deserve what I have. I don't. For whatever reasons my ancestors moved to an area where it's not desert, where there are streams, where there is farming, where there is industry, there are things. I'm not born in the middle of Ethiopia or in the middle of a desert somewhere. And because of all that I've been given, God says again, he backs up about repentance, "Jeff, I'm not asking much. I'm asking you make a difference. How can you help somebody else? Along this journey, how can you help with whatever it is in other people's lives? You see, I've given you a gift Jeff, it's called grace. I just ask you to share what I've given you."

See, all we are given isn't so we can accumulate a mass: bigger houses, bigger cars. We have as many second houses now as people had second cars in the 60s, you realize that? I remember days when people had to find rides to work. Now everybody in the family has a car. And now people say, "Well, I'm going to my colleagues or I'm going down to my beach house or going there." A lot of the people in the world don't have much...they can't even imagine we have two cars or a car or a second home. God says, "I'm not telling you to give up everything. But how about you share a little bit? How about you have an outrageous grace. I've given you so much, could you cut back a little bit and give a little of your time? I'm not talking just money here. Could you teach someone who needs someone to hold them on their lap?" Our neighborhood Center is always looking for people to hold children and read them books because there's not enough parents in the system to teach. Could you help someone around your neighborhood? Could you visit a prison, a nursing home? Can you make a difference? Can you build up, can you do something to strengthen the world?

I look at the world and how mixed up we are nowadays, which is a good thing I think. I look at my family, we are all mixed up. But you know what? Sometimes I look at the greater pictures of our families. We forget each other. I'm amazed at how many people refuse to get along with brothers and sisters and family members and I realize here, people, that some of you have faced abuse and neglect and all kinds of things and I'm not here to make you feel guilty at all, but we must give some effort to try to make peace, to try to make things right and try to work together so we can have some semblance of what community and what family ought to be. We need to give life a chance and we need to give others a chance at life.

I read this story and it is so anti my vision of what Christ would be, to hear him tell a story about someone who was cheating. This man had a job and he was squeezing extra money out of all his boss' clients for himself. His boss figures this out and he was going to fire him and he says, "So how can I take care of my nest knowing I'm going to be out of a job. Heaven knows I don't want to go with a pick and shovel anymore. Heaven knows I can't beg." So he says, "You owe me 1000 bushels of wheat, make it 850. You owe me a whole bunch of olive oil; I'll cut it in half" because if you kiss up to enough people they will be there for you, he hopes.

What I discovered in reading all of this, thinking it was about the money, it's not. When I started reading the backgrounds and I started reading some of the commentaries, this is a story about the Kingdom and new life and about where you string up your treasures. It is not just about getting enough money to live now; it's not just about learning the lesson about how to treat other people. It's about eternity.

Now, we don't talk about that much in the church anymore. We act like we are going to live forever. But I promise you, ain't none of us getting out of here alive. The question is: when it is over, then what? Then what? Where do you stand with God? When God say, "How have you treated people lately? Have you loved the way I loved? Have you forgiven the way I've forgiven? Have you had an outrageous grace to make a difference?" You see, His

Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, which he wants us to bring right now on earth so people say, "You know what? I want a piece of that."

It has different standards. The standard of America is always different than any other part of the world. Some of Europe has it but they don't live big like we do. Our standard is more, if there is any left, I want more. Right? We live big. And we say we have nothing, time. We are busy running kids to church, running to sports, running to music. We say we don't have any time, we don't have any energy, we don't have any money, and we do. It's just we don't put God first because we're fallen. We're fallen as individuals; we're fallen as a society. And here's what the world is...they are looking in at the church today. Predictions are not good if you read church literature. There are some predictions that say within ten years a half of all churches in America will close. That breaks my heart. Because we've lost who we are. We are the people of God and we've forgotten.

Young people are looking in and saying, "They don't look like God, they don't love the way God loved, they don't forgive like God forgave, they don't help others the way..." It's all about them. We talk about young people and the "me" generation...folks, that's us. We've changed our rule of being Christian.

When was the last time you knocked on a door, called a friend, and said, "I miss you? We'd love to see you in church, we'd like to invite you to church if you're not a part of a church family." Somehow we've relinquished that to leadership. If we label ourselves as a Christian and we are a part of the family, we should want to build our family all the time. You see, God says, "I want you to see my Kingdom from my perspective. You are just stewards, remember the guy who was a steward? I have given you this to take care of, and he wasn't doing a very good job." That's what this story is about.

And God is saying to us, "I've given you everything and you are not doing as well as you could do." We need to understand that the stewardship is not giving a part of us. It is not just money. God doesn't want a part of you; God wants all...all of us. In a generation that says, "I want the bigger house..." Sometimes we look and we start to retire, the kids have left, the grandchildren and now we want a bigger house? I'm thinking why? Well, because I can afford it. I want to be comfortable.

Do you know how many of those resources can help people who need things like water and stuff? If we learn to live within our means... When we forget who gives us life, we make Him the God of our leftovers and I'm confessing because I got a house that's far too big for one man. It's a townhouse, but it's a lot of house. And here's what I know. Our tendency is to give God the crust, give God the leftovers.

You have no idea through my years of ministry I've done a lot of flood relief, hurricane relief, disaster work. People would bring in shovels with handles broken off. That would be great when my house is flooded out to get down here and put this in. They call for clothing

and the buttons and zippers are broken. They call for toys and they are a mess or broken. We are really going to give our best to God's people. You have no idea how much that happens in shelter, in missions. We give God our leftovers and somehow think... I've had people walk into church with junk like that and say, "Can I have a write off? I'd like this on a paper." And I want to say you want what? For this junk? You ought to pay me to take it away.

I look at a crust and think how many times we take the best and we give leftovers to God and God said, "I won't have it." God loves us every day. God gives us outrageous grace and He says, "I'll be number 1 or I'll be nothing at all." How about that.

How many of you want to be in a relationship where your partner, your mate, your spouse comes in and you are only there when they need you. The rest of the time you don't know where they are for 2 months at a time. That's God, He's leftover. We disappear until we need something and we're back to God.

I want to talk to you about why we're like these people: Cain, if you don't know the story in early Genesis, Cain didn't like the deal that was going down and he killed his brother. Still a powerful witness for God. Abraham became a liar; he was so afraid of being caught in other nations with this woman, his wife Sarah, that he lied and said because they were afraid they would take his wife, he said it was his sister. He didn't want someone else to have her. Jacob had a fight with his brother Esau because he wanted his birthright. They were people like us who were sinners and made mistakes and tried to get right before Almighty God and God used them.

So, if you are not right before God, and that's all of us, God says it can be right. But don't stand too tall and mighty and think that you are perfect. We get all polished up, we want to look good. We hear people, "Well, we ought to be wearing suits and ties and robes and we ought to be dressed..." We can polish ourselves as much as we want; we are still sinners, folks. We are still in need of God. We can't fool ourselves with respectability. We need to come before God and realize we are sinners in need of God's grace for without confession, we perish. You either know who you belong to or you don't. If you belong to God you say every day, "God, I'm yours. I want to be whatever it is."

This cross was God's way of saying, "I've paid a price. I'm giving you new life, new life."

Every story of scripture, whether it was the lost coins or the lost sheep, the lost whatever, it's God saying, "I don't care how lost you are, you are mine." Even He loved us so much that He gave us these examples: dying on the cross, the thieves next to him, he said: "Father forgive them" to the people crucifying him. "They know not what they are doing." And he said this to those guys with them, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

This God, he's just tossing out love everywhere he could. "I love you. You are amazing. You are wonderful." And He's hoping something will happen. He's hoping that we will

have outrageous grace for those around us. He wants us to toss it out. He wants us to show love and mercy and forgiveness and grace and life.

So, what will you do with the gifts that God has for you? What will you do? There is a trip I was on on my vacation to meet a ministry run by Billy Mills. I'd never heard of Billy Mills before because you can see I'm not a runner. Billy Mills in 1964 ran the 10,000 meter, that's 6 miles. Some of you might have read it. He went to Tokyo. He was not on the list of anyone that had a possibility to win and he won. He did it for his nation. He is Lakota Sioux, a people who continue to suffer. He is 82 years old, soon to be 83. He gave a movie that was made about him, all the profits, to help his people. A book was written about him, all the profits. He married a white woman in that day which was unheard of, fighting with the family. They have been married about 60 years now. How about that? And together they have this ministry running strong. It's run out of a group from Virginia. They help with water; they help with food; they help with boots; they help with books and school. You don't have to be Billy Mills.

What I'm asking is: what is it you are going to do with your life? Are you going to gather more for your retirement? Are you going to get a bigger house, more cars, more boats, more vacations? All that is fine, if God is number 1.

I'm sure Billy has had a very wonderful life. He now lives in California, has many grandchildren. But what is it you are really committed to? Is God one? Number one?

After we left there we visited another sacred place for them where another man had a calling: the Korczak family. This man felt that the Native Americans were done a raw deal and we know they still are. He wanted to build this mountain. The faces on Mt. Rushmore are 60 feet high. This is almost twice that. We were supposed to worship up on top and unfortunately it rained, but we were able to visit. He had 18 children, I believe. He had this dream, it has been in works since like 50 years already and it is going to take another 50 to complete it because there is no government funding. His family are still working on this, all with donations.

I'm not going to be that guy either. Just Jeff, but Jeff trying to make a difference as I pray you are. Is it with Little League, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, training someone to dance or play a musical instrument, read, helping with children? I don't know what it is, but is God One? Are you even asking God to be One in your life, that you can say, "God, what is it that you will have of me that I can use all of my resources all the days of my life, not this 'I've done that, I'm retired, I'm not serving.'" No, until our last breathe, what is it that I'm giving to Almighty God?

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, you have an outrageous grace. You've given us more than we could have ever imagined or hoped for. We are so blessed and often forget. Use us as your vessels. Shake us to our very core of our being that we might call out to you to find out what

it is we could do to bring your Kingdom on earth. May we always be light. May we always uplift. May we always be positive. We ask in your Most Holy Name. Amen.