**Text: Mark 5:21-43**

The Mercy of the Lord

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Have you ever taken something that wasn’t yours? I don’t mean in the sense that you stole something but perhaps maybe you’ve operated under the theory that it is better to ask for forgiveness than it for permission. Sometimes it isn’t a big deal, and sometimes it is. It’s a risk you take depending upon the situation. One summer when I was home on break my friend and I went to see the hottest new movie of the year, Inception. Not only that, but this was only the second time that I had ever been to a midnight premier of a movie. I was excited. This movie had all the hype. It was an original story, something totally new. Not only that, but it was written and directed by the same guy who had just completed The Dark Knight, arguably the best batman movie ever made, and one of my top 5. Now, thanks to the internet, we didn’t have to get to the theater hours in advance and wait in line, so that wasn’t an issue. In fact, the biggest issue arose when we tried to get the tickets for the IMAX showing and found that there weren’t any IMAX theaters close to where we lived. So, we found the closest one and bought our tickets. Now the location of this movie theater was sort of an issue, or at least I knew it would be. It was in an area of Pittsburgh that is not necessarily known for being the safest place at midnight, and I knew that if I asked for permission, and was very specific, I wouldn’t be allowed to go. So, when I was asked what theater the movie was in I said the only logical thing, “I don’t know I didn’t buy the tickets but I think it’s at the mall.” Which if seems like a pretty legitimate answer. Now everything went well, the movie was great and we really enjoyed ourselves. And it was the next morning when I was asked, “So where did you end up going to see the movie?” At this point there was no point in hiding it, so I said, “We went to the IMAX on the Waterfront.” To which I received an absolutely stunned look. It was after a few seconds when I heard the line, “Well if I had known that I wouldn’t have let you go.” To which I replied, “I know.”

I had failed to ask for permission, or at least I had failed in mentioning one very important detail. The saying goes, “Nothing good happens after midnight.” That saying is doubly true for two 19-year-old college students in a not-so-good neighborhood. It makes sense that asking for permission would be a hard thing to do. After all, why is it that people sometimes have a problem asking for permission? Perhaps it’s because it opens the door to an answer we don’t want to hear. In this case, I knew what would’ve happened, I wouldn’t have been able to go see the movie and someone else would’ve had my seat. And in the long run, that would’ve been ok. I ended up seeing the movie in theaters at least 2 more times that summer. It certainly wouldn’t have been the end of the world. But in the moment, I made the decision to ask for forgiveness rather than asking for permission. This is not something that is uncommon for us to witness, perhaps even in our own lives. I’m sure that at some time or another we’ve all taken liberties that weren’t ours to take. Most of the time it happens when we ask very vague questions purposefully in order to get a very vague yes or no. Thus, we have received “permission” to do whatever it is. But we aren’t being completely honest are we. Instead we are being misleading and lying to achieve our ends. In some cases, this isn’t really a big deal, but in some cases it is. In reality it’s a rather insidious habit that we have. We are taking advantage of the good will of others in the assumption that we won’t make them angry or betray their trust, or if we do, we can put on a sad face and apologize, and suddenly all is forgiven right? The woman in our Gospel lesson behaved in a similar manner.

Now it is clear that this woman had suffered a great deal. In fact she had suffered for over a decade with the same ailment and found no cure. Would we even stand for such a thing ourselves? Certainly not! As soon as there is an issue, whether large or small, we have the expectation that it will be resolved quickly. Feeling sick? Take a medicine that makes you feel better. Broken bone? ER trip. Headache? Well how about this fine fast acting pain reliever. The point is that we don’t allow ailments such as these to go unchecked and unresolved for 12 years. In fact, we would exhaust every possible option in order to find a solution. Just look at the amount of medications that are available for us to take. It would make sense that this woman would do the same. In her case she didn’t have specialists that her insurance or other doctors could provide her with. Instead she probably went from “healer” to “healer” dealing with any variety of treatments. From spells to herbalist concoctions to bloodletting to simply praying in the temple, this woman may have done it all. She comes to see this Jesus she’s heard so much about because why not. What other options does she have left? Nothing has worked. Everything has come up zero. How close are you right now to being at the point this woman was? Are you there, right on the precipice, leaning over the edge of the cliff? Do you feel confident enough that you’ve taken care of things well enough that, barring some major disaster, it’s smooth sailing from here on out? My friends regardless of where you may be, know this, things change faster than we realize. If you are at that point, if you are leaning over the edge and grasping at straws, the same is true. Life can change on a dime. When we feel pushed to the limit, often we haven’t even come close. For as much as we don’t want to admit it, ours is a life of suffering. Ours is a life, much like this woman, with ailments that cannot be cured. No matter what specialists we go to, whether it be politics, science, or a complete separation from all things, we will often find that when one ailment goes away, another arises. When one problem in our lives is solved, another one arises. Maybe this month you’ve been really sick, and perhaps this year, things just aren’t going your way. Maybe you’re discontent with your job or the state of the church or the state of our country, or maybe even all three and many many more. We always find an ailment in our world that cannot be fixed. It can’t be fixed with philosophy, it can’t be fixed by our culture and it can’t be fixed with our government. When you look at the history of our world, there are always people discontent with something. The status quo no longer is making the grade so things must change. And then after things change the status quo is no longer good enough. You see the history of the world is constantly evolving, but the story is exactly the same. People become dissatisfied with their situations and force a change. In some cases it creates a nation like the United States, the most prosperous nation in the history of the world, a place where the poorest in our country are considered rich by the standards of most other people on earth. In other cases, this sudden change can create states and governments set upon destruction, war, and genocide.

So let’s reel things back a bit and get back to our story. The woman is at the end of her rope. She’s decided to give it one more shot and go and see this miraculous healer. I’m sure she had heard the line before, “He can cure all your ills!” And so she goes to see this Jesus, and she pushes through the cloud just to have a chance at getting in front of him to ask to be healed. Yet she has faith that this will be the one, she has to, for if she doesn’t truly believe that she will be made well, then what is all this for? Why all this suffering over something that might not even matter in the end? She tells herself, perhaps to give her the confidence to approach him, that such a healer only needs to have his garments touched in order to cure her. She goes, asking for forgiveness, instead of permission. For as we see, Jesus is well aware that something has happened. She doesn’t ask Jesus to heal her, because what if he said no? What then? She had suffered for so long, certainly she was worthy of a reprieve. So she goes, believing that she will be made well, and without speaking to Jesus, touches his garments, and much to her amazement I’m certain, after all she comes forward, in fear and trembling, is healed of her disease! How often does this woman embody us? How often do we go before God asking for forgiveness instead of for permission? The answer is all the time. All the time we are coming before God asking for forgiveness. After all, that was one of the first things we did during the course of our church service, we asked God for forgiveness. And much like the woman in the story, we were healed, for God pronounces his absolution upon us much in the same way the power of Jesus healed the woman. That is because our God operates like no other. Our God operates through mercy. For Jesus certainly had the power to undo the healing, but that is not how God operates. God is not one of destruction and pain, but he is a God of grace and mercy. We come before God asking forgiveness more than we realize. We hardly ever have asked for God’s permission to disobey him. If we have, the answer has certainly been no. Yet we have done it anyway. And when we come face to face with the consequences of our actions, we come to God asking him to look the other way. My friends our God does not look the other way. In fact, he looks straight at the cross and see the suffering done by our Lord Jesus Christ for our sake. He sees that our sins have been paid for with the most valuable currency there is, blood. He looks straight at us and absolves us. For whatever our sufferings on this earth may be, they are but for a little while. The eternity that awaits the baptized children of God is exactly that, eternity with him. Try for a second to put eternity into a number you understand. And then realize that you aren’t even close. Eternity is never ending. Never. Ending. Perfection. That is what awaits us. That is what a life in Christ brings us. A life that never ends in the presence of our God. Amen. Now may the peace which surpasses all understanding keep and guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.