

**Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles**  
**Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – June 28, 2015**  
**Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister**

**Mark 5:21-43**

**FOR REFLECTION**

“Such are the tiresome memories of a shadow-shooter,  
earth-rim-roamer, walker of the world's weird wall.”

- John-Gardner Grendel ch.1

**Walking the World's Weird Wall**

Jairus was a worship-arranger and building maintenance coordinator at the synagogue  
– a Deacon-Trustee, if you will.

His twelve-year-old daughter – on the brink of womanhood – was dying –  
walking the world's weird wall – clinging like a fragile moth  
on that thin curtain of mortality swinging slowly out over the abyss.

Jairus knew that death brought corruption of the body – to touch a dead body  
brought even the holiest of men to the brink of death themselves.

But he had heard about a man who walked that weird wall without fear;  
he found him – and lay down in his path like a cloak over a mud puddle –  
stopping him in his tracks.

Meanwhile, there was a woman who had been bleeding for as many years  
as Jairus' daughter had been alive.

Blood, that life-giving river that runs through us, had been running out of her –  
frightening the world with its relentless redness –  
and its inexorable pull toward death.

Unclean, she had been excluded from touching, talking, engaging with anyone  
other than herself.

She had been forced to huddle up against the world's wall for half her life.  
But she had heard about a magician with cauterizing powers – a wizard –  
“shadow-shooter, earth-rim-roamer, walk of the world's weird wall.”

John Gardner, Grendel p. 7

The woman, her face unknown by forgotten neighbors, unfolded herself  
and pressed through the human wall between her savior and herself –  
defiling anyone who bumped against her.

Dropping to her knees and then her stomach –

reaching across the abyss between her world and everyone else's –  
her fingertips brushed the hem of his robe – as he suddenly stood still –  
to avoid stepping on a man's body  
prostrate before him in the road.

Unable to move in either direction – hemmed in by desperation and defilement –  
Jesus negotiated his precarious position – juggling salvation and resurrection  
as if they were loaves of bread multiplying out of thin air.

To the woman behind him he gave credit for her own healing –  
tossing loaves of faith into the crowd for anyone with ears to hear –  
and anyone hungry enough to consume.

To the man he offered hope in spite of the obvious facts –  
stepping carefully through the maze of professional mourners  
and the mirth of skeptics –  
to reanimate the deceased daughter of a distraught stranger.

Defying death and defilement, precipitating and presaging his own fate –  
Jesus walked on – along the world's weird wall.

He walks there still – repairing the tears (*tares*) in life's lovely and complex tapestries –  
drying the tears (*tears*) of G-d and humankind in the wake of horrific tragedies –  
easing the climb of the frail and feeble as they reach the top of the wall,  
preparing for what lies beyond –  
rousing the huddled masses from their tent cities  
and reuniting them with those who couldn't love them  
enough – or didn't know how.

On battlefields where children kill and die for freedom and land, on principle  
and on the word of their superiors, Jesus walks the labyrinth of souls –  
comforting the wounded and lifting the dead into the light.

At crime scenes and bedsides, ringside and in the sanctuary – Jesus Christ –  
heart-healer, game-changer – bread-juggler and wine-vintner –  
violator of expectations –  
Messiah walks with the wounding and wounded,  
the wandering wonderers.

In his wake spectators cannot remain unmoved and unmoving –  
silent, sidelined and uneasy.

In the wake of Jesus there is a movement that grows –  
flag-pole climbers and more-perfect-unionizers –  
flagrant forgivers and "rights-minded" justices –

corporate persons now raising rainbow flags to replace their racist banners –  
centuries of persistent souls waking now to dance on graves  
and marry their beloveds – all – all in joy –  
all threatening to remake creation in G-d's image.

In this-now-global world – all nations balanced on the precipice of sovereignty  
and boundary-less interdependence –  
G-d's messengers – wall-walkers and bread-jugglers –  
move in labyrinthine patterns across all borders –  
doctors and scientists and teachers and peacemakers  
touch lives without heeding social protocols –  
defiling those who would get in their way –  
offering salvation and resurrection to those swept out of sight  
wall-dwellers, abyss-watchers, lost-souls, shadow-creatures.

On this-now-dying planet – seas rising, species expiring –  
voices of denial shouting down the winds of climate change  
unaware of the tsunami climbing up their backs –  
Jesus walks –  
with an army of healed bleeders and un-starving children –  
peacefully employed veterans of foreign and domestic wars –  
cyber-revolutionaries and serious regime changers –  
eco-realists and activists – truth-tellers and bread-jugglers –  
wall-huggers, tree-huggers – all in hugger-mugger –  
hasting to undo the wasting of this blue-green paradise – our home.

Wall-walkers all – toe-ing that thin-blue-line between this life and the next –  
the Jesus people walk across Niagara Falls every day – no stunts –  
just death-defying acts of kindness – and random resuscitations –  
brinksmanship that would leave us breathless  
if we knew what G-d was thinking about all of this...

We are called to the wall – the world's weird wall –  
to risk it all in the wake of Jesus who walked here before us –  
who gives us credit for our own healing  
and refuses to step on our prostrate bodies –  
offering hope instead – and bread.

Little children get up and walk – eat and go forth –  
Jesus is waiting for you...at the wall...

## Mark 5:21-43

21 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. 22 Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet 23 and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." 24 So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.

25 Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. 26 She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. 27 She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." 29 Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. 30 Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" 31 And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" 32 He looked all around to see who had done it. 33 But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

35 While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" 36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." 37 He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. 38 When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. 39 When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." 40 And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" 42 And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. 43 He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

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Paradoxically, though one ultimately destroys the other, Grendel and Beowulf both define each other—that is to say, each respective role is predicated upon the existence of the other. A hero needs a monster, and vice versa. Grendel, the “Hrothgar-Wrecker”, is both a slave to and an escapee from his role as a mere foil to the designs of men, as we see elicited in his death<sup>1</sup>.

### The Hrothgar-Wrecker

My English teacher’s favorite part about Beowulf were kennings and litotes. I wasn’t keeping careful track of Gardner’s use of litotes, but I know his use of kennings was not only prolific, but superb, as is his alliteration: “Such are the tiresome memories of the shadow-shooter, earth-rim-roamer, walk of the world’s weird wall” (p. 7). Gardner’s prose is not simply beautiful (and occasionally grotesque). Gardner, in the spirit of Tolkien, is acknowledging the tremendous rhetorical import of the Beowulf story, what it tells us about the poetry of Old English, and its literary value in and of itself.

Thus, Gardner has constructed an indubitably pretty vehicle by which to translate/transmit the subtext of the original story—that that such implications were a design of its authors, but as modern readers questioning the construction of monsters, we must invariably ask ourselves what engines drove their creation. Gardner realized not simply the mechanics of the Beowulf, but the cultural fear or need which drives our creation of monsters.

<http://heliologue.com/2010/04/04/grendel/#comment-386728>



27 When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” Mark 5:21-43