

Exhibits A & B on Death and Dying
Mark 5:21-43
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
June 27, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, “And he said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’ While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler’s house some who said, ‘Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?’ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, ‘Do not fear, only believe.’”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today, the Holy Spirit teaches us of death and dying and uses the characteristics of Mark’s gospel to do so. You see, Mark’s gospel account is known for two key characteristics: (1) its brevity, and (2) its focus on the “immediacy” of Jesus’ Messianic mission. In short, brief accounts, Mark is always appealing to the urgency of Christ’s mission, the immediate need, the immediate response to that need, the immediate turn-of-events that surrounds Christ’s work as Messiah.

So, to come upon this text of 23 verses, which deliberately and meticulously details Jesus’ dealings with Jairus, his daughter, and the woman who had been ill for twelve years... to come upon that in the midst of Mark’s brief gospel is a dramatic highlighting of the slowness – the apparent delay – with which it must have seemed Jesus was addressing the situation of those in need. And, this

situation is – at least to the reader – is just as worthy of immediate attention as are the previous situations Jesus calmed.

Last week, we heard of Jesus calming the storm by the power of His Word. Yes, the disciples fretted over his apparent sloth in showing his concern, but the whole urgent situation is over quite immediately. On the heels of that text is an account our lectionary skips, in which Jesus – stepping out of that very boat once it has returned to shore – is “immediately” (Mark says) approached by a man with a demon; and, by the power of His Word Jesus quickly silences the urgency of *that* situation.

So then, when we come to this text, we wonder why Jesus (who has just tamed creation and demon) doesn’t just immediately use the power of His Word to quiet the urgency of sickness and death. How deserving of our sympathy are these two:

- the father of a dying daughter... a man who loves his daughter so much that his title and status as ruler is barely worth mentioning; he’s simply a desperate father whose earthly helps are no answer to sickness and death, and – as any father would – he pleads and begs for help for his precious daughter.
- And, we also hear of a woman who has been bleeding for twelve years; she’s spent all her money on doctors, has endured all their efforts – tried this, tried that (we can imagine all kinds of side effects to all those efforts) – and yet, she has grown only worse and not better.

For both, and for their urgent need and for the reward of their faith, we want the Lord's immediate help. And yet, for twelve years for the woman, and now in these urgent hours for Jairus, God obviously has no hurry to get to the happy ending. Neither need we be; we know what's coming. Rather, because death is so universally looming and because we all must prepare for it, we ought cherish the opportunity to learn it *now* and think about it *now*, so that we are well-prepared for it when it comes and well-rehearsed in proper expectation of how Christ is Lord even over death itself. Luther once wrote a sermon on How to Prepare for Death in which he said we should spend our life thinking about and preparing for death, and then – at death – we should only spend our time thinking about and preparing for life, which is still to come. Indeed, just as bitter a reality is impending death in this world, equally precious is the *truth* of life in *that* world... not just wishful thinking, but equal reality. As **bitter** as is the reality of death in this world, equally **joyful** is the reality of life in *that* world. Thus, we should study our text's "Exhibit A" and "Exhibit B" on how Jesus handles sickness and death because – though there are great similarities (especially: the role of faith; the number twelve – perhaps the woman is Old Testament awaiting its sudden deliverance and Jairus' daughter is 'younger' New Testament church seemingly dying without help *until* the resurrection...), there are also

great differences, that we might see Christ address varieties of our struggles with this great enemy that is death.

In the case of Jairus' daughter, we learn that sickness and death is not a respecter of titles and status. This is important for us to remember, for we live our lives as if he who is most wealthy and most famous and most powerful is less vulnerable to the great enemy. But, as the great enemy is alien servant of God, who promised Adam "dust you are and unto dust you will return"... and as that servant of God has been chained and harnessed and tamed by Christ who is Lord over life and death... therefore, we need not struggle for temporal titles and status and power and wealth, as if climbing over each other to attain the highest peak above the rising flood waters. For every high point was covered by those flood waters, so that he who was of highest estate among men met death just as truly as he who was of lowest estate among men.

Thus, Jairus' high estate earns him nothing before the ear of God. In fact, that is perhaps the most striking difference between these two cases – the dying girl's situation would seem to get immediate attention because her father's plea is singularly *his* and (Luke's account tells us) this was his *only* daughter. How singularly worthy is this situation of Jesus' immediate attention! The woman, on the other hand, is just a nameless face in the crowd. How should she have any hope to be uniquely cared for? What worth and value has she to come before the Lord and beg his attention? She is not

known as someone's only daughter, nor even as someone's precious and beloved daughter... *except* God's daughter, when Christ says, "*Daughter*, your faith has made you well." Her situation may gain *some* sympathy among us, but not near as much as the dire need of a father helplessly watching his dying daughter!

But, back away from the emotion of Jairus for a moment, and consider this as one who probably has status more like the woman. Should this not bring us the greatest comfort! – that the Lord stops to address the needs of the nameless, faceless... treating her needs as just as important to him, as of equally 'high estate' – indeed higher priority – than the one whose status would – by human standards – seem to place him first.

The other striking difference between these two is the suddenness with which they come face-to-face with death. The woman has dealt with her issue for twelve years, to no avail. How we can sympathize with this when we think of our own ailments! – illnesses that hinder and hamper us and seemingly define daily life for us for so many years, with seemingly no relief. Contrast this with what is at least implied to be something that has suddenly struck Jairus' daughter, and her situation is deteriorating rapidly. In both situations, we struggle to see Christ's authority over death... and faith that hopes that help will eventually come gives way to despair and doubt that deliverance will ever come.

Our Old Testament reading reminds us we're not alone in that temptation... for Jeremiah wrote Lamentations as Jerusalem was being destroyed and God's people were being hauled off to Babylon. Why hadn't the help come?

And yet, even in the midst of such seeming reason for despair, Jeremiah's faithful prophetic word is that God's love and promise and timing ought not be second-guessed or doubted: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." He's not saying that as some aloof philosopher safe in an ivory tower; he's writing it as one whose entire nation and life has just been over-run by the enemy. And yet, he continues: "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." Hope in him... in the face of doubt, despair, death.

Sometimes, we must allow our soul to be instructed by the Word, then let the faith of that soul guide the life of our daily struggles and doubts. And that Word that instructs and guides the soul is, as Jeremiah says, "The LORD is good to those who wait for him; to the soul who seeks him. It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD."

But, Old Adam says, "Sure, that's easy to say when we know the happy ending: the woman is given new health; the daughter is restored to life. But what about when death is not answered for me and my loved ones with the same comfort these two received?"

But what do we learn by how Jesus addresses these situations? Do we not learn that Jesus is no respecter of death, neither its imminence nor its permanency. He does not keep his promises based on death's timeline, nor our timeline. To be sure, there are times when he heals the crowds of the towns or villages before death comes; we should recognize such things in the 99% who recovered from Covid. Then there are times when he seems to carelessly forget about Jairus' daughter or even intentionally waits to go to Lazarus' side; we should recognize that, just as he was mindful of them after they breathed their last, so he will be mindful of us as well.

But Old Adam cries out again, "Yes, but for them, he brought them new life in *this* life and new happiness to friends and family." Ah, and that's really our idolatry, isn't it? The timing and narrow focus of *this* life – that's why we doubt Christ's authority and plans and timing... because he sees and rules *beyond* this life, in the heavenly realms and in *eternal* paradise of the *new* creation. We who can only see, feel, and touch the old creation... we are quick to wonder whether the new will ever come or whether it even really exists.

But Christ didn't go to the cross to *improve* this creation. To *this* world, his crucifixion was a six-hour event that was all cleaned up by sundown and was a mere matter of history by the next sunrise. But with Christ's resurrection, this world was introduced to the new

creation and the life of the world to come. And thus, the benefits of that cross we should *expect* to be other-worldly. When skeptics of the gospel claim Christianity seems irrelevant to daily life, claim that the forgiveness of sins that Christ won on that cross seem “other-worldly” ... in a sense, that’s precisely because it is; it’s all about placing you and keeping you in unity with God who seeks not just to restore the old Eden, but who barred the way to a broken life in that old Eden forever, that He might execute His plans for the everlasting life of the world to come.

That doesn’t make it *irrelevant* to daily life; rather, it redefines the timeline and hope of daily life. My “paradise,” my “utopia,” my “best life now” doesn’t have to show up in the next thirty or forty years before the grave. Indeed, God promises it won’t. But it *will* show up: “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” That’s not *irrelevant* to daily life; it refocuses daily life and gives it steely resolve in the face of death.

My weary and dying eyes need not look to the doctor with his charts or to the family member with her tears or to the now bafoonish life coach whose smiling denial of death’s impending march now shows itself to be absurdity incarnate; rather, as we sang in the introit: “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.”

Notice, I appeal to the God who *made* heaven and earth, and he responds by saying, “I have purchased for you with holy blood an inheritance beyond and better than heaven and earth.” He has loved those He created by saving them from what they themselves had done to the creation; so, why would he now keep them in that creation they themselves had ruined?

Rather, our eyes may look to the hills, look to the horizon. For there, beyond the grave, he is preparing the new heavens and the new earth.

It’s no coincidence that Baptism ties us to his death, that we “may share in a resurrection like his.” It’s intended that the Holy Supper of his risen and glorious body and blood gives us – with that forgiveness of sins – faith’s strengthened focus on the life everlasting... so that we may “sleep in peace” – either (as we heard last week) sleeping in the boat with Jesus during this life’s storms and waves, or sleeping with the peace of Jairus’ daughter, to be awakened at once whenever the Lord unveils that glorious day of salvation.

Thus, whether your earthly life confronts death with the immediate urgency of Jairus and his daughter, or with the crawl of inevitability known by the woman, and whether that moment comes to you when surrounded by earth’s great wealth and fame or when surrounded by earth’s great poverty and obscurity, you may appeal with defiant certainty that the Lord who has authority over life and

death hears your plea, knows your need, and has a timing, purpose, and plan far above and beyond death's finite grasp over this world. For Christ's cross stretches beyond time and place – and, because Christ is still Christ (even as He was still Christ when declaring victory over death before he left *His* tomb, so also he is still Christ when declaring victory over death before you leave *your* tomb) – because Christ is still Christ and always will be Christ, the benefits of his cross will *always* be yours, and death's timetable will *always* bend the knee to the risen Son.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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