

“DON'T BE AFRAID; JUST BELIEVE”

Mark 5:21-24a, 35-43 | Sixth Sunday after Pentecost | July 2/5, 2015

[Jesus] took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (which means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). Immediately the girl stood up and walked around.

Jesus

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

What are your biggest fears? What scares you? Are you afraid of creepy, crawly critters – snakes and spiders and bugs? Silverfish give me the willies. Perhaps you have a common phobia like acrophobia (the fear of heights) or agoraphobia (the fear of open or crowded spaces). For me it's claustrophobia (the fear of small, confined spaces). Some people are afraid of the dark. Others tremble at just the thought of getting up and talking in front of a large group of people.

We could mention many others, but there is one fear that is common to almost all people, a fear that reaches across time and space and cultures to hold our hearts in its icy grip. Simply put, most people are afraid to die. You might say that death scares people to death. I know that, as believers in the Lord Jesus, we are all supposed to say, “I'm not afraid to die.” But let's be honest. Death is not natural. God never intended for his creatures to die. And so death scares us.

That's why the portion of God's Word before us today is so comforting. Today we see the Lord of Life's awesome power over death. His words still our trembling hearts: “DON'T BE AFRAID; JUST BELIEVE.” Trust in Jesus. Trust Jesus to take care of your biggest fear. Trust Jesus to take care of your little fears too.

I. Jesus Takes Care of Our Biggest Fear

Last week we heard how our Lord Jesus stilled a storm on Lake Galilee with a simple command. This week we find him on the other side of that lake, ministering to the masses of people who were following him. One of them was a man named Jairus. Jairus was the synagogue ruler, kind of like a councilman or church president. He was responsible for all the services and activities of his local synagogue. It was an important and respected position.

This important and respected man came to our Lord in great humility. **Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.”** Jairus' situation was dire and desperate. His twelve-year-old daughter, his little girl, was dying. He was terrified. You parents and grandparents understand his fear. Losing a child is a unique tragedy, one that some of you have experienced. When a child dies, a parent's heart is broken in a way that can never be fully healed this side of heaven.

That's why Jairus was so afraid. His daughter was on her deathbed. His need was dire and desperate. And so is ours. You know the story well. God told Adam and Eve, **“When you eat of it, you will surely die”** (Genesis 2:17). The crafty serpent countered, **“You will not surely die”**

(Genesis 3:4). Guess whose Word came true? Sadly, our first parents listened to the liar.

That's not just a story. It's history, history that hugely impacts our present. Sir Walter Scott wrote: *And come he slow, or come he fast, it is but death who comes at last.* Paul put it this way: **Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned** (Romans 5:12). Unless the Lord Jesus returns first, every one of us here is going to die. Adam and Eve bear some responsibility for this, but not all. I repeat: **Death came to all men because all sinned.** May we never forget that **the wages of sin is death** (Romans 6:23). My sins earn death for me. My impatience and lust and anger. Your sins earn death for you. Your greed and selfishness and disobedience. We're not just talking about the kind of death that keeps casket companies and sympathy card writers in business. We're talking about the death that separates from God, the eternal death and suffering of hell.

Dire and desperate – good words to describe our situation. And there's not one thing we can do to fix it. We sure try though. In elementary school we learned about Ponce de Leon's search for the fabled Fountain of Youth. Today doctors and scientists spend lifetimes trying to lengthen ours. Some people even pay big money to have themselves frozen in the hopes that one day they can be defrosted to live in a disease-free, deathless world.

The story is told about a little girl whose mother was terminally ill. One day the girl stood outside her mother's bedroom door as the doctor spoke to her mother and father. She overheard the doctor say, "I'll be frank with you. You don't have long to live. Before

the last leaves have fallen off the trees you will die." Sometime later the father went outside and saw a heartbreaking sight: his little girl was standing under a tree using thread to try and tie the leaves back on. Sad. Pathetic. Mankind's attempts to solve the problem of death are just as pathetic. There is only one solution: Jesus. He is the Lord of life. He alone brings life to this world destined for death. He alone can bring life to you and me, just like he did for Jairus' little girl.

The scene at Jairus' home was heartbreaking. The funeral was already underway. In those days it was customary to hire professional mourners to express a family's grief. These mourners, usually made up of local women, would moan and wail and beat their chests and pull their hair and generally make an awful racket. The fact that these pros were at work shows that the little girl really had died. They knew death when they saw it.

Jesus came into this scene and said, "**Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.**" They just laughed at him. They knew the child wasn't taking a nap. But after shooing everyone out of the room, in the presence of five witnesses – her parents and three disciples – Jesus took her by the hand and raised her from the dead. Just like that.

Jesus had said to Jairus, "**Don't be afraid. Just believe.**" He had good reason for saying this. Death can seem so final. But Jesus brings life even in the midst of death. This whole account shows Jesus' awesome power over death.

He emptied death of its power. He took the wages of our sins on himself and paid for them all with his precious blood. Jesus died a

horrible death, nailed to a cross, forsaken by his own Father. But what death did to Jesus is nothing compared to what Jesus did to death. On the third day he rose to hand death a humiliating defeat. **“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”** (1 Corinthians 15:55). There can only be one Victor, and that Victor is Jesus, the Lord of life, the risen Savior. When we die he will raise us back to life just as surely as he did that little girl.

Jesus, the risen Lord, the resurrection and the life says to each of you, **“Don’t be afraid. Just believe.”** That would mean nothing coming from a doctor or a scientist or a nutritionist trying to keep you from dying. But coming from Jesus it means everything.

II. Jesus Cares about the Small Fears Too

So Jesus has taken care of our biggest fear, but he takes care of the little things as well. After raising that girl from the dead and giving her back to overjoyed parents, after performing an amazing miracle, Jesus **told them to give her something to eat.**

It’s easy to miss that little detail, to pass over it as unimportant. But the Holy Spirit doesn’t waste words. There is great comfort for us here. It wasn’t as if those parents were going to let their newly-raised little girl starve to death. They would have figured out that they should feed her at some point. But our tender-hearted Savior cares about the smallest details of our lives. The one who saved our souls from eternal death cares about our bodies too.

A member of my former congregation and I were working on installing a new water-heater in the parsonage. He was a very handy guy, very mechanically inclined. He was always working on something. He asked

me a question. “Pastor, sometime when I’m working on something like this I ask God to help me with it. I’ve always felt like I was bothering him with something small and unimportant. What do you think?” I told him he wasn’t bothering God at all. God loves to hear the prayers of his children, he loves to help in time of need, even when that need is seemingly small and insignificant.

Jesus wants to be bothered. Paul wrote to the Romans: **He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?** (8:32) The God who gives us the gift of salvation in his Son cares about everything else too. He cares about what we eat and what we wear. He cares about where we live and work. He cares about our daily to-do list. He cares about our relationships. And he knows all our fears.

So, dear friends, trust in Jesus. **“Don’t be afraid. Just believe.”** When a Christian loved one dies, don’t be afraid. Just believe. When the doctor tells you the results of your blood tests aren’t so good, don’t be afraid. Just believe. When there are probably more years behind you than ahead of you, don’t be afraid. Just believe. When the bills pile up, when there seems to be more bad news than good and when daily life gets you down, don’t be afraid. Just believe.

There are a lot of scary things in this world. Death is right at the top of the list. But Jesus takes all our fears away. In Jesus sorrow becomes singing. In Jesus pain becomes pleasure. In Jesus the end becomes the beginning. In Jesus, tragedy becomes triumph. In Jesus life is ours, now and forever. Don’t be afraid. Just believe in Jesus. Amen.

S.D.G.