

## Mark 5:35-43

### Fear of Death

One of our basic fears is that we won't exist any longer or that someone we care for deeply will no longer exist. There is a lot about that we could talk about but basically our fear of death is about the fact that we cease to be. We are very tied up in being human, as we should be. Our lived experience is what we have, what we know, whether it be a good life or one fraught with harm.

This is not an easy topic for any of us. We all want to be alive, to thrive, to have meaning and purpose, and regardless of what the Bible tries to tell us about life after death, we only know life as it is right now, and the thought of not having life or of severed relationships, is more than we can often bear.

This Lent we are looking at times when Jesus spoke the words, or some variation of the phrase, "do not fear" (v36). In this case it is when a crowd of people had come to tell Jairus that his daughter was dead. But let's start at the beginning.

Jesus is back in the area of Capernaum. A crowd is once again gathering around him. They are those who are curious, those who have heard good, and those who are just checking this guy out. In the midst of this "one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw Jesus, fell at his feet 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." (v23)

Think about this scene, people crowding in, and this man, not just once, but repeatedly say help me, my daughter, my little daughter is dying. There are those hearing those words then and now that know that pain, that fear, the hopeless and helpless feeling of this parent. Jesus is the last hope. So Jesus in compassion chose to go with Jairus.

But they get waylaid. There are others holding out much hope for what Jesus can do for them, in particular a woman who has been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She doesn't want to call attention to herself, and thinks, "If I can just get close enough to touch the hem of Jesus' cloak, maybe that will be enough to heal me." She manages to do so, but that stops Jesus in his tracks. He knows that power has gone from him. He is not angry. He just seems to want to take the time to assure the person and to help them go away in peace. After a conversation where the woman reveals herself, Jesus does just that, sends her away in peace.

In the meantime, the delay has meant that the daughter that was on death's door has passed through it. People who had been at the Jairus' house have left to announce to

Jairus that it is done, might as well not bother Jesus any more. But Jesus ignores them and says to Jairus, “*Do not be afraid, only believe.*”

We are not told what Jairus is to believe, but faith, belief, and trust all work together and so this may be a moment where Jairus is to trust fully in Jesus. We can trust, we can believe, we can have faith, and still have doubt and questions. Those human responses are part of us and God and Jesus do not ask us to set that aside, but also not to let go of trust.

Well, you heard the rest of the story. Jesus goes in the room, takes the little girl by the hand and says, “Little girl, get up!” ... Life has been restored!

Now these two stories about the woman who was hemorrhaging and the little girl brought back to life have often been used to say to people, “if you just have enough faith”. Those words have cut more than one grieving person to the core, thinking that if they just had enough faith, if they were better people, then the prayers would have been answered. Then a bunch of “if only’s” start to creep their way in. This kind of talk puts way too much onus on us to stop death, which we cannot. Try as we might, as much as we keep talk of death from our lips, it is the way all life ends.

So if this is not about how much faith we have, what might be another perspective? Could it be that these stories are more about Jesus’ power in life and death than they say anything about us?

I was reading a sermon by a man named [James Liggett](#). The sermon took a different approach to this passage than any other I had read or heard. Liggett suggests that the full meaning of the story hinges on the sentence where Jesus gives strict orders that no one should know about what had happened. Of course, good luck with that, but the point that Liggett makes is that this story cannot be fully understood without the full story of Jesus life, death, and resurrection. Without the whole story these miracles of healing would be taken out of context by those who experienced them at the time. Hence why Jesus strictly ordered them that no one should know what had happened.

Let me share some of Liggett’s writing on this.

The reason Jesus does that [orders them not to speak of the miracle] is to make it clear that the meaning, the true significance, of the event could not be known or understood at the time it happened. The obvious interpretation would be wrong. What happened with Jairus’ daughter could only be understood later, when all was accomplished. It could only be known in the light of the cross and the resurrection. That is, the real meaning of the Lord’s authority over death is not that Jesus could do miracles, (that was just an illustration, a parable) and it is not that, with enough faith, we can somehow escape the worst of life (which is nonsense.). The real meaning of the Lord’s authority over death is found in the resurrection. Neither Jairus nor anyone else who was there could have known

that. So anything they said would be misleading. Anything they said would give the wrong idea.<sup>1</sup>

The miracles were not to be a distraction, there were to illustrate a point about Jesus, his life, his power, and the power of God. The power Jesus has over death is transforming. It is as much about how we live each day as how we die. It is about living in hope, promise, and trust that God goes with us no matter what, but that also in the end, God is still with us, whether we are the ones who have died or the ones left behind.

These stories are not to say there will no longer be pain, suffering, or heartbreak, as much as they say do not say there will no longer be joy, hope, and laughter. All of these things are what it means to be human. The promise is that in Christ our lives can be lived in the promise of presence. God's presence with us, through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is about living life fully and wholly, which includes death. It includes all the range of experience we have as human beings. Jesus experienced both life and death and through his resurrection we trust that there is life after death.

May peace be what you receive from your relationship with God. Regardless of what life brings to you. Peace that God walks with you no matter what, even when the end comes, you are not alone, you are loved. You matter to God. And just as much as in your dying, in your living, be at peace, God walks with you, even if it feels like ending are coming, you are not alone. You are loved. You matter to God.

---

<sup>1</sup> [James Liggett. He Strictly Ordered Them..., Proper 8 \(B\) - 2003 – The Episcopal Church.](#) Accessed March 1, 2024.