

Arise, Precious One

Mark 5:35-43

Rev. Brett Shoemaker ~ August 19, 2018 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

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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I stopped by the church last night, and discovered the faces of sponsored children from our church congregation. I was not expecting that, at least so soon. These photos celebrate the young people that are benefitting from World Vision's work, and our part of that, every single day, and not just one Sunday a year. It feels good to be a part of God's Kingdom work in this way. These kids look healthy, happy, and cared for.

It occurred to me that we could also have taken another approach. We could have put pictures of unsponsored children, children that seemed to be without hope, unhealthy, unsmiling, with hollow eyes that called out to us to do something. It would have appealed to our sense of justice, hoping it would cause us to say, "It's not fair!"

But I'm encouraged that we have chosen the first approach. This is HOPE Sunday. A chance to emphasize that we are a people that God calls to respond out of gratitude and confidence in God's work, not out of fear of what might happen if we don't respond—as if our work could begin to compare with God's work.

Paul writes a couple letters of discipleship to his partner and apprentice Timothy. In the beginning of the second letter, he writes:

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.¹

Of course Hope Sunday is a chance to *rekindle or fan into flame* God's gifts in us, and how they might be used to bring a sense of justice and fairness to the world. This summer, we are all too aware of the power of flames, and the destructive force of fire. But perhaps we're also humbled by the power of this image to change us and awaken something in us that has been sleeping.

We have a new dog in our house, a little terrier named Kirbee. None of us were quite prepared for the way he would find his way deeply in to our hearts in such a short time (or at least it took me by surprise, if not the rest of my family)... those with pets already know this, I suppose. Within the first couple of days, we discovered a certain character trait that we didn't know what to do with. If one of my girls or my wife are sitting down, and I lean over them to give them a kiss on the head or a hug, without hesitation, from wherever he is, Kirbee sprints over, jumps up, bears his teeth, and growls and nips till we stop. Please know that this is a generally very fun, playful, and gentle dog. But somewhere in his experience as a rescue dog, he has

¹ 2 Tim 1:6-7

this innate sense of protection. He roots for the underdog (if you'll excuse me for that). Initially, I think we were far too quick to begin trying to train this out of him, scolding him whenever he would catch us by surprise. It hasn't worked anyway. But maybe this is a part of how dogs were made to be, with this underlying protective spirit that is their way of saying, "Don't forget, I'm looking out for you!"

Part of this morning is a rekindling of the work that God may want to work out through the laying on of our own hands in the world. And then Paul gives three characteristics that God has designed in us to respond to the world, and one of them is not fear (or cowardice). We've given *power, love, and self-discipline*.

We see all three of these gifts lived out in Jesus' encounter with a little girl and her family. Because this is a miracle story, we may quickly go to a sense of awe in what Jesus does here (which is not a bad place to just sit for a while). However, the writer also gives some very definite clues that can teach us what to do in moments of desperation, whether they are immediate personal crises or ongoing issues of human rights and survival for people around the world. And as I've tried to listen carefully to this story this week, I realize that I generally approach the needs of the world in a very different way. I have a lot to learn here.

I'm willing to bet I'm not alone.

Our scripture this morning doesn't exactly start at the beginning of the scene. There are a couple of things that we need to know. Most importantly, we meet Jairus a few verses earlier. Jairus is a ruler in the synagogue who would normally be someone who would be very proper and respectful, just falls at Jesus' feet, and begs Jesus to come put his hands on his daughter who is sick and about to die. So Jesus starts to go with him, but gets surrounded by a huge crowd and another woman gets the center stage as she is healed just from touching the edge of his cloak.

This sub-theme of touch is interesting. A man has faith that Jesus' touch will heal his daughter. A woman has faith that if she only touches Jesus' coat she'll be healed. In the end, a little girl will be raised when Jesus simply takes her by the hand. Nurses

around the world will testify to the power of touch to bring down a fever or a heart-rate or calm the breathing of a patient even if they are unconscious.

So, we enter this story midstream, Jesus is surrounded by a crowd, and people come from Jairus' house, probably close friends or relatives, and they say, "The situation is without HOPE. So much so that you shouldn't even bother this miracle-worker anymore. Be realistic, Jairus. Nothing can be done."

While Jairus is processing this, his greatest fear being realized, Jesus says the unthinkable: "Do not fear." And then he adds, "Only believe." Five simple words hoping that Jairus hears something like this: "Jairus, I know how this looks, and I can say I even know how this feels, but there is a reason not to fear, and it's the same reason that brought you here in the first place to fall at my feet...you had HOPE, and you believed that you could put your trust in me. Now I will confirm that you did the right thing. Just Believe."

Most of what we learn about our response to tragedy, desperation, world problems—centers on *trust*. It sounds nice, doesn't it? Talking about trust in church? That makes sense. But in reality, it's counter-intuitive. In advertising, in political campaigns, in motivational speeches, what is the most common starting point? Fear. If you can get people to be afraid of something, you can get them to move. You can look at almost any advertisement and see the underlying element of fear involved.

Here is one. "Unofficial service can be dangerous." Mercedes Benz is suggesting that you should visit an official Mercedes service location (and the price that goes along with it I'm sure) with this image of a wrench turned into a vicious dinosaur.

And here is one from a generation gone by. Colonel Sanders comes to suggest that marriages around the country may be in serious jeopardy if they are not allowing him to come to the rescue with ready-made delicious meals for your family. He is the Messiah for women and their families. Really?

But when we look at justice issues around the world, we do this in subtle and not-so-subtle ways even in the church at times. A radio station this week has been fund raising for child sponsorship for

children in Guatemala. Over and over throughout the day they would ask the question, “Would you give \$39 to save a child’s life?” I’m going to Guatemala in a month. I’m listening to statistics and news and pleas for money and thinking, “Maybe there’s a child in Guatemala that I *won’t* meet because I didn’t send \$39 today, and I’ll never even know it!”

I happen to think this radio station is doing some great work. But, I wonder if we have some work together in worship to do first, that we might hear these first words of Jesus and remember above all who is on the throne...Jesus’ first words to us:

Do not fear. Only believe.

A pastor and speaker Francis Chan said this about worry:

“Worry implies that we don’t quite trust God is big enough, powerful enough, or loving enough to take care of what’s happening in our lives.”²

As we approach the needs of the world, and the desperate places in our lives, how do we reflect *first* our confidence in God’s sovereignty even in the darkest valleys of life? We are living in a period of history in which the valleys are particularly deep and especially dark. Human trafficking, civil and international war, violence in schools, racism and marginalization, poverty and famine, a planet that seems to be running out of time. The words *do not fear* are just as challenging to us now as they would have been to Jairus who was just receiving the news from friends that his daughter had died.

When faced with issues of the world, we would rather *do* something. We want to raise money, join a march, write a letter to a politician, give a sermon, anything *we* can do in our own power. These are all good things and we should look for ways to *fan the flames* of seeking justice. But if we can’t accomplish it first with our own power, we will so easily give up the fight. We come with the question of Jairus’ friends: “Why bother? It’s too big, and we’re too late to do anything about it. Why bother?”

Jesus begins not with action, but with trust.

Trusting seems too passive. It can only become active if there is real power behind it. So Jesus says, “Only believe”. Paired with what Jesus can do, it’s the most active thing we can do. Then he backs it up at Jairus’ house in the next part of our passage.

Jesus takes the girl by the hand and he says “Talitha Koum.” I don’t have to tell you what it means —“Little girl, get up!”— because it’s right there in the passage. But the author here goes to the extra length of spelling out what the phrase would have been in the language he was speaking. But I have to say, I don’t particularly like the way the NRSV translates it here. It almost sounds like a parent who is trying for the third time to get a child out of bed for school for the third or fourth time. “Little girl, get up!” No, part of the reason the writer highlights this phrase is to note that it this is a more personal and familiar phrase almost like a nickname a father would call his daughter, so that more likely what she would have heard was, “Arise, precious one! Arise.” And he took her by the hand, because coming out of the valleys of darkness that we’re all aware of can’t happen on our own power. We need this kind of miraculous power of God. We need to be able to trust it. Speaking the familiar Aramaic as well would have been in contrast to the typically Hebrew that would have been spoken as a part of Jairus’ more proper role as a synagogue ruler. It points to Jesus’ desire to come down out of the rafters of the church, and to be a part of the struggle of real life.

But, as much as Jesus calls on us to trust Him, Jesus isn’t the one who has the final action. Listen again to Jesus’ final words to those gathered. He orders them not to tell anyone about it. Maybe he knows their enthusiasm won’t be quite the same in others they tell. Instead, give the girl something to eat. Continue the work, be a part of her life. Don’t run off because of the spectacular, take care of her daily needs and watch her grow. She’s only 12.

On the other side of trust, and completely wrapped up in it, is a willingness to find creative ways to serve people, even when it seems like a very small thing we are providing. We do that in so many ways in our church already.

There is an organization called “Talitha Kum”, standing up to counter human trafficking and to be

² Chan, Francis. Quoted in *Keep Calm and Trust God*, 2014.

a voice for those about whom many in the world have said, “Why bother?” They claim a hope that crosses religious lines. They’ve chosen these words as their identity—and their desire to walk with people through transformation from death back to life.

And in always looking “out there” around the world and across the country or even city, we often forget the ways we are called to nurture and care for the children in our own church, and in our own homes. So many of our own children need to be invited to “Arise,” kids who feel dead inside from a world of pressures and social media.

Here again these words from Deuteronomy: “And these words shall be on your heart. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you sit and when you walk and when you lie down...and when you RISE (precious ones).”

Here is a statement of our purpose in Family Ministry that works well with our vision as a church: To Bless the child, to nurture the youth, and call parents to the promise of the gospel, every night in every home.

All of this is in response to Jesus’ call to “Don’t be so ambitious to go spread the news of this that you forget to give this girl something to eat, this girl who is a part of your own home.”

Anyone here been a part of a PTA?

I’m going to borrow it this morning as a way to remember the attitude Jesus is calling us to embrace in the toughest situations around us.

My first impulse in a crises or difficult situation is to ask, “What physical resources do I have? What can I, in my own power and influence, do to fix this?”

But Jesus simply wants me to begin with Prayer. Jairus realizes this is out of his league, runs to Jesus, falls at his feet. This is where the story begins.

When I don’t get anywhere by motivating others or raising enough money or I’ve run out of time, I either say, “Why bother? It’s too big,” or I appeal to fear, rather than hope, because I’m essentially saying that without us, it will fail.

But Jesus says, “Do not fear.” He wants us to Trust. All of this hinges on our ability to do this, but I won’t say “simply.” It’s hard work, it’s backwards thinking, if we’ve tried, we know that.

And in the end, whether I feel I’ve been defeated, or if I fall down exhausted by victorious, I still just want to be done and go home, or move on to the next justice issue.

But Jesus says, “Give her something to eat.” He calls us to continue to Act on behalf of those that he has led us to.

All of these are so hard for me to do. But remember earlier when I said it wouldn’t be a bad idea to just sit in awe of what Jesus can do for a while? Why don’t we do that now, in a time of prayer as Jim leads us, that God’s power would encourage us that we might have...

...the capacity to PRAY...

...the humility to TRUST...

...the courage to ACT on behalf of the poor and weak all around us...

Amen.

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The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read Mark 5:35-43 again. What catches your attention this time around?
2. What are some needs of the world that we may have too quickly said, “Why bother?” Which of these needs do you most wish you could do something about?
3. What might be significant about Jesus’ first response: “Do not fear”?
4. When news arrives of disaster or personal struggle of those close to you, how do you typically respond first? How is Jesus inviting us to respond?
5. Why do you think Jesus spoke the Aramaic words, “Talitha cum” to the little girl? Do you have

a guess as to the significance of the author's inclusion of this translation?

6. Read verses 22-23, from earlier, when Jairus approaches Jesus. As followers of Christ, what are we called to do first when we face an injustice in the world?

7. If our second task is to simply *trust* (Do not fear, only believe), what are we finally called to do in our pursuit of justice and healing (see the final verse – vs. 43)?

8. Which of these three acts of justice do you feel most called to give attention to in the next season of your life (*Pray, Trust, or Act*)? Which one does our congregation most need to attend to in the coming months?

Table to Table Question
A question for kids and adults
to answer together

Make a list of people that you could offer a helping hand to in some way. Is there one person on the list you can serve now with your family? Spend time praying for them today!