

2024 Mark 5

A child is dying. A Woman has an incurable disorder. That woman is cured of her incurable disorder. The child dies. A father is terrified. Mourners gather. People mock the hope of the Gospel. The child lives again.

In which of these stages is it appropriate for the teacher, Jesus, to be bothered? The simple Sunday school answer is: All of them, correct? We know that cognitively. But are we not tempted to be like the people in the reading?

The people in the account only thought the help of the “teacher” would be appropriate for *some* of them. Jairus runs to the teacher because his daughter is “near the end.” The lady with the discharge of blood sneaks up to the teacher. They both come to Jesus for very similar reasons. They both have things going on in their lives that the doctors can’t fix. And they have heard the word of this teacher and his healings, so they think, “well, we might as well ask this Jesus, what have we got to lose? Lets bother him a bit and see if he, in mercy, will help.”

And most of us agree with this rationale. You get the spot on your skin, no big deal, lets make an appointment. If the doctors take care of it, great. Thank the Lord, truly, thank Him that modern medicine has more options than these people had. But we all know there comes a day when even with the wonders of modern

medicine... the doctors eventually will say, "I'm sorry there is nothing more we can do."

And right about that time, well, we do the same thing these folks in our reading do – we turn to the teacher and bother him, perhaps he, in his mercy will help us too?

Now if I was to put the worst construction on this. It would seem that we treat Jesus as a safety net. A last resort when all the "normal" means fail. I put "normal" in quotes there because, well, who established those normal means, who provides rain and crop and physics and doctors...? Yes, the very same teacher, the Creator of all things. He will be forever praised.

And yet, we treat Jesus like a safety net, or a last resort that we talk to when we get scared only. And we say (I mentioned it last week too), that guilty prayer, "Lord I know I don't pray as often as I should, and I don't thank you enough, but if you could help me, I'll..."

It's a guilty prayer. And this should cause us to repent and be mindful of the Lord's blessing each day, each day his mercies are new.

But this reading, like last week's, gives us comfort. Does Jesus listen to guilty prayers? Does he catch, like a safety net, those falling in fear and despair who cry out in faith, even if it is the size of a mustard seed, even if it's the eleventh hour, or on a deathbed? Yes. So say that prayer!

Because the best construction on this reading, the best, not the worst, is that these people heard of the teacher and his power and they believed that word. And so they come to him in faith. And beautiful, beautiful healing and life results.

You too have heard of this teacher, so learn today to come to him, bother him, even with your guilty prayers, and see what life comes from his grace. Yes, our Lord does not despise those who come to him, even as a last resort. He goes with Jairus to see his daughter. And he bids the lady with blood to come forward. It must have been scary, she was ceremonially unclean because of her condition, and she just touched him! She will make him unclean! No. No, she won't. Uncleanliness cannot change him, just the opposite, His cleanliness goes to her. And she, in humility, confesses her desperation, Jesus however, confirms her faith and her healing.

And now we can perhaps see that God, can use the brokenness of the world and our bodies to draw people to himself. To have them look past the "normal" earthly gifts of money and insurance and doctors and self-preservation plans, to see the gift-giver, the teacher, the Savior. Maybe that hardship is so you will look down at the safety net, and perhaps be a little more mindful of his work not just as a net, but as a Savior for every aspect of our lives.

But then the little girl dies. And now, the people in our text see no further use for the teacher. When she was "just" sick it was appropriate for Jesus to be there. But

now she is dead. It is no longer appropriate to bother the teacher now, because “no one can raise the dead, right?” It is now appropriate for the mourners and the mortician to come by. That’s it.

But he will show them how appropriate, no, *necessary* his presence is even in death. “Do not fear, only believe.” He tells Jairus. An ironically unbelievable statement! But it gets worse because, in the midst of mourners, Jesus says something so inappropriate to their ears that it causes them to laugh at him, “She is not dead, but sleeping.”

And this wonderful Gospel message is mocked and derided. “So inappropriate! What a coping mechanism! What cognitive dissonance to try and find a fairy tale comfort when it is so plain to see the body growing cold!”

This is precisely how the world views us. As fairy tale, coping mechanism, fools! They mock us as we mourn our dead in hope. As if they, when they mourn their dead with no hope – “You will never see that person again, sorry!” – as if that is better, “because it’s honest.”

We will see who is honest won’t we? “Do not fear, only believe.”

And then he raises the little girl up, “Talitha cumi.” And the people now see that Jesus, a safety net, yes, is also so much more: the life giver, life sustainer. Far

exceeding the doctors, far exceeding the morticians, the One not just to be bothered, but the one *needed* in blessing or hardship, especially in death.

And so when your loved one is sick, or healed. Dying or dead. Is it appropriate for the Teacher to be around? Yes. Bother him. May the Gospel be heard in each circumstance.

How odd it is to give thanks to God in a hospital room, in the funeral home? It's almost laughable! How can we give thanks in those places? Because God raises the dead. Because Jesus is the life giver and sustainer.

This does not mean it's fun or easy to live with a crippling disorder, or to watch your child grow sick and die. We aren't pretending that isn't hard. The Lamentations cry out to God that there is great pain in this world. We don't have to lie and pretend it isn't there, nor do we, like the world, have to flee in terror from existential dread and looming inevitable death and meaninglessness.

No we can stand in the middle, honest about the darkness, celebrating the hope.

The hope found, in the teacher, who is by our side always. How beautiful the news that while we think on him so rarely it seems, that he is ever present, not forsaking his baptized children, who have his Holy Spirit.

And yes, then, how right and fitting it is to gather regularly to celebrate these promises. And how fitting in times of joy, and in times of great hardship and death to gather once more around the Word of the teacher that gives life and comfort.

The Christian funeral from start to finish is an elaboration on Jesus' words to Jairus. "Don't fear, only believe." Those are the words Jesus gives to a father whose daughter is dead. There are no more appropriate words to give to someone mourning. "Don't fear, only believe." Unless we think we are better pastors than him. "Well at least... Well, maybe they live on... well you have their memories..." Bah! Those are not words appropriate for death. The appropriate words are "Do not fear, only believe, she is not dead but sleeping." This is the Word of the lifegiver for us.

And since these words are so hard to believe, laughed at by many, we must remember – is this "teacher" credible enough to say such things? If he raised this girl up, yes. If he has himself gone into death, hemorrhaging his blood to make us clean, and come out of death victorious and risen – it's master, it's conqueror... then yes, yes, and yes. We have every reason and every hope to trust in His Word at our funerals. And look with hope to seeing that loved one again!

In fact, I tend to think it a sadness to not share his words at our funerals. There is this new trend I'm noticing where people don't want a "big to-do" when they die,

“I’ll be fine just put me in the ground or spread my ashes somewhere. Don’t bother anyone.” No! Bother them. Have the teacher bother them! “But Pastor, I know I’ll be fine.” Good. You will be fine, but what makes you think the funeral is just about you? Jesus’ words weren’t for the little girl, they were for the heartbroken parents! His words for the girl are 1. “Get up” and 2. “Eat something.” And one day, on the resurrection day, we will hear those words and we will get up and eat the marriage feast of the lamb – God be praised!

But until that day, as we wait for the Lord, the appropriate words are: “do not fear, only believe.” And “She is not dead only sleeping.” These are the words that we cling to in a world of death, until the resurrection. These are the words for those in your life who are mourning.

These are words from the teacher, appropriate for life’s joys and necessary for its sorrows. We have reason to see these words are strong and true. Which means we, even facing death, have reason for joyful hope of resurrection, reunion, and final healing. Do not fear, only believe. Amen.