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Pentecost 6 – Mark 5:21-24a, 35-43 – Don't Be Afraid; Just Believe!
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I can't imagine how helpless that man must have felt. Having daughters myself, I know that there's not much in this world greater than a father's sense of protective care for his little girl. She was slowly slipping away, and even though he fought with all his might throughout every day of her life trying to keep anything from hurting her, there he sat, completely helpless, knowing that nothing he did could stop this from happening.

No matter how many doctors he talked to, no matter how many treatments he tried, nothing made a difference. But as she lay there with her breath slowing and her grip on his hand getting weaker, her father Jairus suddenly shot up from her bedside, out of his house, and toward the lakeshore – toward Jesus. When he got there, he pushed through the crowd that had gathered around Jesus, and with no time to spare he fell at Jesus' feet in front of everyone and begged him for help. Jesus was his final hope, and he knew it.

And in that moment, Jesus showed exactly why Jairus was right to come to him. He didn't get annoyed at the interruption, and he didn't take him to task for treating Jesus like his last option. He didn't ask any questions, didn't require any backstory, didn't make Jairus sit down and fill out paperwork first. He just *went* without so much as a word, because when someone comes to him and needs help, Jesus is always there no matter what.

But I'll tell you, sometimes he can test us and makes it a little bit harder than we might like. Jairus had finally gotten a hold of Jesus and Jesus was on his way. There was hope! But then as they were going, the crowd around Jesus bogged him down and then he stopped for a bit to heal a woman who came to him with hemorrhaging problems. Now maybe Jesus only stopped to help that woman for two minutes, but as nice as it was for him to do what he did, that must've seemed like an excruciating eternity to the man whose daughter was going to take her last breath at any moment if Jesus didn't get there first.

And then it happened. As Jesus and Jairus moved quickly together, suddenly men came from Jairus' house with the news. I imagine as Jairus looked up and saw them coming, he stopped and desperate tears welled up in his eyes – “No, no, this can't be happening, not now, not yet...” He dreaded their words, but still they came: “*Your daughter is dead. Why bother the teacher anymore?*”

I mean, what would you have said? As cold and matter-of-fact as it seems like these men were, really, what more could *we* say that would be any

better? I'm sorry? My sympathies? My condolences? I wish we could've done something? There's not much we can say in and of ourselves at a time like that to make things any better, either, is there? Sickness and death makes it painfully clear to all of us just how weak and powerless we are. And it's ironic that these men called Jesus merely “the teacher” right then, because apparently they didn't think he had much to offer, either.

But here's where this story turns – this story for Jairus and our whole human story, too, because Jesus didn't just shrug, give him a pitiful pat him on the back, say, “I'm sorry there's nothing I could do,” and walk away. No, Jesus looked at those men and then looked back at Jairus with determination in his eye and said, forget those guys. They don't know me. They don't know my power. And they don't know what I've come to do. But you're about to see that you came to the right place. You trusted me, and I'm not going to let you down. Jairus, “*Don't be afraid; just believe!*”

But how quickly then the scene turned from mourning into mockery as Jesus now resolutely led Jairus toward the place where his daughter lay. Past the men who brought the news of her death, past the crowd of mourners, Jesus pushed by and spoke up: “*Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.*”

Well, sneering, snickering, and outright scoffing were all that followed, as people said, “What, are you blind? The girl isn't breathing. She isn't moving. She's obviously dead. What do you think you're going to do? Is talking like this really going to help anything? Who do you think you are?” It was sad the way they wrote him off in that moment. Jesus was famous for being a miracle worker already then, but even miracle workers had limits, they thought. He was hardly more than a sideshow as far as they were concerned, and this wasn't the time for cheap entertainment. When the real problems came and the real tragedies struck, what help was he going to be? He should just get out of the way and stop bothering people who have bigger things to worry about.

Their hostility was tangible, but still Jesus promised, “*Don't be afraid; just believe!*” I have to wonder if maybe Jairus' faith shook a little bit as he heard everything they said. I mean, isn't it a little crazy to think that Jesus could do anything about this? Isn't it a little crazy to think that there's any going back? Let's be realistic here. This isn't some fairytale. I mean, my little girl is dead, and there's no fixing that in the real world... right?

I'm sure he could've thought up every excuse in the book to doubt Jesus right then, and the people around him certainly didn't help. But then Jesus

put out all the doubters, maybe he even winked and whispered, “Watch this!” and he stretched out his hand and took the girl up alive. “*Little girl, I say to you, get up!*” he said, and just like waking her up from a restful night’s sleep, the Lord of Life, our Lord Jesus reached down into death and gave her back to her parents.

See, doubters can always come up with reasons why it’s crazy to believe in miracles. Scoffers will always say to you that’s not how the real world works. Unbelievers will always tell God’s people to get our heads out of the clouds and stop believing in myths, but in all their empty words they can never comprehend the power and care of our Savior. When Jesus speaks, sin, death, and every obstacle in all of creation must flee and fall, because nothing can stand before him. Jesus told Jairus, “*Don’t be afraid; just believe!*” and against all human standards and in the face of all kinds of dissenting opinions, Jesus proved exactly why he should. Jairus believed, and Jesus took away his fear and delivered him from his every trouble. No, Jesus wasn’t just some miracle worker sideshow. *Our* Lord, *our* Savior Jesus, who holds each of us in the palm of his hand, is the very Son of God made flesh, almighty, all-knowing, who can speak just a word and instantly show all power over this world and everything in it – power even to defeat our greatest enemies, to bring us through every challenge this world throws at us, and even to bring life from death.

So then what is it about your life that you need to hear Jesus reassure you, “*Don’t be afraid; just believe!*”? Whether it’s trying to get comfortable finding normalcy again coming out of the COVID pandemic, or concern about where our state and country are headed, or hurting because you’re dealing with health decline or death, no doubt that’s only the beginning of everything that’s going on in each of our lives. It’s easy to get down on the world around us. It’s easy to get depressed and feel like our lives are spinning out of control when it seems like our families, our communities, our country is falling apart. It’s easy to be like the mockers who doubted Jesus and told Jairus to get real.

But my friends, the faithlessness of all those people who doubted Jesus kept them from seeing his awesome power and it kept them from having the greatest joy in their lives. What they thought and said may have been the rational and logical thing, sure – the thing that made sense to a lot of people. But it left them in darkness and fear and uncertainty and never allowed them to see Christ as he truly wants to be seen by his people – as the one who has all power and love and care to fix every problem we have and make everything in our lives right again. When you look to Christ in undoubting

faith, you’ll see his power and his gracious guidance everywhere, in every aspect of your life. So when you face a tough challenge like a society going against the grain of your beliefs, or when you lose a loved one too soon, or when it seems like your life and your plans and what’s important to you are dead in the water, remember this – our Lord *raises* the dead, just like he raised every single one of us from spiritual death first, and just like he’s going to raise us all up from our graves on the Last Day, too.

Yes admittedly, by human standards, there is much to be afraid of and much to be worried about – much more than we can handle on our own. But with God’s grace and blessing and with Jesus’ power at our back, he still assures us, too: “*Don’t be afraid; just believe!*” See, sometimes the more helpless we are, the more we can realize that our help comes from the Lord, and the more we become convinced of our Lord’s goodness and power in our lives. Maybe a lot of people think it’s crazy nowadays to be a conservative Christian who still stands for God’s truth that’s so counter-cultural. Maybe a lot of people think it’s crazy to believe in a good God when it seems like there’s so much bad going on all around us. Maybe a lot of people think a lot of things are crazy in the life of a Christian, but if Jesus could overcome death and use even that greatest of enemies to showcase his almighty power in his people’s lives, how many other things can Jesus bring us through better for in the end? See, it doesn’t matter what we do here in this world. If we do it in Jesus’ name and for Jesus’ glory, there’s nothing too big for Jesus to pull off for us. If Jesus can even do this greater deed of raising a dead little girl – and just as certainly as he himself rose on Easter morning and will raise all of us from the dead one day too, he surely can – then he can do every other lesser deed as well without even breaking a sweat, and he can work for good in your life and bring benefit and blessing to your situation far greater than we could ever rightly expect or hope for. *That’s* our God’s power, *that’s* our God’s grace, and *that’s* the confidence that only he can give to every one of us. So people of God, don’t be afraid; just believe – because when our need is greatest, our Savior’s care is closest.

Yes, maybe Jairus felt pretty helpless at first. But Jesus didn’t let him stay that way, did he. Jesus showed him just how much power he had behind him working for his good, and that changed his life and the way he looked at everything in it. No challenge was too steep. No obstacle was too difficult. No threat was too terrible for Jesus to overcome. And when the people around him told him he was crazy, Jairus could do the same thing we can now – he could go back to God’s Word for the life and the strength that only it can give, and against this world’s reason, even still today that gives us every reason to follow Jesus’ promise: “*Don’t be afraid; just believe!*” Amen.