

# Sunday's Sermon

## GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH

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July 1, 2018

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The two stories you just heard read in our gospel reading contain all the essential elements of what Mark wanted to say and accomplish in his version of the gospel account.

Moreover, the essence of the gospel Mark hoped to proclaim can be found in the two responses contained therein, the response of Jesus to Jairus at the raising of his daughter and the words he speaks to that unfortunate woman, who upon touching Jesus' garments was healed of her chronic disease.

In the first, we are told that as the crowd approached the house, Jairus' friends greet him at the door and say, somewhat cold heartedly if not gruesomely, "Your daughter is dead, why are you bothering the rabbi?" Not much compassionate pastoral care there. To which Jesus responds not only to Jairus but to them, "Have no fear, only believe."

And in the second, as the woman confesses that she is the one who touched Jesus garments, he responds, "Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace and be healed of your disease."

I would like to take these two passages and hold them up side-by-side for you.

First, "Have no fear, only believe,"

and, second,

"Your faith has made you well."

Let's take a look at the first.

Jesus speaks the words, "Have no fear, only believe," to a man who has just been told by his friends that his daughter is dead.

I have been with people at their moment of passage from this life to the next, and I have been the one to tell people that their loved one had just died. In both instances, what you want to do more than anything else, is to convey to them that no matter what happens, no matter what the next moment, the next instant, the next step holds in store for them, that they need not fear anything, for God is with them, and most importantly, God is with the one they loved, was with them when they died, and now resides in God's eternal presence.

The beauty of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, and why it is the Psalm of choice at the time of death, is not that it assures us that all will be well, that life will forever abound, that death will never touch us: the beauty of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is that it tells us that no matter what happens, whether we be on the mountaintop or in the valley, whether we walk in the light or in the shadow of death and darkness, God will be with us.

“Have no fear, only believe,” are words that say just that. To Jairus, who arrives home to hear his daughter is gone. Note that before Jesus revives her, before anything happens, he turns to Jairus and says, “Have no fear, only believe.”

It could have been that Jesus didn't raise her, couldn't raise her, wouldn't. Scripture might then have recorded something entirely different. Perhaps, had Jesus not raised her from the dead, but instead, gave her to God; the Scripture might have only recorded how Jesus comforted Jairus with those words.

“Have no fear, only believe,” says that one should have faith in God's goodness and that one should rest securely in knowing that God means us well. But, it does not mean that all will be well. Contrary to some of the preaching you may hear on the television,

- faith will not give you millions,
- faith will not help you make the basket, or get that touchdown, or score the needed goal
- being “right with the Lord,” will not alone heal your ailing marriage,
- and while prayer in the midst of trouble or despair may help in that it might help you sort out what's right or what's best, or at least help you to compare what you think is right or best with what God has proclaimed through Scripture and history to be good and just, prayer alone will not bring your children around, or heal the strained or broken relationship between you and your best friend. Prayer might help, but prayer alone will not.

Sayings like, “Pray to God but keep your powder dry,” or “trust in the Lord but keep rowing for shore,” have some basis in the truth.

In the story of the woman with the perpetual hemorrhage, Mark records Jesus as saying, “Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace and be healed of your disease.” But it was no secret to anyone, least of all the woman who was healed, that it was indeed **not** the woman's faith that made her well, but instead, God through Jesus who healed her. Mark records the words coming from Jesus, but the viewer at the time and the reader for all time knows better.

What truly mattered was that she believed that through this man, she could come to rely on the goodness and mercy of God. In some ways, whether she be healed or not, she could come close to the grace-filled person who was Jesus, and who had it within his power, to grant her mercy and relief, and that his power was so great, that even if she touched even the hem of his garment, she could be healed through him.

“Daughter, your faith has made you well,” does not say that faith alone can heal, because it can’t, but faith in the power and goodness of God is that which can bring about the possibility of healing.

If it were any other way, if faith alone **could** heal, then our problem is that if we are not healed, it’s because we don’t have enough faith, and that’s nonsense. Nonsense because if faith alone could heal, there are a couple of people you and I know that would still be among the living.

And yet, there are a good many people out there who still:

- believe that
- preach that
- Cling to that
- and some who even prey (with an e) on the concept.

Therefore, isn’t it better then to say, *“Have no fear, only believe.”* where faith and belief are that which bring us to God, and not necessarily to healing. Not that I discount healing, healing is real, healing is powerful, miracles do happen, but again, contrary to some media-spawned evangelists, miracles don’t happen because you believe in miracles, (i.e. expect a miracle, make miracles happen).

- Miracles happen,
- healing occurs where one thought there could be no healing,
- life comes at the time death is most expected,

because God is at work.

In the meantime, whether one is in the midst of life or death, “Have no fear, only believe,” because if one trusts in God and in God’s love and mercy, to quote one of **my** favorite phrases, “what then can they do to me?” or as St. Paul says, “If God is for us, who is against us?”

It so happened that that day Jairus’ daughter **was** raised to life and the woman with the perpetual bleeding **found** relief from her disease, but the **healing** was not the point, **faith** was.

Sometimes, and sadly sometimes, in the midst of faith, even in the midst of great faith, there is no healing, at least no healing in terms of symptoms, or remission or even relief. But that’s not to say that healing is the only benefit of faith.

Sometimes in the face of an illness that cannot be cured, faith becomes even greater.

I mentioned that I have been by the side of many persons who have died, and I have been the one to tell others that someone they loved had died, and I have seen great faith exhibited at both these times, both in the one dying and in the ones left to live. I have been privileged to witness how God, through the Holy Spirit has upheld and strengthened those who knees would have otherwise

given way; I have seen in people tears, express at one and the same time, sorrow **and** joy, hope **and** despair, loss **and** release. And I believe, as did St. Mark, that the greatest gift God gives to us is the blessed assurance, the confidence that no matter what life brings to me, God is by my side and that the one who was there in the beginning, will be there at the end, and so that whatever happens in the middle can be made bearable if not enjoyable, if not curative, in the sense of my soul and my psyche.

In my youth, I was a lifeguard for nine years; it helped me get through college and graduate school without even more debt. And what remains one of the greatest examples of faith I know, is watching a small child, standing by the edge of the swimming pool, with Mom or Dad or grandparent or uncle standing below, arms waiting with arms outstretched, and to see that child, sometimes with reserved caution and sometimes with total abandon, throw themselves off that edge, knowing that beyond the shadow of a doubt, she will be caught and safe, if not hugged and kissed and loved when it's all over.

“Fear not, only believe,” I leave the application of that maxim up to you.  
Amen.