

“The Child Is Not Dead, but Sleeping”

(Mark 5:21-24, 35-43 – Pentecost 6 – June 29, 2025)

Mark 5:21-24, 35-43 – ²¹Now when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea. ²²And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet ²³and begged Him earnestly, saying, “My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live.” ²⁴So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him.... ³⁵While He was still speaking, some came from the ruler of the synagogue’s house who said, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?” ³⁶As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, “Do not be afraid; only believe.” ³⁷And He permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. ³⁸Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly. ³⁹When He came in, He said to them, “Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping.” ⁴⁰And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying. ⁴¹Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, “Talitha, cumi,” which is translated, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” ⁴²Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement. ⁴³But He commanded them strictly that no one should know it, and said that something should be given her to eat.

Dear Redeemed in Jesus Christ, the Divine Physician of the soul and Eternal Life Giver:

One of the most difficult things in life is to see a loved one dying. We do all we can to provide them with the best medical care. But finally, we feel a sense of helplessness when, despite every human remedy, death takes our loved one. That feeling of helplessness can be especially difficult when the loved one is a child. A loving father and mother do all they can to raise their little one in good health. They give of their lives to see their child grow strong. So what a grief it is to think of that dear child preceding them in death.

Here, a loving father came to Jesus with that feeling of helplessness and grief. We hear his desperate prayer on behalf of his twelve-year-old daughter who is at the point of death. He is doing the best he could for his loved one in need; he has come to the right Person in his time of deep grief. For Jesus is the great Physician of the soul, the Savior who came to conquer death and bring eternal life. In the face of death, Jesus gives His Word of assurance, backed up by His saving power: **“The Child Is Not Dead, but Sleeping.”** Let us consider **1) A father’s desperate prayer**, and **2) The Savior’s gracious answer**.

1) A father's desperate prayer

As Jesus arrived at Capernaum, it says: *“Behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet and begged Him earnestly, saying, ‘My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live’”* (vs. 22-23).

As a synagogue ruler, Jairus had an important place in the local house of worship. He was one of the laymen of the congregation chosen to help manage affairs of God's house. He was a well-respected, honorable man. Many synagogue rulers would reject Jesus and not believe in Him. Maybe they were too filled with pride in their own honor in the eyes of men to feel their need for Jesus who came as the Savior of miserable sinners. But Jairus, in his moment of desperation, casts aside all worldly honor and pride. In his miserable condition with his daughter near death, he fell on his face in the dust before Jesus, humbly begging His help. Jairus had faith in Jesus' power to heal his daughter, even now.

When are we moved to come before Jesus and fall in the dust before Him this way? What does it take for us to see our own desperate and miserable condition, so that we cast off all worldly pride and honor and fall at the feet of Him who alone can save?

Certainly, we feel our desperate condition in the face of death. When we see a loved one lying in an intensive care unit hooked up to life support, or at home in hospice care, it can bring us to our knees. In our helplessness, we bow before our Savior in prayer: *“Jesus, come and lay Your hands on my loved one. Grant healing and life according to Your gracious will.”*

But even beyond what we may see or feel, our condition is desperate as sinful human beings. God's Word teaches us of our truly miserable, fallen condition. It reveals that, since we are conceived and born in sin, we cannot escape the wages of sin which is death (Romans 6:23). Even from birth, even when we are in the best of health, our sin-corrupted bodies are in decline and subject to death. But our desperate condition goes beyond the mere physical. Scripture teaches that, if left in our natural sinful condition, our souls would be separated from the life of God in spiritual death. This condition would be worse than all physical ailments that might be suffered in this world; for it would bring us down at last to the wages of sin in everlasting death and suffering in hell.

When we rightly understand our desperate and miserable condition, then we can truly appreciate Jesus for the Savior He is. As God in our flesh, He had come into the world to undo the curse of sin and save us from death in every way – physical, spiritual, and eternal. To this end, Jesus was on His way to the cross where He would pay the full wages of our sin and bring us His healing, life-restoring forgiveness. As Isaiah prophesied: *“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed”* (Isaiah 53:5).

Not long before this account, here at Capernaum, Jesus had explained His reason for coming. When the religious leaders took offense at Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners, He answered: *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance”* (Mark 2:17).

So like Jairus, we come to Jesus as the divine Physician of the soul, who alone can help us in our desperate need. In repentance, we cast aside all worldly pride and honor and every claim to worthiness before God. We fall as beggars at Jesus’ feet, confessing our poor miserable condition, clinging to Him who alone can save us from sin and death. For He has promised in His Word: *“The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out”* (John 6:37). And as the Savior of sinners, Jesus lifts us up in His blood-bought forgiveness, cleansing our soul, healing us from the inside out. He lifts us up in Baptism and faith to walk with Him in the newness of spiritual life. It is the life of His Spirit in us, which will culminate in the perfect healing of body and soul one day in heaven.

2) The Savior's gracious answer

“Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live” (vs. 23), Jairus prayed. And now, in answer to a father’s desperate prayer, we see the Savior’s gracious answer.

First it says: *“So Jesus went with him”* (vs. 24). In this case, it was the Savior’s gracious will to answer his prayer and restore his daughter to physical health and life. Yet Jesus would do so only in a way that built up in Jairus a right faith in Him as the Savior and eternal Life-Giver. It is the same with us. In answer to our prayers, whether or not Jesus answers as we expect, it is important to know that He always goes with us as our Savior. Already, He has shown His love for us by giving His life for our eternal life. So how could He ever fail to answer our prayer in the best way for us and our loved ones, in the way that will build us up with a right faith in Him as our Savior?

This truth became important for Jairus along the way; for soon his faith was tested. As we read the full account, a crowd presses in around Jesus, slowing their progress. Then Jesus stops to heal a woman who had suffered twelve years with bleeding and He talks with her. We can imagine how Jairus must have felt anxious with this delay, worried that Jesus might not make it in time to heal his daughter.

We can understand how his heart must have sunk when, stalled there along the road, *“some came from the ruler of the synagogue’s house who said, ‘Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?’”* (vs. 35) It may have seemed that with life gone, hope was gone. That is what the world around Jairus was telling him; that is what reason and sight was telling him. Have you ever felt that way as you prayed fervently for a loved one? Have we held out hope that, as long as there is life and breath, maybe the doctors and medicine can still help?

But Jesus turns Jairus' heart, and our hearts, to Him who is the divine Physician and Life-Giver. Even now we hear His gracious answer to prayer, filled with promise: *“Do not be afraid; only believe”* (vs. 36). As our God and Savior, nothing is ever out of His control. It is never too late for Him, who has written in His book all the days of our life before one of them came to be (Psalm 139:16). He who gave His life for our eternal life is here to strengthen our faith daily in His Word of promise. Even in the face of death, He reassures us: *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die”* (John 11:25-26).

This is why, as Jesus came to the home of Jairus and saw a crowd of mourners weeping and wailing loudly, He said: *“Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping”* (vs. 39). For the child of God in Christ, death is not the end; it is more like a sleep. Even though the body lies motionless and is laid to rest in the grave, yet the soul lives on with our living Savior; with the promise that on the Last Day, He will raise up the body to life again. So the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14: *“I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”* What a comfort this is at a funeral, as we cling to Jesus' gracious answer to our prayer, His Words of eternal life.

As Jesus came to the home of Jairus, He put outside all those who ridiculed His promise. He drew close those who mourned for their loved one and showed them His saving power. *“He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying. Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, ‘Talitha, cumi,’ which is translated, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise’”* (vs. 41-42). And as her parents watched with great amazement, their daughter arose and walked; and with fully restored health, she even ate food!

What a comfort it is to know that one day, Jesus will come to the place where we have laid to rest the body of our loved one in Christ. As His ultimate and gracious answer to our prayer, He will say to His dear child: *“Arise.”* What joy and amazement will be ours, when He raises our bodies from the grave as from sleep; and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)! Together, we will walk with our Savior in perfect health beyond what we have ever known in this world. And we will eat in that heavenly feast of victory with Him who died for us and rose again to win our salvation and everlasting life!

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.