

Alive is Forever

Proper 8, Year B – Mark 5:22--43

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson July 1, 2012

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Let's get one thing straight. Dead is dead. Everybody knows that. In our story from Mark's gospel this morning, we get to the point where Jesus *finally* makes it to Jairus' house. We get to the point where he says to those that are gathered there to mourn: "she's only sleeping." We get to the point where the mourners laugh at Jesus, and we do a bit of a double take, and we say, "Hey! Don't you know who you're talking to here?" "How dare you laugh at Jesus." "Don't you know he's the king of creation, the Alpha and the Omega, the Lord and Savior of humankind?"

And, of course, the answer is no. Because we're at a different point in the story than those family and friends are. Remember there, back at the beginning of the story, all we had was a panicked father. A father who had some degree of influence in the community, perhaps some resources that others didn't have, but a father whose daughter was sick and getting sicker with each passing moment. His last chance was to have this Jesus of Nazareth, this rabbi that some were saying had healed the lame and made the blind to see, he needed this Jesus to come to his house and do something, *anything* for his dying daughter. And he needed for him to come quickly, before it was too late. Because if he didn't hurry, if they didn't get there in time... well, dead is dead, and everybody knows it.

But they *didn't* move quickly, did they? I saw some of you looking at your watches during the long Gospel reading. At the beginning of our story Jesus has just come back from calming the sea and sending a legion of demons out of a man and into a herd of pigs. The crowd was delighted to have him return to *their* side of the lake. The crowd was exuberant and adoring and demanding. The crowd was... well, a crowd – pushing and shoving to see who could get close to this miracle worker, pushing and shoving to see who could get the "best seats," pushing and shoving to see who could best hear the next wonderful words to come from this wise teacher, this new prophet, this potential messiah.

In the middle of all this mayhem, somehow the frantic father, Jairus found Jesus. Somehow he managed to get close enough to him. Somehow he managed to gain his attention long enough to make his need known. And then he literally collapsed to the ground. In his worry and in his sorrow and in his desperation, Jairus put himself in front of Jesus and fell to his knees and begged, "Please, please come and help my daughter!" And Jesus goes with him!

But that doesn't mean that the crowd parted like the Red Sea. As a father, I think I know for a certain fact that Jairus would have had it that way if he could have. Perhaps he had spent months helplessly watching his daughter get sicker and sicker. If he could have moved everyone else out of the way and made a straight path to the threshold of the home where his daughter lay dying, he would have done it. But in the middle of the journey of salvation for one sick and dying little girl, in the story in the *middle* of the story, "a large crowd followed [Jesus] and pressed in on him."

You probably remember this story in the story. One woman in the pressing crowd had her own problem. Like Jairus, she too came to see Jesus in hopes that he could help her when no one else had been able. She too had reached her last hope. She too wanted, no *needed*, just a moment of Jesus' attention. And now her only chance for wholeness was heading the other way, being swept away by the heaving throng. With one last lunge, the desperate woman reached out and just for the briefest of moments was just able to grab hold of just the tip of Jesus' robe, and in that instant she is healed of an affliction and a stigma that had tormented her literally for years. And Jesus stops. To the amazement of the clamoring crowd, to the apparent bemusement of the disciples, and no doubt to the frantic dismay of Jairus, Jesus stops and asks, "Who touched me?"

You *know* this story in the story, the story of a woman whose faith made her whole. But while all this was going on, people came from Jairus' home to tell him that he had failed in his mission. Because of the crowd, because of the obstacles and the delays, perhaps because of the woman who had touched Jesus and turned him aside, Jairus' daughter was dead. And dead is dead. And everybody knows that. There was no longer any need to hurry. There was no longer any need to push people aside. There was no longer any need to bother the teacher. Dead is dead. And everybody knows that.

But Jesus presses on until they get to Jairus' house where another, grief-filled crowd had gathered. They may have clamored to greet him if he had arrived earlier. Instead they wept and wailed and cried out in their sorrow. Jesus tries to reassure the crowd that it is *not* too late. Jesus tries to bolster their faith that the girl will be made whole. But the crowd's cries turned to mocking laughter. Because dead is dead. And everybody knows that.

Everybody, that is, except the king of creation. Everybody, that is, except the Alpha and the Omega. Everybody, that is, except the Lord and Savior of humankind. Shooing everyone out the door, Jesus reaches out, takes the hand of the dead little girl, and says, "Talitha, cum." "Little one, rise up." And she does!

Because of our selfishness, and our contempt and disregard for one another and because of our combination self-love and self-loathing, you and I and every human being that has ever drawn breath are under rightful condemnation by a God who is, by definition, the sum of righteousness. Based on our own righteousness, we deserve precisely *nothing*. In the grand expanse of the created universe, we are *dead*, plain and simple. There is absolutely no life in us. Dead is dead. And everybody knows it.

Until, that is, we are touched by the hand of Jesus. Until we are lifted up and set free from the chains of sin and death. Until we know the changing, healing power of his love for us, bought at the cost of his own suffering and death. Until we hear his voice call us, "little one, *rise up!*" And then *everything* is changed. Dead may be dead, but in the peace and the glory and the *power* of Christ, alive is forever!

Too often we Christians get to the point where we live as though we don't understand this difference between our life and that of the rest of humanity. Too often, in our desire to be included and to be inclusive, we get to the point that we forget that we are *not* like everyone else, that we are different, that we have been set apart by a splash of water and a smudge of oil that mark us as Christ's own, forever. Too often, we get so involved in our arguments over who controls the truth of God, that we fail to even see the giver of the life that is within us. Too often we get to the point that we live as though we are still on our deathbed, covered and ready for burial when we have already been raised to speak the Good News to a dead and dying world that with Christ and through Christ and in Christ we are alive to a *new* way of seeing and a *new* way of knowing and a *new* way of being. We have been made alive to a new hope. We have been made alive to new life, assured by the hand of Christ that though dead is dead, we are alive forever in his love.

Little ones, rise up! Amen.