

July 1, 2018 • 6th Sunday in Kingdomtide • Holy Communion

Prayers for Our Children

Homily by the Rev. Patricia Farris



Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live."

So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

What a provocative story we hear this morning from Mark's gospel. One of the leaders of the synagogue, a man named Jairus, went to Jesus and worshipped him—that's what the words here mean—begging him, pleading: "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live."

How often I have heard your stories and your prayers of intercession for your own daughters and your sons. Prayers when they are born. Prayers when they start school, when they move to a new school. Prayers when they are learning to drive. Prayers when they get in trouble and don't realize how vulnerable they are. Prayers when they have difficulty in their classes. Prayers when they are sick. Prayers when they can't seem to get life sorted out. Prayers when you meet their boyfriend or girlfriend. Prayers when they go off to college. Prayers when they don't. Prayers when they go off on their own. Prayers when they move back in. Prayers when their first child is born.

How fortunate we are that we can share these prayers in the fellowship of the church—with small groups, with close friends, or silently in our hearts in the prayers of the worship time. How very much comfort and strength we find in knowing that the prayers of this church community, these special relationships, lift up our prayers as well, bringing the miracle of eternal life into the joys and the heartaches of every single day. Be with our daughters and sons, Jesus. Lay your hands on them. Let them be well and live.

Today we hear a story for all parents and all daughters and sons.

Jairus, a father, one of the leaders of the synagogue, went to Jesus and begged him repeatedly: "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live." Hearing this, Jesus went with him.

When Jesus got to the place where the little girl was, he found people outside weeping and wailing loudly. Some went to Jairus to cruelly say: "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But Jesus pushed all that aside. He went, inviting in her mother and father, and his closest disciples Peter, James, and John as well. Taking her by the hand, he said simply: "Little girl, get up!" She got up and began to walk and he told them to give her something to eat.

Perhaps we've heard this story so many times that we're tempted to take it for granted. But think about it for a moment and ask yourself: why would Jesus, the great teacher, the Messiah, in the midst of teaching a great crowd of people, why would he step aside to go and heal one child, a girl no less, in a society that put no value on children or girls?

This story shows us not only Jesus' power to heal and to raise from the dead, a power previously attributed only to God alone. It shows us who he is and where his heart is. It shows us his values, his priorities, his ethics. It shows us that for him nothing is more important in this moment than this child. And in making time to raise up this one girl, is he not showing us that he wants abundant life for all children?

“Suffer the little children come to me,” he said. “For to such as these belongs the Kingdom of God.” The kingdom of love, of righteousness, of compassion, justice and peace.

We who would be his disciples place this same conviction at the heart of our “followership,” if you will. Care for the children. All the children. Each and every one of children. No matter the color of their skin, the language they speak, the country of their birth. I’m not talking politics here. Amongst ourselves, we might disagree on what policies to pursue or how to proceed as we face issues challenging our nation to the core. But bottom line, as followers of Jesus, the one who sought out and raised up a twelve-year-old girl, wanting her to have life and food to eat, as followers of Jesus, our bottom line must always be the welfare of each and every child.

John Wesley said to his people called Methodist: “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences.”

We are one in Christ Jesus. We who strive to be his disciples, his followers, are one in him. Through him, we are in relationship with one another and with God and with every one of God’s children. That’s the power of this sacrament we share today, the power of this bread and cup. For it was Jesus himself who said: “Take, eat. Take, drink. Do these things to remember me.”

Jesus has a way of doing wondrous things like healing and teaching the crowds and then doing something almost commonplace to reveal the depth and power of what he is really about. Like showing his disciples the full scope of his power and might, and then taking ordinary food from their table, something to eat, and transforming it into this sacrament through which his presence and power will always be present to them.

Or like raising up a little girl, and then following it up with something really ordinary to bring it home and help us remember all that it really means. He saves a girl’s life and then he looks at everybody standing around with their mouths hanging open and says: “Don’t just stand there! Do something! Give her something to eat.” Remember how another time he asked: “which of you parents, if your child asks for bread, would give them a stone?” Give her something to eat.

It’s as if he’s saying: ‘I am the One who has come to bring life in abundance. Now, my followers, here’s what you must do: give her something to eat.’ Be it literal food. Be it encouragement. Be it safety or love or compassion or hope. “Give her something to eat” just as you do for your very own children.

Fellow followers, as we prepare our hearts to come to the table of God’s love this morning, remember that Christ Jesus is here this day bringing the gift of life to one and all. Pray. Eat. Believe. Love.

Thanks be to God.

Amen