

6th Sunday after Pentecost
July 4, 2021
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Mark 5:21-24a, 35-43
Lord Over Death

Mark 5:21–24a, 35-43 (NIV84)

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. ²² Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet ²³ and pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.” ²⁴ So Jesus went with him....³⁵ While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher any more?” ³⁶ Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” ³⁷ He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” ⁴⁰ But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (which means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). ⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. ⁴³ He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Dear Friends in Christ,

My wife volunteers as a bluebird trail monitor. This involves weekly walks in two locations to monitor bluebird boxes. The hope is that by keeping the predators out of the nests and keeping other birds from using the boxes, the bluebird population will increase. It has worked and bluebirds are beautiful birds. If you want to know more, talk to her.

I want to talk about the location of the bluebird trails. Both are in cemeteries. It is peaceful and beautiful to walk through these cemeteries. Around Memorial Day there are many flowers and many flags. Around this time of year, July 4th, a walk through a cemetery reminds one of the many who served in our armed forces to defend the freedoms we enjoy today. Seeing all the gravestones with military markers on or near them is humbling and reminds one to thank the Lord for the times of peace. At Woodland Cemetery on MLK near I-235, you can find those who served in the World Wars and the wars since that time. You will find many Iowans who volunteered to serve in the Civil War. You can even find one man who served in the War of 1812. I don’t think you will find any who served in the Revolutionary War that brought about July 4th as our Independence Day celebration.

Looking at these gravestones almost teaches a history lesson, but one marker brought me out of history to the reality of this world. It was the stone marked for Felix McCarty ¹. He volunteered with the 47th Iowa Infantry during the Civil War. What most struck my emotions were the dates marked on the stone. 1849-1864. He died during the war and must have lied about his age when he volunteered because he was no older than 15 years old when he died. He was a child.

And at the other cemetery, there is someone who died on her birthday, her 4th birthday. There are far too many of these grave markers where the distance between the birth and death dates is far too short. We humans may at times have the ability to lengthen the dash between birth and death

¹ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/221809421/felix-mccarty>

but we can't change anything once death comes. Death is an enemy that we cannot defeat. The cemeteries of this world are a witness to all that death rules this world. How appropriate then, that in our last week of looking at Jesus as Lord, we see him revealed as the Lord over death. We cannot do anything about death but Jesus has authority even over death. He rules over death for you.

Hear again the first part of the Gospel reading for today from Mark 5:

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. ²² Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet ²³ and pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." ²⁴ So Jesus went with him....³⁵ While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher any more?"

Jairus was a synagogue ruler. His job was most likely to make sure the synagogue was ready to be used by the rabbis and congregation. He was not a teacher himself but surely heard the Word of God read and sung and explained in the synagogue services. Now he has heard of this Jewish rabbi named Jesus who has been teaching and healing in the area. Healing! With just a word...with just his touch. Healing is what his daughter needed. There is hope for Jairus as he approaches Jesus and pleads with Jesus to come to his house and heal his daughter. Notice that he calls her his, "little daughter." She is just a girl. She should not be dying of this sickness. How Jairus' heart must have been beating in anticipation as Jesus agrees to go with him and starts for the house.

And how his heart must have stopped when the men brought the news that his daughter had died. All hope was lost. Jesus was no longer any good to them. Why bother Jesus anymore? It makes sense. These men were just being practical. Once death happens, there is nothing more to do to save the person. It is time to mourn and prepare for the funeral. Jesus is no longer useful. Jesus has better things to do than be a mourner at a funeral for the daughter of someone he just met. But Jesus is not practical. He doesn't have better things to do. He continues on to the house.

Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe." ³⁷ He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." ⁴⁰ But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was.

It is almost like Jesus is in that classic stage of grief called denial. He ignores the announcement of her death. He tells the shocked father to believe. He confronts the crowd of mourners with a crazy question – why all this commotion and wailing? Of course there is commotion and wailing. A young girl has died. What do you expect? Jesus then tells them she is only sleeping. He kicks them out of the house and goes to room with the dead girl.

Put yourself as an observer of Jesus at this time. If you did not yet know who Jesus was, you would be convinced at this point that Jesus had lost touch with reality. He was denying the way the world has worked since the fall into sin. Death ends life. Death cannot be stopped or overturned. If someone acted like this today, we would recommend some kind of counseling and mental health treatment to help them deal with the grief. Nothing Jesus is doing or saying is normal for the situation. And then he does one more out of the ordinary thing. He speaks to the dead girl.

He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which means, "Little girl, I say to

you, get up!’’). ⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.

Take that death! She was just sleeping to Jesus. In fact, this girl wakes up from death easier than most of us wake up from a night of sleep. Immediately she stood up and walked around. Two words and the touch of his hand was all it took for Jesus to show his dominion over death. The sound of wailing that had filled that house just moments before was gone. Astonishment replaced sadness and I’m sure the sound of laughter and joy filled that house very soon.

Christ is the Lord over death and would show it again in when his friend Lazarus died. Lazarus was in the tomb for days before Jesus called to him and Lazarus came out of the tomb alive. Next, Jesus would defeat death for all people. Death is a result of sin. The wages of sin is death. Only sinners die, not that a specific sin caused someone’s death but rather that every sinner is mortal and subject to death. Death rules over every sinner.

Christ breaks death’s hold on us by becoming sin for us. On the cross he takes upon himself the sin of the world. He is treated as if he is every sinner in the history of the world. And the innocent Son of God dies as a sinner though he never sinned. Christ’s perfect payment has freed us from suffering death forever. He has removed the punishment of eternal death from all who trust in him. And then he overcame death. He, himself, rose from the dead. It is one thing to raise someone else from the dead. It is quite another to predict your own resurrection on the third day and then raise yourself to life. Jesus did it because he is Lord over death. Easter proves it!

Remind each other of Jesus’ dominion over death when the news from the doctor is bad, when accidents and violence strike, when buildings collapse, and disasters occur. Remind each other of Christ when at a visitation or funeral. Jesus did not avoid the wailing and mourning at Jairus’ house. He took away the reason for grief. It will likely take more time to take away the grief in our situations than it did for Jairus’ family. But Jesus eases our grief with his promise of eternal life for all who die in faith. He will banish grief forever when he returns to raise all to life again and give believers a place with him in the new heavens and earth.

I thought of Isaiah’s description of heaven when walking through the cemetery recently and seeing the short time between birth and death on some stones.. “Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days” (Isaiah 65:20). And as peaceful as a cemetery is now, it will not be so calm on the day our Lord returns. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Maybe I could add something to my gravestone, another dash after the year of death. And after the dash an 8 that is on its side, the sign for infinity. For, while death is something to mourn and grieve in this world, it is just a date on the timeline of eternity for a believer. Christ has overcome death. Jesus is Lord over death. He will bring you through that terrible date and into eternal life.

Amen.