

Created for Life

A sermon on Mark 5: 21-43 and Wisdom of Solomon 1:11-16a; 2: 22-23

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts
be acceptable in thy sight o Lord, our rock and our redeemer.*

When I first read the readings for today and started planning this morning's worship,
I had a very happy, bubbly, joyous feeling in mind.
I find these passages very hopeful and life-affirming and indeed they are
... and then I realized that the focus of my happy service was the cheeriest of all
subjects: DEATH.
I'm sorry.
But we'll get to the happy part – I promise.

Have you ever thought about the big questions of life, the universe, and everything?
Of why there is something instead of nothing? Why did God create me? You? Humanity?
Mosquitos? Anything? Why create at all? Why go through the trouble? Why?

Perhaps only God knows.
But wise king Solomon tells us that God created us to exist, and to live,
that we were created for incorruptibility.
As though Life was something inherently good and desirable.

Maybe that seems obvious to you,
and I'm a bit envious of you if you never doubted the inherent Goodness of Life.
Me, I'm stuck pondering every once and again:
Is something that is should be better than something that is not?
Why life is better than death, if it is?

The ancient Romans actually disagreed.
One legend told by the Romans centered around the question of
who was the happiest person in the world?
the answer was two boys
who were rewarded for their piety with the best gift there was:
to immediately, painlessly, and blamelessly die.

That should strike you as somehow wrong.
And if it doesn't - if that makes sense to you - listen up.
because scripture readings this morning challenge and redirect this line of thought

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into something far less depressing and causing of despair.

Now, when Jarius's daughter dies -

I do not recall Jesus responding by consoling the parents
that the girl's death was a good thing after all.

I'm not remembering Jesus explaining how wonderful it is that their twelve-year old
daughter need not go through life's miserable drudgery and toil.

I don't think that Jesus extolled her death saying she was among the most happy because
it was "granted" to her to die young and be spared growing old.

I'm not finding any of that because that is the opposite of the story the gospel tells.

This is a different story.

And in this story, life prevails.

The parents are not wrong for grieving the loss of their daughter.
Jesus tells them to stop their wailing because he was going to show them
that life is stronger than death and
that their daughter was not gone for good.

Remember Jesus tells everyone that she is not dead, but only asleep.

And everyone else thinks he's nuts. They laugh at him.

Throughout the New Testament and a lot of early Christian literature
this same turn of phrase is used to say that someone has died.

It is said that he or she has "fallen asleep in the Lord."

Indeed, I don't think I've ever seen death referred to as the usual word for death
- maybe in the occasional treatise on the subject of resurrection -
but in referring to the death of a Christian - they are reposed.

They have fallen asleep.

Quite often modern commentators write this off as simply a euphemism.

A way of putting this more delicately
and avoid using the harsh sounding and impersonal word of death.

But I can't help but thinking,

based on the Christ I see revealed through Scripture and early Christian writings,
that Jesus was not trying to "sugarcoat" the ugly reality with this phrase.

Rather I think he was trying to be accurate.

He was telling us the way he saw things.

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To him, that girl was very much alive.

Perhaps this will make more sense if we consider what death is,
and what it refers to in this passage
and in the reading from the Wisdom of Solomon we heard from earlier.

Death as it is spoken of in Wisdom is not biological so much as ontological.
That is, it has to do with the move from being into non-being
a very final and permanent obliteration
more than with bodily death as we generally think of it.

This was the great problem of humanity as the early church conceived of it.
Our problem was not so much that we
needed forgiveness because we had offended or angered God
or needed to be punished
or needed to pay God off.

The problem is sin and death. Sin that brings the death of no-longer existing.
The problem is that we tend towards non-being.

As Solomon explains to us this morning, slander and lies destroy the soul.
It is living a life of error that invites death.

It is the very works of your hands that can bring on destruction.
We see a similar idea in the more modern phrase “live stupid, die young.”
...And here you can see why we need to be careful.

We all know that people do not die simply because they are bad.
After all, good people die too.

Bad things happen to good people.
We know that the rain falls on the just and the unjust.
So too the sun shines on the righteous and the unrighteous.

And yet, there is something true in Solomon’s words.
Our actions and words can be destructive,
even to our own selves, our own souls.

Of course the opposite is also true:
We can with the help of God’s grace, grow spiritually
through cultivating positive and life-giving thoughts, words, and deeds.

It is righteousness that is immortal. Goodness is eternal.

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Of course it is. Who is God?
What name does the burning bush give to Moses
to tell Pharaoh on who's authority the Israelites should be freed?
I Am. The Existing One. The One Who Is.
And he is the One in Whom we Live, Move, and have our Being.

And having our Being in the eternal one,
being united through Christ even deeper into that reality,
we too have a share in eternity.

Augustine points out that anything that "dies"
only dies to the extent that it does not participate in the essence of Being, God.
And that it is only the life that neglects God that moves towards non-existence.

And complete obliteration isn't quite possible - try as we might -
for us creations made in the image and likeness of God,
a creation very much linked to God
through Christ as much as through our creation.

So no, Jarius's daughter may have stopped breathing,
her heart may have stopped beating, her brainwaves stopped ... waving(?)
but such "death" does not and can not end her life.

We aren't told specifically what kind of child this was,
if she was naughty or nice,
but she was a child, under the age of accountability whatever that is,
and that she just didn't have all that long to drive herself into a state of non-being.

From Jesus' perspective, she wasn't dead.
Just asleep and awaiting Christ to call her to resurrection.

And this has as much to do with Christ as with anything.
Who He is. What he is.
I know I skipped right over the story about the woman suffering from hemorrhages
for about as long as Jarius's daughter had been alive.
And I don't have time to cover it in detail,
but I will say that this passage shows not only a woman with great faith
that Christ can heal her and make things as they should be,

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but a Jesus that does this seemingly unconsciously.
Just because of Who he is.
How can he help but to heal when desperate faith surrenders to him.

This is Christ who puts things right.
Recreates them after his original design.
Answers desperation.
Offers healing and peace.
Restores life and hope.
And Destroys the power of Death,
making it instead a door to eternal life.

Someone once said:
You were never created to live depressed,
guilty, condemned, ashamed or unworthy.
You were created to be Victorious.

You were created to live.
Because Life is what we were created for.
And I think that qualifies as the happiness I promised you.
Remember again those words of Solomon:

God did not make death,
and he does not delight in the death of the living.
For he created all things that they might exist...
For righteousness is immortal...
God created man for incorruption,
and made him in the image of his own eternity.

*To the God of all grace,
who calls you to share God's eternal glory
in union with Christ,
be the power forever!*

Amen.