

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
June 28, 2009  
Pentecost 4  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Deuteronomy 15:7-11  
Psalm 112  
2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 13-15  
Mark 5:21-43

Last week in our Gospel lesson we witnessed a miracle of Jesus where there was a lack of faith, or where the faith of the disciples' was at best a weak faith.

Today, by contrast, we witness a miracle where there is great faith. The story of Jesus' healing of Jairus' daughter has another healing story embedded within it which I have removed for preaching purposes today. That story is the story of the woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage problem for twelve years, and risked a great deal to get close enough to Jesus to touch his garment. The two stories have much in common, but I have chosen today to focus on the story of Jairus, the synagogue ruler, and his daughter.

Jairus is the ruler of the local synagogue, which means he has great responsibility, not only in the worship life of the synagogue, but also in the community in which he lives. He is a very wealthy man, for only the wealthiest persons lived in homes where there were separate sleeping quarters, and the text indicates that such was the case here.

Jairus' little girl is, in some ways, not a little girl, especially in first century Palestine. She was at the age where she was becoming a young woman, and preparations for her marriage would not be too far down the road. And just as her life

is in many ways about to begin, she becomes deathly ill and her life is snuffed away from her before it has had a chance to blossom and grow.

Jesus is at a point in his ministry where he has taught, and healed, and done some impressive things. But no one believes or expects that he is capable of raising the dead to life. So when the messenger arrives with the sad news of the little girl's death, we hear the additional words: "there's no use troubling the teacher now." Which is to say, "this situation is so bad that no one, not even Jesus, can do anything about it."

What happened here to Jairus is a window into our own lives. No matter what your station in life -- whether you are rich or poor, educated or uneducated, privileged or not -- the vagaries and vicissitudes of life come to us without partiality. *Life happens to us.* No one is exempt.

Sometimes, we may find ourselves in circumstances where desperation takes hold of us. We look at our situation through our human eyes and perspective, and we are tempted to draw the same conclusion as that of the messenger to Jairus. We are tempted to throw our hands up in despair and say, "this situation is so bad, not even Jesus can help it."

Into such situations comes Jesus. He comes with power, and with these life-changing words: "*Don't be afraid. Just trust me.*"

Such were his words to Jairus. Jairus stared into the abyss, and out of the blackness of the abyss he heard Jesus say: "Don't be afraid. Just trust me." By the

time they arrive at the house, the professional mourners are already there, playing their flutes and wailing and grieving the little girl's death.

Jesus says, "why all this commotion? The little girl is not dead, she is merely sleeping."

The crowd laughs. Hilariously. Uproariously. Condescendingly. But Jesus' words to Jairus remain: "Don't be afraid. Just trust me."

Jesus dismisses the crowd and sends them away. He takes Peter, James, and John, along with the girl's parents, into her room. He takes her by the hand and tells her to get up. She does so. And the words of the text are inadequate to describe her parents' reaction. The text tells us they were "absolutely overwhelmed." The literal rendering of the text is that they were "amazed with amazement."

They are stunned, because they have just seen that a situation completely beyond the reach of Jesus was not beyond his reach after all. They have just stared into the abyss and survived, because Jesus was present with them in the abyss. In the midst of utter despair, they heard a most intriguing invitation: "Don't be afraid. Just trust me."

If we listen closely this morning, those same inviting words are being spoken forth to us also. "Don't be afraid. Just trust me."

They are spoken forth not just in our personal lives, but also in our corporate lives. They are spoken forth in a context where we are called to give our lives, our material resources, our money away in service of the Gospel and of a world in need.

This theme permeates our lessons today. Whether it was the children of Israel who had entered the promised land, or the church at Corinth to whom Paul writes, the message is the same: We've been blessed by God to be a blessing to others, and we've been called to give our lives away for others.

The temptation in such situations is to think that there is never enough to go around. To live from a mindset of scarcity. But in God's economy, scarcity is not in the vocabulary. God's challenge to us is to give ourselves away, generously. And the invitation is often framed in these words: "Don't be afraid. Just trust me."

As we come to the Table of the Lord this morning, the tangible signs of bread and wine are God's promise to us of something very important. These signs of bread and wine are proof to you that there is no circumstance in your life that is beyond the reach of Jesus' power.

As you come to the table this morning, I invite you to bring with you that circumstance in your life that seems to be beyond the reach of anyone -- perhaps even Jesus -- to help. Just bring it with you. And as you come, listen closely for his voice. It's the voice of love. And through the bread and the wine, it says to you: "Don't be afraid. Just trust me."

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.