

Mark 5: 21-24a, 35-43: 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. Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He 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.” So Jesus went with him. While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?” Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” 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. He took her by the hand and said to her, “*Talitha koum!*” (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up”). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk 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 fellow children of God;

Volumes 42 & 43 of Luther’s Works are titled “Devotional Writings.” There are some overarching themes in the 21 mediations we find in these two volumes: Luther frequently focuses on the blessings found in the Lord’s Supper. 5 of the devotions have prayer as their main topic. But by far the most frequently treated subject is death. Compare that to the latest copy of Meditations, our synod’s daily devotional book: in the 90 some devotions, there are only a couple that mention death.

Why the difference? Luther’s devotional writings date back 500 years to a time when life expectancy was about 40. There is a tragic reason that this number is somewhat misleading. Once a man hit the age of 21 it wasn’t unusual for him to reach the age of 60, as Luther did, but the problem was reaching the age of 21. Over half of children who survived birth died before the age of 16. Luther lost two of his six children: Elisabeth lived just 8 months and Magdalena died at the age of 13. It’s understandable that so much of the art of both the medieval and Renaissance eras contain graphic depictions of death. Yet while life expectancy is different today, death really isn’t. Death is still the ultimate test. But by God’s grace we have the ultimate study guide. Our theme is:

The Word works—to prepare us for our ultimate test

1. It’s a test we dread
2. It’s a test where we like to provide our own answers
3. It’s a test where God’s answers are perfect
4. It’s a test we’ve already passed

Death is a test we dread. Death is a test God never intended us to face. When God created Adam and Eve as the crown of his creation, they weren’t supposed to die. There is no mention of death in the first two chapters of Genesis. And then in chapter 3 Satan, the father of lies, convinces Adam & Eve that sin and death make more sense than God’s plan for their lives, and so *“when the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”* So sin entered the world and death by sin—not just a physical death that Adam & Eve would experience years later, but they died an agonizing spiritual death the moment they ignored God’s will, forgot God’s love, and bought into Satan’s lie.

After Genesis 3, the rest of the pages of scripture are dotted with death. From Abel’s death at the hands of Cain to Adam’s death at the age of 930 to Moses’ death on Mount Nebo to the pages of our text in Mark 5. When we first meet Jairus in our text there isn’t a death...just impending death. *Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet.* A man of power and influence, a prestigious man—yet there is no arrogance, no sense of entitlement. What is the saying? “Desperate times call for desperate measures.” This important man falls at Jesus’ feet. ²³ *He pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying.* My little daughter... Little leads us to think of just a young child, a toddler or 5 or 6 year old. Yet in Luke we’re told that this little girl is 12 years old. Little? No dad here this morning would quibble with Jairus’ choice of words. A man’s daughter is always his little girl, no matter what her age, and even more so when facing a crisis. *My little daughter is dying.* Can you hear the dread in his voice? For 12 years he

has no doubt fixed every problem she's faced, and now he is facing a test he wants no part of. Jairus realizes that this is a problem that no amount of duct tape, no basement workshop, no trip to Home Depot or a stop at Dairy Queen can fix. And yet, this dad does know what to do. He goes to Jesus.

2. The Word works to prepare us for our ultimate test: it's a test where we'd like to provide our own answers. In our text, Jairus pleads with Jesus: *"Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."* Jairus sees the problem, and Jairus is sure he knows the answer. If only Jesus would come and lay his hands on his daughter, then he is sure his daughter will live. As plans go, this certainly isn't a bad plan. It shows faith in Jesus' ability to heal. But as is often the case, Jesus has other things in mind.

You may have noticed that our text skips 12 verses of chapter 5 that describe what happened after Jesus left to go with Jairus and before he arrives at Jairus' home. A woman who had been battling a bleeding disorder for 12 years comes behind Jesus and touches his cloak, hoping that she might then be healed. Jesus initiates an extended conversation with her, all while Jairus is waiting, all while Jairus' little girl is slipping closer and closer to death.

Imagine Jairus' consternation. Imagine you're in an emergency room with someone you love, and every minute could be the difference between life and death; and instead of immediately attending to your family member, the doctor first treats someone who not only came in after you, but whose condition is far less serious. Scripture doesn't tell us that Jairus grew impatient, but what must have been going through his mind. "Jesus, please, please hurry." "Jesus, don't you realize my little girl is dying!" "Jesus, I need your help **now!**" Jairus knew he was facing a test, and he was certain he had the correct answers: Jesus should come now, Jesus should lay his hands on his daughter, and his daughter would recover.

When we face life and death issues with family, there is a lot of Jairus in us. When we come face to face with a doctor's prognosis, when we've received a 2nd and a 3rd opinion, when we've googled definitions and treatments and recovery or remission chances and know more than we've ever known before, how often don't we go to Jesus, just like Jairus did. And we present the problem, and then offer our solution. There's nothing inherently wrong in that. God invites us to come to him in prayer. Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you." And how many times haven't you been pleased to discover that your answers were exactly what God had on his answer key. The test results were negative. The antibiotic worked. The EKG was normal.

But of course there have been just as many times when our answers weren't God's answers. Do we realize that this is also part of the test? Recognizing, trusting and believing that God's answer key is perfect?

3. The Word works to prepare us for our ultimate test, and God's answers are always perfect. ³⁵ *While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?"* How devastating this must have been to Jairus who had just watched Jesus spend precious minutes with someone else, someone other than his dying daughter. Imagine his wife who had been at home no doubt by the bedside of their daughter waiting for Jairus to return with Jesus. How she must have been willing him to hurry, please hurry home. They had a solution, but that solution, like so many of ours, depended on a certain time schedule...our time schedule. Jesus' perfect solution depended on his time table, and here's no surprise...it was just a little bit better.

Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe." And so that's what Jairus does. He just believes. He leads Jesus to his home...a home that's so sadly different than the one he had left just a short time earlier. We aren't told what he was thinking. We aren't told of any exchange between husband and wife. Mark's focus in his gospel isn't on the parents but on Jesus and that little girl. Dismissing the mourners who mocked him for saying "the child is not dead but asleep" Jesus leads the parents into the house and stands with them by the deathbed of their only little girl. They had prayed that Jesus would show up earlier. They had prayed that he would lay his hands on her and prayed that he would heal her. That was their prayer, that was their answer to this test, and Jesus? Jesus answered their prayer. Jesus said no, but here is what I will do: *He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up").* Get up. And what happens? Well, because God's answer key is always perfect we know what happens. *Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.*

At this they were completely astonished. We might ask, "But why?" They had prayed for a healthy daughter, and that's what Jesus gives them. Have you ever secretly hoped for something, but felt it was too far beyond possible for it to

happen? Have you ever wanted something so badly, but were convinced there was no way your wish would come true? And then when it seemed like the impossible was about to become possible, you still wondered if this was too good to be true? If you think about it, doesn't it happen fairly often? Just think of how often you've come to church, after a week of sins that shame you, a week of sins that you'd rather not think about, sins of selfishness, of sarcasm, of a loss of temper, of impatience. A week of lust, or anger, perhaps even anger at God or doubts about God's love. By nature dead in our sins, and then we walk into this church, and we'll kneel at the Lord's table, and beyond all hope, beyond all logical expectation, Jesus takes us by the hand and says, "Get up, go in peace, your sins are forgiven." As always, God's answer is perfect.

4. The Word works to prepare us for the ultimate test—and by God's grace, we've passed the test. Jesus said, "Don't be afraid, just believe." And Jairus didn't question Jesus, didn't say, "But Jesus, she's dead." What a faith. But that faith didn't come from Jairus, it came from Jesus powerful promise. Have you ever thought about how many times in the Bible God says "Do not be afraid"? And how many times all of the outward evidence gave people every reason to fear? The Israelites have the Red Sea in front of them and the Egyptian army behind them, and Moses says, "Do not be afraid." And then God parts that sea, allows the Israelites to escape, and drowns the Egyptian arm. The disciples are caught up in a storm so severe they thought they would drown, and Jesus says, "Do not be afraid," and the lake becomes as smooth as glass. On Maundy Thursday Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to die, but tells them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. In my Father's house are many rooms," and less than 24 hours later pays the full price for each of those rooms, including your room. We've passed the test. But have we? There's an elephant here this morning—an elephant that some of you are so very aware of because it's right next to you in your pew. You've already faced an ultimate test—the death of someone as precious to you as Jairus' daughter was to him. And here's the thing...there was no "Talitha kum." No deathbed rescue, or a "Lazarus, come forth" at the grave.

Did God give Jairus a different test than the one he gives us—all of us who have buried parents, or a spouse, or a child? Did Jesus love Jairus' daughter more than he loves us? There wasn't a moratorium on deaths and funerals during Jesus' 3 years of ministry. He raised 3 people from the dead, but far more died than Jairus' daughter, the widow of Nain's son, and Lazarus. What was the comfort Jesus offered them? What comfort is ours? Our comfort is this: That while John the Baptist didn't have his cousin show up at his funeral and call him back to life, at the moment of his execution his Heavenly Father welcomed him into heaven. On their deathbed, my parents, your parents, your spouse or your child didn't hear Jesus say, "get up!", but they did hear Jesus say "Welcome home. Here's the mansion I have been preparing for you."

And for those of us left behind? Those of us who still grieve? Find confidence in this: grieving doesn't mean you've failed the ultimate test. Praying, "God, please get me through today" doesn't show a lack of faith in God's plan. Our comfort is in God's promises: promises of a reunion in heaven and promises that until that day, Jesus is by our side. God didn't say, "Never will I leave, never will I forsake you...until I take someone you love. Then you're on your own." No, the Savior-God who took your husband or wife, son or daughter to heaven is the same God who is by your side from now until he stands by your bed and says, "My child, come home." For the child of God, there are no God-forsaken deathbeds. That was Jesus' deathbed. And because Jesus passed that test, you've passed yours as well. So when we face death, we can say with Paul: "Death where is your sting. Grave, where is your victory...Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Amen.

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