

SERMON NOTES

Sunday, November 9, 2008

Synaxis Gospel

Luke 8:49-56

A PRAYER ANSWERED A CHILD RESTORED

INTRODUCTION

There was a man named Jairus who was quite important in his community. He was called “a ruler of the synagogue.” The synagogue in Jesus’ day was, as it is in our own day, a center for prayer and study for the local Jewish neighborhood. If the community were small it might have only one synagogue. In Jerusalem there were many. The Gospel writers do not tell us where Jairus lived, but it was probably in one of the villages near the Sea of Galilee.

In the following account in our reading, Jesus had just returned to the western shores of the Sea of Galilee from a visit to the Gerasenes on the opposite side. The crowd had been waiting eagerly and they welcomed him back. Suddenly, Jairus, this very important community leader, came and we can imagine how the respectful crowd must have parted to allow his approach to Jesus.

Jairus had an only daughter, a little girl twelve years old, and she was at the very point of death. His only hope for his child was Jesus. In desperation he fell at the feet of Jesus and begged Him to return to the home and heal her.

As Jesus set off with Jairus, the crowd moved along with them. But then, a woman with a serious illness delayed them. For twelve years she had suffered and no one had been able to help her. She reached to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment and was instantly cured. It is with the interruption of the ensuing discussion with the woman, which our reading for today begins.

SYNAXIS READING

Luke 8:49-56

While He was speaking, someone came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, “Your daughter has died; do not trouble the Teacher anymore.”

But when Jesus heard this, He answered him, “Do not be afraid any longer; only believe, and she shall be made well.”

And when He had come to the house, He did not allow anyone to enter with Him, except Peter and John and James, and the girl's father and mother.

Now they were all weeping and lamenting for her; but He said, "Stop weeping; for she has not died, but is asleep."

And they began laughing at Him, knowing that she had died.

He, however, took her by the hand and called, saying "Child, arise!" And her spirit returned, and she rose immediately; and He gave orders for something to be given her to eat.

And her parents were amazed; but He instructed them to tell no one what had happened.

NOTES

While He was speaking,

Jesus was saying to the woman, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."¹ It was her faith in Him, Who was pleased to heal her, that made her well. It was not her hand touching the garment. That was simply the expression of her faith.

Luke now returns from the delay, caused by the ill woman, to Jairus and his urgent need.

someone came from *the house of* the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; do not trouble the Teacher anymore."

A member of Jairus's household arrived with the sad news. Literally: "She has died, your daughter." Jairus no doubt extremely anxious about the delay the cure of the woman caused, had his worst fears realized. Jesus did not reach his sick daughter in time. His little child had died.

The messenger's remark about troubling 'the Teacher' displayed a lack of understanding of Jesus' true identity and power.

But when Jesus heard *this*, He answered him, "Do not be afraid *any longer*; only believe, and she shall be made well."

Jesus addressed Jairus and commanded him, "Do not be afraid! Only believe!" Luke assumes the reader will understand that the object of the belief is to be in Jesus not in the desired fulfillment. However, here, Jesus promised that He would intervene. He would restore the little girl.

And when He had come to the house, He did not allow anyone to enter with Him, except Peter and John and James, and the girl's father and mother.

Of all the disciples, these three would now be allowed to witness more than the others. Later they would also witness the transfiguration.²

¹ Luke 8:48

This is the first mention of the little girl's mother.

Now they were all weeping and lamenting for her;

'They' refers to the rest of the household and, no doubt, friends and those who regularly attended a death for the purpose of adding their voices to the family's lament. They were beating their breasts in mourning.

This description of the lamenters, and Jesus' interaction with them, should not be taken as a point in time *after* the entrance of Jesus and the other five persons into the house, but as a parenthetical report of the situation Jesus met *as* He entered the home.

but He said, "Stop weeping; for she has not died, but is asleep."

Jesus sometimes uses the term 'asleep' to describe the state of one who has actually died physically but who will be raised to life again. Another instance of this is the case of His good friend, Lazarus, whom He raised to life four days after death occurred.³ This euphemism for physical death of the spiritually alive was used by St. Paul for those who had died in Christ and would be resurrected at His coming.⁴ Christians still use 'asleep' in this way to indicate that death for the Christian's body is simply a transition from which it will one day awake, refreshed and rejoined by its living soul.

There are three deaths that the Bible speaks of: spiritual death, physical death, and the condition referred to as the second death. Adam and Eve died spiritually when they chose to disobey God's command.⁵ That death need not be permanent, for when one puts his or her trust in God and is forgiven, one is born again spiritually—one receives eternal life.⁶

Physical death is the consequence of sin which has touched all mankind; it need not be permanent for God has promised the resurrection of the physical body at His Second Coming.⁷

However, the last form of death, the second death, is permanent; it is the eternal separation of one from God. It is the final judgment on all who refuse God's gracious offer of life with Him, that He went to the Cross to secure for us all.

The child was not dead spiritually.

And they *began* laughing at Him, knowing that she had died.

This was scornful and mocking laughter. Her death was a matter of absolute fact. This sentence ends Luke's parenthesis he began with, "Now . . ."

He, however, took her by the hand and called, saying "Child, arise!"

In spite of what the lamenters knew to be true, Jesus moved quickly to restore physical life to the girl.

In the culture of that day, to touch a dead body would make one ritually unclean. The purity issues were never a barrier to the compassion of our Lord. While He could have simply commanded the

² Luke 9:28ff.

³ John 11:11

⁴ 1Thessalonians 4:13-16

⁵ Genesis 2:16-17. All mankind has followed in the footsteps of our first parents according to Romans 5:12.

⁶ John 3:16; 11:26

⁷ John 11:24-25; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

child to rise with out touching the dead body, our Lord took her by the hand. It was a beautiful gesture.

In a raised voice, as to a sleeper, He commanded her to get up. She was otherwise helpless to obey but He endued her with the power to do the impossible. At the resurrection, Jesus will also raise us with a shout.⁸ Notice that it was with a shout that He called Lazarus back to physical life.⁹

And her spirit returned, and she rose immediately;

Death is no match for the Giver of Life. Immediately her physical life was restored. Obeying, she got up.

and He gave orders for *something* to be given her to eat.

This order may have been given to prove this restored child was no vision or phantom. It may have been given to indicate the return of normality. Or it may have been given to give the overwhelmed parents something to do to help them absorb what had happened.

And her parents were amazed;

Literally: “they were beside themselves.”

but He instructed them to tell no one what had happened.

Some things would not be understood by even the disciples until after the Resurrection of Christ. Moreover, those lamenters outside were mocking scoffers and unbelievers; they would see the result but they were *not* to have the facts.

APPLICATION

Recently I heard a young woman, Anna, explain how she had become estranged from her faith in Christ. In the church that she attended there was a great emphasis on having ‘enough faith’. If one only had *enough* faith, God would hear and grant any petition. Anna firmly believed that what was being taught was true.

Then her father died. Anna could not accept her beloved father’s death and so she prayed before her father’s corpse that he would rise from death. Based on what she had been taught, she fully believed that he would return to life as she prayed. He did not. Anna was so angry with God that she left her church and did not want to have anything more to do with Christ or His people.

In our lesson for today, we are met with a father, Jairus, whose only daughter had died. He was told to have faith, and Jesus did restore the little girl to life. What is the difference between these two situations: Anna who had lost her father and Jairus who had lost his little girl? They both had faith, didn’t they? Yes, they did. Then why did Jairus have his prayer answered and Anna did not?

The answer is, one restoration to life was the will of God, and the other was not. Jesus *promised* Jairus that his little girl would be restored that day. He never promised Anna

⁸ 1 Thessalonians 4:16

⁹ John 11:43

anything of the sort. Anna was trying to force her will upon God based on a false teaching that she firmly believed.

What is the truth about prayer, and what can we confidently expect God's answer to be? There are two kinds of legitimate prayer. One is certain to be answered positively but in God's own timing, and in God's own way. With the other kind of prayer, we can not be certain how it will be answered. The answer could be "Yes," or it could be "No."

Jairus did not know what Jesus' answer would be as he knelt before Him and pleaded for the life of his little daughter. All Jairus knew was that Jesus was able to cure her if it was His will. We are sometimes in the position of Jairus. We have a sick child or relative or dear friend and we plead with God to heal them. Sometimes He does heal them to the astonishment of the doctors. But at other times, He does not, and we must accept, even though we cannot understand, that His will is always for the best.

Our faith and belief should *not* be like Anna's—that if we *believe* He will do something, then, He *must* do it. No, our faith should be like that of Jairus. Our belief and faith must be in Him,¹⁰ knowing that He has the power to do whatever our request is; but the decision is His.

Most of us do understand this. We are joyful and beside ourselves when the answer is "Yes." The difficulty comes for us when our pleadings are answered with "No." The child or relative or dear friend does not recover and we are crushed with sorrow. We don't get the job, or we lose the house, or we don't get whatever it is that we believe we really do need.

Sorrow is mixed with a disappointment that is palpable—we feel it and we can't shake it off. We are disappointed that *He* did not respond to our desperate need. It is exactly at this time that we need to trust Him the most. His love and compassion for us never changes. We may never understand why our request was denied, but we do know Who made the decision. He is our God, Who loves us and gave Himself for us.

What about the second kind of prayer, the one we can be sure will get a "yes" answer? As we learned in last Sunday's lesson, any of us who hear his words and obey them can have a very close relationship to Christ. We can be as near to His heart as His mother, Mary. In such a relationship we can be sure that He is attentive to our prayers and they will be answered. Jesus promised, "If you abide in Me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you."

The question is "What kind of prayers do those near to His heart pray? What kind of prayer did Jesus Himself pray? What kind of prayer did He teach His disciples to pray,

¹⁰ Faith has no power in itself; the power is in the object of the faith. We might have faith that a chair will support us if we sit on it. If the chair is defective or weak it will collapse beneath our weight. No matter how strong our faith is in the chair, it has no power to support us. If however the chair is strong, it will support us and our trust in it will not have been misplaced. Therefore, the object of our faith determines the power, not our faith. Our trust in Christ is never misplaced.

and which we repeat in Church every Sunday?” The answer to all these questions is the same: “Father, Your will be done.” The prayer of faith in our Lord, is a prayer for His will. It is a prayer knowing that His will is best. Even when our hearts are crushed with pain and agony, we can and must pray as Jesus did in Gethsemane, “Nevertheless, not my will but Yours be done.” Whatever our requests may be, our *will* is that His be done.

So then in both kinds of prayer, the focus should be on our Father’s will in the matter. The specifics of how He answers are in His good, and loving, hands. The real answer to both kinds of prayer is “Yes.” His will *will* be done. Moreover, we can be confident that He causes *all* things to work together for our good.¹¹ The physical death of the daughter of Jairus was a sad thing, but it was the means whereby Jairus witnessed the power of God.

May our prayers be from a heart that trusts in the wisdom and goodness of our Heavenly Father. May we understand that our knowledge is flawed, but that His is perfect. Let our minds be set on doing His will, and let the aim of our prayers be directed to His purposes being fulfilled. Moreover, as we pray, may we never forget His great love for us.

He has promised that our joy will be full.

¹¹ Romans 8:28