

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

ANNO † DOMINI 2021

Text: Matthew 9:18-26. While [Jesus] was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And the report of this went through all that district.

"Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." So says the Lord in the fiftieth psalm (v. 15). These words not only contain God's explicit command to call upon Him in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks, but also His gracious promise to hear and answer prayer. Both ought to encourage us to pray. "For if He did not intend to answer your prayer," writes Martin Luther in his Large Catechism, "He would not ask you to pray"; and, "He testifies with His own Word that our prayer is heartily pleasing to Him" (LC III 18, 19). As God's holy ones, His saints, who have put on Christ in our Baptism, we should be bold to pray, asking God for what we need as dear children ask their dear Father. "Or which one of you," says Jesus, "if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matt 7:9-11). Therefore, the author of Hebrews writes, "Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:14).

Today's Gospel lesson offers two examples of such bold faith. The first, a man identified by Mark and Luke in their gospels as Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum, had evidently heard of Jesus and His ability to heal. But what's truly remarkable about Jairus is his confidence in Jesus to heal the *dead*. He says, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live." What a combination of words: "died, but." Those don't usually go together. You die, period. There is no comma, no contrasting conjunction. But there was for Jairus, because, by grace, he believed that Jesus could *raise* the dead. That He could take that most final of punctuation marks and turn it into a sentence that keeps going.

Bold faith believes the impossible, because with God all things are possible. What the world says can't happen (the dead coming back to life, for example), faith believes can happen, and will happen, on the basis of God's Word. God's Word is truth, even when it flies in the face of experience. And so, staking your trust on *that*, making such a bold request as, "Come and heal my dead daughter," is wisdom, not foolishness. It is spiritual understanding of the highest degree. It kneels down before the Creator, confessing His sovereignty. What could Jesus say to such faith but, "Let's go"? And so, Jesus rose and followed him.

On the way, He meets the second of our two examples, a woman who is described as having suffered from twelve years of bleeding. Mark adds that she had seen many doctors, and spent all that she had, and was no better for it but rather *worse* (5:26). Her condition also rendered her ritually unclean, according to the law of Moses (Lev. 15:25). So, it's no wonder she opts to approach Jesus *from behind*. She's ashamed, and she says to herself, "If I only touch His garment, I will be made well." This is not superstition. I've heard Roman Catholics use this as a proof-text for the healing power of relics, but that is not what's going on here. This woman's faith is in *Jesus*, not His clothing. She has no doubt heard that Jesus is on His way to heal a girl, who, like her, has suffered a great deal. And that has given her hope. Here is a man whose name is "Yahweh saves," who is not only willing but apparently able *to save*. And so, in spite of her shame, she comes to Jesus boldly. And before she even has a chance to touch Him, He turns and sees her and heals her with a word: "Daughter, your faith has made you well."

She is a daughter because she has faith. She has faith because she has heard the word of Christ and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. She has nothing at all to be ashamed of. Jesus came to bear the sorrows of people like her, to eat with sinners and tax collectors, to take away the sin of the world. He came for those who have nowhere else to go, and in so doing became like them, despised and rejected, a worm and not a man, that they might have an advocate, someone to sympathize with them in their weakness and give them hope. Jesus is your advocate, too. He is for you, no matter how worthless you feel. He forgives your sins. There is no one to condemn. Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of the Father interceding for you. And the Father listens, for even on your worst days, the Lord is your righteousness.

We return, then, to the ruler, who has been a witness to all this. Actually, it's interesting to think about how the healing of the woman, who was inspired by the ruler's story, helps prepare the ruler for what comes next. His daughter is dead. The mourners are mourning. The flautists are fluting(?). But Jesus says, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laugh at Him. Of *course* they do. What complete

and utter nonsense. What is He, crazy? But the ruler, the girl's father, is not laughing. Not after what he's just seen. He knows better. He understands what's happening: that just as Jesus healed the woman with a word so has He just healed his daughter. He has turned the period into a comma, making her death into sleep. And He proves it, by going in and taking her by the hand, and raising her up.

So too will we rise on the Last Day, getting out of our graves like we get out of bed. By His death and resurrection, Christ has turned our death into sleep, a sentence that runs on into eternity.

Dear friends, this is the God who invites us to call upon Him in our need. We too are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them. Nevertheless, we know that we do not draw near to the throne of grace on the basis of our own worthiness; we come on the basis of *His*. We come with confidence in Christ our Lord, friend of sinners, who never turns away anyone in need. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble," He says, "I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." That is both a command and a promise. So pray boldly. You are God's children now, sons and daughters in Christ. Draw near to Him, for your faith has made you well.

In ☩ Jesus' name. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria

Questions for Reflection:

1. What should motivate us to pray?
2. What does the example of the ruler's bold faith teach us?
3. What about the example of the woman?
4. On the basis of whose worthiness do we dare to come before God?