

Text: Mark 5:21-24, 35-43. Sixth Sunday after Pentecost. **July 1, 2018.**

Grace and peace are yours through our risen Savior, Jesus. Amen.

Imagine you are at a funeral. I know fun, but that's where the people in the Bible found themselves, so let's try to be in their shoes. You are at a funeral. There's the casket. The flowers. The family and friends gathered. There's the dead body of your loved one. There's crying. Tissues. Funeral homes have even gotten clever. They have tissue packets with the name and website of the funeral home on them. Now imagine the funeral is for a twelve year old girl. That multiplies everything. The younger you are, the more people there are at your funeral. Ten times the flowers. Twenty times the family. Fifty times the friends. One hundred times the tears and crying and uncontrollable wailing. Now imagine one guy walks in. Authoritative, but not arrogant. Calm, but in control. He raises his voice. Announces over the din. "She is not dead. She is sleeping." What? What are you talking about? What is this guy saying? How did this guy get in here? You can hear the sobs get louder. Who could be so insensitive! You probably even hear a few chuckles. There's something really wrong with this guy. But that's what Jesus said. After he heard the news, "She died," Jesus announced, "She did not die. On the contrary. She is sleeping." She did not die. She is sleeping. She is not dead? She is sleeping? Yes! That's the good news Jesus gives us all year round, Easter all year round. Your loved one who died believing in Jesus is not dead. She is sleeping. Your grandma who was a Christian is not dead. She is sleeping. She is not dead. She is sleeping. How do we picture this scene? Jesus is popular. That's actually unusual. He crosses by boat to the other side of the lake. Large crowds gather. One guy in particular stands out. Jairus is his name. He's a synagogue ruler. He's like the church chairman. His responsibilities range from taking care of the practical details at the Jewish place of worship to lining up the readers and teachers and making sure what they teach is true. But Jairus doesn't approach thinking himself to be a man of important position. He falls at Jesus' feet as a faltering father. He begs, "My little daughter, my dear daughter, my lovely daughter, my only child, is dying. She's near the end. She's about to die. Come, please and heal her. So she lives. Please!"

Try to imagine the ups and downs Jairus faces. His life is generally an up. He's a believer. He has an important position. He's respected. Then the down. His daughter is down. Sick. Near death. Then the up. Jesus agrees to come. Out of all the people in this crowd, Jesus is coming to my house! To heal my daughter! Then there's a down. A delay. In the intervening verses, a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, (the exact same age as Jairus' daughter), touches Jesus and is healed. Jesus stops. Has a conversation. Jairus might be getting a bit impatient. He's nervous. Will Jesus make it in time? But Jesus is coming. There's still hope.

Then the downiest down. The lowest low. Some men show up. "Your daughter is dead." They weren't even polite about it. Couldn't they have said, "She didn't make it. She passed."? No. She is dead! Talk about a shot to the heart. What a dagger to the chest! She is dead. She died. It's a fact. Jairus was running as fast as he could to get to Jesus, hoping to outrun death. Hoping Jesus could get there before death did. But death won the race. Death outran Jairus. Death got there first.

Doesn't matter that I've run over 40,000 miles. Death is going to outrun me, because I'm a sinner. Doesn't matter if you workout every day. Drink only kale smoothies. Sleep eight hours a night. Death is going to win. Death is going to overtake you. Because you are a sinner.

So why bother the teacher any more? Why bother? He's just a teacher! Maybe he could heal some sick people. But a dead person? No way! Why bother? What's a teacher going to do now? Do you see that if you see Jesus as only a teacher, you won't think he can do very much, at least not when times are really bad. You don't call your third grade teacher when you are sick. You don't even call the Sunday School teacher when you are dying. You might call pastor, but he's just a man. Can he heal the dying, raise the dead? Come on! What about Jesus? Can he cure the dying, raise the dead?

Well, we have doctors and medicines, and pills and chemo. They'll take care of us. Jesus? Maybe a nice guy. Maybe a good teacher. Maybe say a quick prayer or two. But why bother him? We have the best medical care in the country. Why bother Jesus? Why bother with Jesus? He's not here. What can he really do?

While Jairus has this dagger in his chest, Jesus reaches out to him. And of all the people in the crowd, Jesus speaks just to him. "Don't be afraid." 365 times the Bible reaches out, just to you and says, "Don't be afraid. Stop being afraid." Stop being afraid of death. Jesus rose. Jesus defeated death. Jesus lives and so you will live. Death didn't outrun Jesus. Jesus outran death. Jesus conquered death. Jesus defeated death with his own death. Stop being afraid. You won't die. You will live. As surely as Jesus lives, you will live. As certainly as Jesus is alive, you will be alive. Whoever lives and believes in Jesus will never die. Will never, ever die. You won't die. You will just be sleeping. You won't be dead. You'll be alive. You will not be dead. Your body will just be sleeping.

Just believe. Just keep on believing. Believe over and over. Stop being afraid, but never stop believing. "Believe what? What are you talking about?" Those thoughts had to be going through the mind of Jairus. What am I supposed to believe? What hope is there now! She is dead. Jesus says, "She is not dead." But she died. Jesus says, "She did not die. She is sleeping. She is not dead. She is sleeping." Just believe: she is not dead. She is sleeping. Don't stop believing. Keep on believing. Never give up believing. She is not dead. She is sleeping.

So let's get back to the account. Jesus just ignores the news she is dead. He continues on to the house. And oddly, it's a mad house. There's a commotion. An uproar. Crying. Wailing. Probably professional mourners. The louder people wailed the more that showed love for the one who had died. You can't think because the noise is so loud, and so emotional and so, just noise. The word for wailing is literally pronounced, "alalala." Try to listen to all these people, professionals at making mourning, wailing, "alalala." But let's not judge. They dealt with death with noise. While we may prefer silence, they chose noise. While we whisper, they wailed.

One guy, rose above the noise. Jesus walks in with calm confidence. She is not dead. On the contrary, she is sleeping. We have to stop there and ponder. She is not dead? What? She is sleeping? What? It's fascinating, Jesus used the same word that the friends of Jairus used. While they said, "She is dead." Jesus said, "Not she is dead." Or, "She is dead. Not!" The exact word. Only with a negative. She is not dead. But the friends of Jairus knew. The mourners knew. They were often around dead people. You don't have a funeral for the living. But here's the only one who really knows. The only one with super knowledge. The Son of God and Savior of the world announcing, "She is not dead." Try saying that the next time you go to a funeral!

On the contrary, she is sleeping. Is Jesus just using another euphemism? Is this just another way to avoid the dastardly d word? No. Jesus is calling it like he sees it. In his eyes, she is only sleeping. Sleep is temporary. So her physical death is only temporary. Sleep is a condition that is relatively easy to change.

She wasn't a teenager yet. Many times, the Bible calls the physical death of a believer a sleep, a temporary, easy-to-change condition.

Now we can judge the crowds. They laughed. They laughed at him. They laughed down at him. Their great show of wailing and crying and alalaling quickly changed into derisive laughter when this guy said, "She is not dead." Well, we can judge them, but then we are also judging ourselves. Would you have just believed? Would you have not been afraid? Would you have laughed?

But the last laugh belonged to Jesus. He took along enough people to witness the miracle, but not so many that it was a commotion. The father and mother and three close followers saw firsthand. She is not dead. She is sleeping. All Jesus does is take her by the hand, says two words, "Talitha, koum!" And she stands up. How powerful is Jesus' word! It raises the dead. His Word gives physical life to the physically dead. His Word gives spiritual life to the spiritually dead. The word that he used, was used in two ways. One, it was used to tell someone to, "Wake up," when they were sleeping. So was Jesus simply saying, "Wake up," to this child who was sleeping? The word is also used for Jesus' resurrection from the dead. So is Jesus also saying, "Rise from the dead!"? Don't the words of Jesus do both? His words wake up the sleepers, those who sleep in the sleep of death. His words raise the dead to life. Immediately the girl stood up and walked around. No therapy. No recovery time. Better than new. Now there was no laughter. Just complete astonishment. The crowds were beside themselves. She really wasn't dead. She really was just sleeping. This guy wasn't just pulling our legs. When he took her by the hand, she got up and walked. He was even so calm and collected, he cared for her basic need for food. He was concerned about her physical life as well as her spiritual life. This guy just raised the dead! He was absolutely right! She is not dead. She is sleeping.

Now put yourself back at a funeral. I know, start and end with fun. Stand at that casket again. Listen to Jesus speak. She is not dead. She is sleeping. Listen to his voice above the sobbing. She is not dead. She is sleeping. Focus on his voice despite the tears, the well meaning euphemisms, the pious platitudes. She is not dead. She is sleeping. And when that seems impossible, hear Jesus say again, "Stop being afraid. Just believe. Believe she is not dead. Believe she is sleeping. Believe I have woken her up. Believe I have raised her from the dead. I raised myself. And I was dead. I will raise you. You will just be sleeping. You will not be dead. You will just be sleeping. Just be sleeping. Just be sleeping." Amen.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Whoever lives and believes in him will never die. Amen.