

A Test of Faith: Mark 5:35-43
Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church
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In God's providence we come to a passage this morning that is so fitting to the situation that we find ourselves in. Our dear sister in Christ, Emily Robinson, passed away late last night, and we're all still trying comprehend what has happened. It is a test of faith. It is a test of faith like Jairus experienced when the messengers came and told him that his daughter had died. And Jesus' response was, "Do not fear, only believe."

When we're in the middle of the story (as we are now), when we can't yet see the outcome of God's plans, will we be consumed with fear, or will we trust Jesus? We of course think of William and Catherine and Gabriel and the test of faith that they are all facing right now. And the test of faith that we are facing together as a church. We have lost a dear sister in Christ. Will we fear, or will we believe?

Maybe there are other things going on in your life that present you with a test of faith as well. Maybe there are financial hardships or marital conflicts or strained relationships within the family. Maybe you have unfulfilled longings in your life that cause you to be heartbroken. This passage is given to us for our edification. And the message to each and every one of us is, "Do not fear, only believe."

Last week we saw the humble faith of both Jairus and the woman who was healed of her discharge of blood that had been a trial in her life for 12 years. Both of these individuals, with their very different backgrounds and positions in society, came to Jesus to seek His help and healing. It's a story inside of a story. The passage begins with Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagogue, coming and falling down at the feet of Jesus. And Jairus asks Jesus to come heal his dying daughter. Then there's an interruption. The woman with the issue of blood comes up behind Jesus and touches His garments. And much to everyone's surprise, Jesus stops and asks, "Who touched my garments?" It seemed like an absurd question because hundreds of people would have been touching His garments. He was in the middle of a large crowd of people, all of them pressing in around Him. And why would He be stopping to ask such an absurd question when He was on His way to heal the daughter of a very important person? This didn't make sense to the disciples. And it probably didn't make any sense to Jairus either. He was very eager to get Jesus back to his house.

But Jesus' plans and purposes often don't make sense to us, at least in the moment. It usually takes some time before we can grasp the bigger picture of what He is doing. And in this life we'll

never comprehend the full picture of His plans. But in this story we can see that Jesus was doing something wonderful, even though it would have been utterly confusing in the midst of it. Every detail happened according to plan, and every word of Jesus was intentional and deliberate. This was a test of faith for this father, Jairus. And as the account comes to us in the inspired writing of Scripture, this is a call to humble, radical faith. Jairus experienced a test of faith. Would he be afraid, or would he have faith? Would he be like the woman who was healed, or would he be like the messengers who thought it was a lost cause, or the mourners who laughed at Jesus? As we study this passage the same questions face us. In the tests of faith that we are experiencing, will we fear or will we believe?

Think about the providence of God in these events. Jesus agreed to go to Jairus's house. Then He stopped to see who had touched His garments. And as frustrating as that may have been for Jairus, it gave him an up close and personal encounter with authentic faith. This woman had an imperfect faith, a mustard seed kind of faith, but it was authentic. And Jesus responded to her faith, not only with physical healing, but with spiritual salvation. He said to her in verse 34, "Daughter, your faith has made you well [or it can be translated, your faith has saved you], go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

What an amazing thing it would have been for Jairus to watch this happen right before his eyes. As much as he was eager to get back to his daughter, he must have also been intrigued and amazed by what had happened with this woman.

But then the narrative moves from mountain top to dark valley. If the ordeal with the woman was an unwelcomed interruption, the next interruption is a very painful blow. Verse 35 happens right on the heels of verse 34. Jesus was still speaking when the messengers from Jairus's house came with the sad news. "Your daughter is dead." What a stark contrast from the previous verse. In verse 34 a daughter is saved and healed. In verse 35 a daughter dies.

Here is the test of faith for Jairus. And the first influence upon him is one of discouragement. The messengers exhibit their unbelief when they say, "Why trouble the Teacher any further?" In other words, the Teacher may have been able to help while the girl was still alive, but it's a lost cause now. Jesus is no help now that your daughter has died. But Jesus overheard this message, and He said to Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe." And Luke adds, "and she will be well" (Luke 8:50). Jesus is telling Jairus to believe that He can still help. The test of faith could not be clearer. Jairus finds himself confronted with these two contrasting appeals. The messengers tell him to give up hope. It's over. Nothing can

be done. Jesus, on the other hand, tells him to believe. Don't fear. Trust.

There's evidence in Matthew's account of this story that Jairus did believe. Matthew's account is condensed, and so the order of things doesn't exactly match up to the detailed story that Mark gives us. But Matthew quotes Jairus as saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live" (Matthew 9:18). I think it's likely that Jairus said that in response to Jesus telling him not to fear, but to believe. Jairus bowed again, and said, in effect, I believe that You can still help. Even though my daughter is now dead, I believe that You can raise her from the dead.

So they set off again toward Jairus's house. Jesus didn't take all 12 of the disciples, but only the inner circle: Peter, James and John. These guys were among the very first disciples Jesus called, and this was the first time Jesus distinguished them from the larger group. But it was not the last time that He would do this. These three will also witness the transfiguration in Mark 9, and Jesus will separate them out in the Garden of Gethsemane to pray with Him. This was the inner circle within the group of disciples.

When they arrived at Jairus's house, the funeral proceedings were already underway. It's hard to tell how much time had elapsed since the girl died. But it must have taken some length of time for the messengers to make their way to Jairus in the midst of the great crowd and for them to make their way back to the house. By this time the professional mourners and musicians had already arrived, and the customary chaos had ensued. These funerals were unlike the funerals we're accustomed to. When we go to a funeral, it's usually quiet. People speak in whispers. But it was very different in Jesus' day. Funerals were loud. The family was actually expected to hire at least two flute players and one professional mourner. And that was the expectation for the poorest of families. For Jairus, being well off, the expectation would have been greater. The professionals hired to mourn and weep were there in order to stir up everyone else to mourn and weep loudly. And this is the commotion that Jesus saw. It was not a pretty sight. It was not a peaceful sight. It would have made you cringe to see the chaos and hear the piercing screams and listen to the mournful sounds of the flutes.

When they entered, Jesus made a most startling statement. Jesus is full of surprises. He is unpredictable. And this is one of those instances. Verse 39 records Jesus' words: "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." What did Jesus mean by this? They knew the girl was dead. These professional mourners had seen lots of dead people. And they knew the difference between a dead person and a

sleeping person. They knew the difference between a dead person and a comatose person. And they knew that this girl had breathed her last.

Jesus, too, understood that she was physically dead. He was not denying that. But in His usual veiled way, He made this statement as a way of saying that her death was a temporary condition. When we go to sleep, it's temporary. We sleep, and then we wake up. And her death was going to be like that. She was certainly dead physically. Her body had died. But she was not dead in the ultimate spiritual sense. She was only sleeping, and would soon awake. In the story of Lazarus in John 11, Jesus makes a similar statement to the disciples. He said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died" (John 11:11-14). And Paul picks up on this language, too, referring to death as sleep. The point is, it's temporary. A resurrection is coming.

There are other parallels between Mark 5 and John 11 that are also helpful to notice. In both stories Jesus delays His trip in order to allow time for the person to die. John 11:5-6 is a very startling statement. And without an understanding of God's sovereignty over suffering and God's goodness to us in suffering, these two verses would be utterly incomprehensible. It says, "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was." That two day delay serves the same purpose as the woman whom Jesus healed in Mark 5. While Jesus waits, the beloved family member dies. And the shocking thing about this is that John 11 explicitly states that Jesus' delay is a result of His love for the family. Did you catch that in the verses I just read? "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. *So*, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was." Do you see that? He allowed Lazarus to die rather than going immediately to heal him, and He did this out of love for them.

A few verses later He says to the disciples, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe" (John 11:14-15). You see, Jesus had a bigger plan in these situations. He wanted to perform the miracle of raising someone from the dead rather than the miracle of healing a sick person. And so, out of love, He waited. He allowed Himself to be interrupted. He let there be a delay so that the test of faith would be all the more piercing.

And this leads to another similarity between these passages, because Martha and Mary faced a test of faith just like Jairus did. And Martha's response seems to be similar to Jairus's response. When Jesus finally did come, Martha said to Him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you" (John 11:21-22). There was a trust there that Jesus could not only heal the sick, but He could raise the dead.

And in both of these events, the raising of the dead is a foreshadowing of Jesus' own resurrection, which is the assurance we have of our own resurrection. Jesus conquered death, and therefore all those who belong to Him will likewise not be bound by death. In John 11 Jesus says to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" (John 11:25-27).

You might think that these stories don't apply to us because we haven't seen any of our loved ones rise from the dead. But we have to realize that spiritual resurrection is even more glorious and more miraculous than physical resurrection that is only temporary. Jesus performed these amazing miracles to show us that He has authority over death. And the point is, as He explained to Martha, that those who believe in Him, though we will die, we will live eternally. That's our hope, brothers and sisters. Our hope is not in a temporary resurrection here on this earth. Lazarus and Jairus's daughter both died again eventually. But our hope is in what these miracles point to, which is Jesus' resurrection which is the assurance of our own resurrection. If you are believing in Jesus Christ, then you will live eternally with Him in heaven. That's our hope. Emily Robinson has died, and yet she lives. She is with Jesus now, enjoying His presence, never to be sick again, never to be sad. For us, the disappointments and heartaches and losses that we will experience in this life are like the delay that happened in each of these stories. Out of love, Jesus allowed the beloved family members to die, in order that He might show His power and draw people into a saving relationship with Him.

Let's come back to the story in Mark 5 now and see what happened after Jesus' statement that the girl was not dead but sleeping. Verse 40 says that they laughed at him. They knew the girl was dead, and they had no faith in Jesus' ability to do anything about it. So they made fun of Jesus. They ridiculed Him. They laughed at Him.

What Jesus does next reminds us of His purpose for the parables. There were the insiders and the outsiders. For those who

were hardened toward Jesus, they were kept on the outside. Jesus did not explain the parables to them. Similarly in this situation, those who rejected Jesus' authority, those who scoffed at Him and laughed at Him, they were not permitted to see His miraculous power. Jesus "put them all outside," it says in verse 40. The only ones who got to go in were the father and mother and "those with him," meaning the three disciples He brought to the house, Peter, James and John.

In verse 41 we see the tender compassion and the personal touch of Jesus. He takes the girl by the hand. Again and again, we see Jesus making personal contact with needy people. In Mark 1:31 Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, and it says, "he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them." And just several verses later Jesus cleansed a leper, and it says, "moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched [the leper]." Jesus was not aloof. He was not distant. He was up close and personal. He was hands-on. He showed His love and compassion for people by reaching out and touching them, holding their hands.

For this girl He took her hand and then spoke these tender words, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." Mark is the only Gospel writer who gives us the Aramaic here. The New Testament was written in Greek, but Jesus actually spoke in Aramaic. This is another indication of the eyewitness account that Peter must have relayed to Mark. Peter was there in the house and watched this happen right before his eyes. And he was able to describe the scene with such detail. And Mark, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, records here the actual Aramaic words that Jesus spoke in that miraculous moment.

Immediately the girl got up and began walking around. It was an instant and complete healing. The girl had been dead. Now she is perfectly well. This is such an amazing thing about Jesus' miracles. When He healed Peter's mother-in-law, she was instantly and completely well. She didn't need time to recover. She didn't need any rehabilitation. She got up and began to serve them. Similarly with this 12 year old girl. She didn't need several days to rest and recover. She didn't need to be slowly nursed back to health. She had been dead, and now she is walking around.

There's another interesting connection here between the story of Jairus's daughter and the story of the woman who was healed. Back in verse 25 it says that the woman had suffered from her illness for 12 years, and now we learn that the girl is 12 years old. These stories are woven together in such an amazing way. And even with all the differences between the two situations, there are striking similarities. A 12 year old sickness healed. And a 12 year old daughter raised to life.

Those who watched Jesus raise this girl from the dead were amazed, of course. But then Jesus charges them not to tell anyone. We've seen this before. Jesus has demanded silence when it comes to claims about His identity or spreading the news about certain miracles He has done. Earlier in this chapter, interestingly, the opposite occurs. When Jesus was on the other side of the lake, on His first visit to the region of the Decapolis, He told the man to go home to his friends and tell them how much the Lord had done for him. And the man did just that. So it seems that part of this call to silence has to do with practical matters having to do with the crowds that flocked around Jesus. In the Decapolis, Jesus was getting kicked out of the region. There was no mob issue there. The people were not flocking around Him. They were telling Him to leave. But now that He's back in a familiar area where great crowds are pressing in on Him, He has a desire to limit that. And in this situation, He may be simply strategizing a way to get out of Jairus's house. The people are going to find out what has happened sooner or later when the girl comes out alive. So part of this has to do with the mobs of people who are interested only in Jesus' miraculous powers.

Another factor, though, is the timing of things. Jesus has not yet gone to the cross, and therefore the reports about Him—about His identity, about His miracles—cannot yet be put in their appropriate context. And so His desire is to limit the talk and speculation until after His resurrection. When Jesus gives these commands about keeping silent, He doesn't give a reason for it. But when He speaks to Peter, James and John after the transfiguration, He does say something about the timing. Mark 9:9 says, "And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead." I think this relates to the other places where Jesus commands silence as well. He wants the discussion about these things to be delayed until after His resurrection, because that's when it will make sense. So for practical reasons and because of the timing of His ministry, Jesus strictly charged the mother and father and Peter, James and John that no one should know about Him raising the girl from the dead.

The last statement emphasizes Jesus' compassion again. He told them to give the girl something to eat. Jesus was attentive to these kinds of needs.

This text confronts us with a test of faith. When we face various trials in life, are we going to be afraid or believe? Will it be fear or faith that dominates our thoughts? Take comfort, friends, in the fact that Jesus is in control of the situation. Even if we don't understand what He is doing in the moment, this passage (and the whole Bible) gives us every reason to trust that He knows

what He is doing. And even when His plans cause us great pain, it is for our eternal good. Be strengthened by that, brothers and sisters. “Do not fear, only believe.”