

“Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet and implored him earnestly, saying, ‘My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.’ And he went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him.”

“There came from the ruler’s house some who said, ‘Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?’ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, ‘Do not fear, only believe.’” (Mark 5:22-24, 35–36, ESV)

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

A noted newspaper columnist, when writing his final column, stated that after having read more than 90,000 letters from his readers, he was convinced that fear is public enemy number one. The great and the lowly, the rich and the poor, the cultured and the uneducated: it made no difference. Through every level of society ran, like a poisoned stream, the paralysing disease of fear.

Are you afraid? Are you afraid of tomorrow and what lies ahead? Are you afraid of illness, afraid of death, afraid of war? Are you afraid of loneliness or old age? Are you afraid of God, afraid of His wrath, afraid there is no forgiveness for you? There are many things that can make us afraid. But God does not want His children to be afraid, and in the strength of His love and mercy we have no need to fear. Jesus says to us: **“Do not fear, only believe.”** We can and should take these words to heart, for there is no need for fear. Our Saviour is with us. He can help and save us. Even in the times of our worst fears, He will be with us and help us so that we might know that with the Lord, there is no need for fear in anything.

The things people fear are so numerous that we could spend all the time in this sermon simply listing them. People fear being sick, especially with diseases like cancer. We fear crime and natural disasters. Then there are all those ‘phobias’, such as claustrophobia, the fear of being in an enclosed area; acrophobia, the fear of high places; pyrophobia, the fear of fire; thanatophobia, the fear of death. Some fears seem so silly to us, but are very real to those who suffer from them, such as erythrophobia, the fear of the colour red; gamophobia, the fear of marriage; and apeirophobia, the fear of infinity or eternity. Franklin D. Roosevelt said that the “only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” But as someone else pointed out, “that is exactly what I am afraid of”.

Fear can take control of our lives very easily. Some fears are irrational. They make no sense, such as being afraid to walk through a graveyard at night. But many times our fear is based upon some experience that makes us afraid. Being bitten by a dog might make you afraid of dogs. Being robbed will likely cause you to fear such events again. Recurring or chronic illness may enhance any fears you have of sickness and death. If you have been laid off in the past, you may be afraid of losing your job, and with the cost of things right now, that would be a real concern. When we look at so many of the things that happen all around us, we may think we live in a time of fear, and I haven’t even mentioned war or terrorism or global warming! To be honest, most of us are aware of these things, but not really overwhelmed by them. Yet fear can destroy our confidence and rob our hearts of hope. Fear can immobilize us and make it impossible for us to focus or think clearly. For some people, fear is so overwhelming that they cannot go about the simple, everyday tasks of life. Fear can cause such despair that we even give up on God, which is why the devil uses it as one of his weapons against us. How terrible a thing fear can be!

That is why the words of our text are so important—not just for Jairus, but for us, too: **“Do not fear, only believe.”** Those words could be attached to every promise in Scripture. Think of the many times we hear those words from our Saviour. In the midst of a storm on the sea of Galilee, the disciples are afraid and cry out, **“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”** (Mark 4:38, ESV) Jesus gets up, calms the wind and the waves. He then turns and asks the disciples, **“Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”** (Mark 4:40, ESV) We see the same thing another time on the sea, as Jesus comes in the midst of a storm, walking on the water. Seeing Him, the disciples are terrified, but Jesus says: **“Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”** (Matthew 14:27, ESV) In preparing His disciples for the ministry that lies before them, even in the face of persecution, Jesus says: **“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”** (Matthew 10:28, ESV) Do not be afraid. Fear not. Have no fear. Over and over we hear those words from our Lord. His saints have always heard that from the mouth of God. Do not be afraid, no evil shall befall you. Do not be afraid, your sins are forgiven. Do not be afraid, for your Father knows your needs. One of the passages from Isaiah that I often read in the hospital or when

I am sharing Holy Communion with our shut-ins assures us: ***“But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”*** (Isaiah 43:1–3, ESV)

How blessed we are in the midst of the things that cause us fear to know that the Lord and Creator of all is with us and that He can overcome even the darkest moments of our life. That is exactly what we see in our text today. Jairus, one of the synagogue officials, much like one of our elders or PPC members, comes to Jesus filled with fear. His daughter is very sick and he is afraid she is going to die. His only hope is that Jesus will come and heal her before that fatal moment. In His love and mercy Jesus responds to this cry for help and goes with Jairus. As they journey, the crowds still flock around Jesus, including one woman who had suffered for twelve years with what is simply called a discharge of blood. She believes that if she just touches the hem of Jesus’ cloak, she can be healed. She does it and is healed, but Jesus also stops to talk with her. That is a wonderful miracle in itself, but you can well imagine that every delay, every moment of struggle with the crowd is only increasing the fear that fills Jairus’ heart. Then comes the totally devastating moment as some messengers arrive to tell Jairus that his worst fears have been realized: It’s too late. ***“Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?”***

As Jairus struggles with his grief, Jesus speaks up to assure him. ***“Do not fear, only believe.”*** Believe, Jesus? Believe what? That everything is going to be all right? Don’t you understand, Jesus, that everything is not all right? My precious daughter has just died. How can you tell me not to be afraid? How can you say to me only believe? What difference does it make?

It makes all the difference when it is the Lord of Life who tells us there is no need to fear. It makes all the difference because He can do all things, and make all things right. He can conquer any problem, He can remove all obstacles. He would soon show Jairus how unnecessary fear is when we have the Lord with us. Jesus did not tell Jairus not to worry because He would bring the girl back to life. He did not tell Jairus that He was about to perform a great miracle. He simply said: ***“Do not fear, only believe.”*** Trust Me, Jairus. I am with you. There is no need for fear. But we all know how hard that would be.

When they arrive at Jairus’ home, there is a great commotion with people weeping and wailing. But Jesus says ***“Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.”*** (Mark 5:39, ESV) The crowds laughed, but Jesus puts them all outside the house. Then, taking the girl by the hand, Jesus says to her, ***“Talitha cumi,” which means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.”*** (Mark 5:41, ESV)

There is an old hymn which says: *‘Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus; Just to take Him at His Word. Just to rest upon His promise, Just to know, “Thus saith the Lord”* (Louisa M. R. Stead, 1882) Even something as terrible as death cannot defeat the greater power of the Lord of Life. Fear must give way before Him, and joy must take its place. There is no need for fear, when the Lord is our strength and help. This is not a promise that nothing will ever trouble us or cause us pain. We may argue with God, because He didn’t spare our loved one or restore them to life. We still get sick and we die. Sin still carries out its miserable consequences in our world and in our lives. If there were no forgiveness for our sin, then we truly would have a reason for fear. Thankfully, we hear the apostle John assure us: ***“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.”*** (1 John 4:18, ESV) That perfect love is the love that our God has for us. It is the love so great that the eternal Son leaves the peace, glory and beauty of heaven to live with us and for us. It is the love that leads our Saviour and Shepherd to lay down His life on the cross for sinners like you and me. It is a love greater than death, as the same crucified Jesus rises from the dead, to be the life and salvation of all who will believe in Him. His death brings us forgiveness. His life is our life. No matter what this world may bring and no matter how much the devil works to lead us into fear and despair, we need not fear. As the psalmist says: ***“The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”*** (Psalm 118:6, ESV)

We live in a world of fear and uncertainty. Much of that fear comes from our not knowing what tomorrow may bring, or from the realization that we are powerless to change many of the things that happen to us in this world. That was the fear that surrounded Jairus. Will my daughter die? What will I do without her? Can even Jesus help? Maybe the hymn writer says it best: ***“Fear not! I am with you, O be not dismayed, For I am your God and will still give you aid; I’ll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand, Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.”*** (LSB 728, st. 2)

Are you afraid? Put your life, in good times and in bad in the hands of our loving God. Believe. Believe Him when He says, ***“behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*** (Matthew 28:20, ESV) Believe that you can, as Peter says by the Holy Spirit: ***“[cast] all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”*** (1 Peter 5:7, ESV) Amen.