

Sine Domino Frustra Laboramus

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 28 2009

Glendale Lutheran Church

BETWEEN FEAR AND FAITH: HOPELESSNESS

Mark 5:21-24a, 35-43

I.

This is the second of a three-week sermon series entitled “Between Fear and Faith.”

FEAR, I began last Sunday, is sometimes at one end of life’s spectrum; FAITH is at the other. Hopefully, somewhere in the middle, they will embrace; sometimes they inevitably collide. Fear is neither to be denied nor avoided, nor is it childish; it is a very strong emotion of our lives. Whatever it is that brings us fear, lay it at the feet of Jesus, and wait patiently for his loving response. That’s the substance of FAITH – trusting God’s promised to be with us and to shower us with infinite grace and mercy, in God’s own way and at God’s own time.

Finally, I said, if only it were that easy. Between fear and faith is an assortment of cause-and-effect situations. Last week, with the stilling of the storm on the lake, there was chaos, simply being out of control and without warning. Today there is hopelessness.

II.

Jairus was risking his status among the priests and Pharisees by going to Jesus. After all, he was one of the ‘movers and shakers’ in the synagogue. But he was desperate – his little girl was dying, and Jesus was his only hope. In a significant way, his life was in chaos; his daughter’s ability to live was totally out of control. Probably without much warning, his daughter’s life was slipping away. On his knees he begged, pleaded, urgently, with the passion of a father’s heart, for Jesus to “put his hands upon her.” Whatever Jesus’ agenda had been, it was changed then and there; the text says, simply, that “Jesus went with him.”

On the way, Jesus stopped to heal a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years. Her faith, arguably, was even more dramatic than Jairus, but both were borne out of fear. She believed that if only she touched the cloak of Jesus' outer garment, she would be healed. Yea, and indeed, she would be healed, and strength went out of Jesus. By the time this entourage approached the home of Jairus, the little girl had already died; professional mourners who were skilled in the art of wailing were already at the scene (a custom in those days, complete with flutists, adds Matthew). What led to this particular theme, "Hopelessness," was the response of some men who came out to tell Jairus the sad, sad news. (I have been in many a hospital waiting room, dreading the entrance of the physician or nurse who bore that same horrible news regarding a loved one – it's not pretty. I have also been in the shoes of someone who is the bearer of that news – I remember as if were yesterday not two months after we arrived in Morgan City, LA, a member whom I didn't even yet know, an offshore diver named Dan, was killed, and the sheriff and I went to the home to tell his wife and two small children. I still remember her seeing us coming up the driveway – she was outside in a flower garden – and she knew why we were there.

Then these men said to Jairus, "Why bother the Teacher any more?" Hopelessness surely entered the heart of Jairus and his wife, just as surely as it entered Dan's young wife and her family.

### III.

Permit me to paint an all-too common scenario, one with which many of you may eerily identify. Upon examination, a suspicious lump has been discovered in a person's body. Hope prevails – it might be benign. The first hope is dashed, but there is always surgery and/or chemotherapy and radiation, and hope is rekindled. After weeks or months, that was not successful. The news comes that the malignancy has spread too far and too fast. All of the prayers thus far offered to God have been for healing, prayers offered with hope, sometimes guarded but hope nevertheless, to no avail. That is the picture of Hopelessness between Fear and Faith; that is, initially, the fear was loss of life; the

hopelessness is the reality that this person has only a limited time of life left on this earth. At the point the words of the men become even more haunting, “Why bother the Teacher any more? Why continue to pray when all of the other prayers went, seemingly, to deaf divine ears?”

Ponder with me, Is it at all true that we beg and plead for God’s merciful touch of healing when there is still hope? And when that hope is gone, then to wonder, “Why bother anymore?” What prayers are left to be said? Pushed farther, what use is Jesus after the fact, they reasoned; in this text’s scenario, the fact of death?

I wonder if Jairus thought that. I wonder if he wondered, If only Jesus had not stopped to heal the bleeding woman? At some times in life, depending upon the immediacy of our circumstances, we think that we are the only people hurting, the only people in need of Jesus’ immediate attention and affection? I certainly plead guilty to that, if not in matters of life and death, then certainly throughout those contexts about which I have a paralyzing fear not quite to the edge of hopelessness.

#### IV.

Ignoring what these men said, Jesus told Jairus, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” That’s it! That’s fear and faith, bound together in five succinct words of our Lord. Then he said, “Why all this commotion and wailing: the child is not dead but asleep.” Their response? The people laughed at him; they had the audacity, the arrogance, to mock in disbelief the promise of our Lord. Not so the parents of their twelve-year-old baby.

“Talitha koum!” Talitha – that’s the name of Walt and Thanne Wangerin’s daughter. In Aramaic, reads the lesson, it is Jesus saying, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!” Marvel of marvels, miracle of miracles, mercy of mercies, the little girl stood up and, if to prove that this was no wild fantasy, this poignant detail – she walked around the room. She was raised from the dead! Physically, bodily, spiritually, literally – and Jesus told them to give her something to eat.

I’ve never seen that in my lifetime on this earth; albeit, there are too many verifiable stories to deny or dismiss of individuals who have been so near death that their loved

ones had given up hope to the grim resignation that it is only a matter of time, only to be shaken from their comatose shells and given life anew, and even personal testimonies of seeing and experiencing heaven.

Between Fear and Faith there may, indeed, be Hopelessness, but within the context of Faith, there is always HOPE. For us Christians, hope never wanes or dissipates or fades amidst profound grief.

Back to the scenario about the person with terminal cancer. After that person's life is taken captive by death, that's not where our prayers end, but begin, and HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL! They are prayers of thanksgiving, mingled with huge sadness of course, but thanksgiving nevertheless, for we live in the promise of the resurrection of all flesh. We live in the glory of God's Word that the faithful shall live forevermore. We live in the hope of heaven.

I've always been a bit perplexed that these same disciples who had witnessed the raising of this twelve-year-old as well as the much older Lazarus on another occasion still wondered in disbelief when this same Teacher himself rose from the dead on Easter morning. Didn't they recall these miracles of life born anew from the ashes of death? But, then, Scripture says, per Pentecost's Spirit, they did, indeed, "get it" and "spread it" throughout the world. Lord of lords, King of kings: the cross of death could no more hold the Christ captive than the threat and curse of Satan. The Easter message is and has always been the heartbeat and finality and fruition of our faith and witness; it needs proclaimed in the heat of late June as well as early spring. The unfathomable story of resurrection is real, if not reasonable; and it shall be for the rest of our lives the great, glorious, grace-filled bridge between Fear and Faith. For Christ has entered our human story, at its very death-filled depths, and given us hope forevermore.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.