

A man was not feeling very well, so he decided to go to a doctor. While he was waiting in the doctor’s reception room, a nun came out of the doctor’s office. She looked ashen, drawn and haggard. The man walked into the doctor’s office and said to the doctor: “I just saw a nun leaving who looked absolutely terrible. I don’t think I have ever seen a woman look worse.” The doctor said: “I just told her that she is pregnant.” The man exclaimed: “Oh my, is she?” The doctor responded: “No, but it sure cured her hiccups.”

The story of Jairus and his daughter is not the story of an ordinary cure. It demonstrates great faith on the part of the religious leader, Jairus who was a well-to-do member of the religious establishment—a group often opposed to Jesus. But the “establishment” could not offer a solution to his problem. Jesus could, in spite of their opposition and their laughter. Did you catch that shocking detail in the reading? Jesus says, *“The child is not dead, but asleep,”* and in the following verse we read, *“But they laughed at him.”* The Son of God, the Savior of the World, is the butt of a joke. I don’t think this is what it means to laugh in the face of death. Jairus was desperate. His child was dying, and as those of you who are parents know all too well, the parent of a sick or dying child will do almost anything to save the child. Jairus was so desperate he knelt at the feet of the one person who could help him—Jesus.

Some people believe that God should rid the world of sickness and death. That idea does have some merit. Yet it quickly becomes problematic. If God protected everyone who believed in him, then everyone would believe not out of love, but out of a calculated self-interest. People would believe only so God would take care of them and their families. Unfortunately, we would also have no freedom to believe or disbelieve. We would be enslaved because of our fear of death, and that is not what God had in mind.

Jairus had to lower himself when he came seeking healing for his daughter. He had to move beyond the rules and expectations of the religious elite in order to be delivered from its assumptions and illusions. He had to move beyond the praises and promises and good intentions of the religious class and go with what his heart was telling him to do. He used his social status and power in order to approach Jesus, but emptied himself of both status and power. He came to Jesus in humility and earnest faith.

Notice that when Jesus brought the little girl back to life, he didn’t fill her empty stomach. That’s because God wants us to be a part of what he is doing. He brought the little girl back to life, but he wanted the people around her to give her something to eat and watch her enjoy every bite. Then there would be no doubt that Jesus truly was omnipotent, all powerful, and great in mercy.

Jesus came to raise the dead—both the physically dead and the spiritually dead. When Jesus is on a mission, nothing can stop him. He did not allow the professional mourners and their laughter to stop him from showing God’s healing power. The laughing mourners represent people who refuse to accept Christ and his gifts.

Only a select few were allowed to see Jesus bring the girl back to life. Jesus wanted the news kept secret. He knew that most of the people could not comprehend what had happened. He knew that the miracle of the dead being brought back to life could only be understood by those who believe in One who himself would be raised from the dead.

Most of you have heard of the old saying that “desperate times call for desperate measures.” Desperate times also call for a desperate faith—a faith we see in this narrative. Faith in itself is meaningless, but faith in an all-powerful God means everything. Jesus enters our lives in our *hopeless* moments and brings us *hope*. He comes with his healing power when no healing is possible. Sometimes he works the miracle of physical healing, and sometimes he works the miracle of spiritual healing. He may not always come when we want him to come, and he might not always answer our prayers the way we want him to answer, but we must always be faithful and know that he wants to help us. Faith is the belief that God will do what is right for each of us at the right time.

Sometimes God does what is right by not doing anything right away or by doing something other than what we want him to do. Jairus had to wait for his daughter’s healing while Jesus healed the woman with a hemorrhage, and as a result, his daughter’s situation went from bad to worse. When we have to wait, our faith can be shaken. We wonder if God loves us at all. We might wonder if we are worthy of God’s love. We might wonder if we are praying to God in the right way. Jairus might have had some of these same thoughts, and if he did, it would certainly be understandable. Jesus did not give up on Jairus; and Jairus did not give up on Jesus. Even when God does not answer our prayers in the way we want him to, we can have faith that God loves us and he answers our prayers in the way that is best for us and in line with his will for our lives. *Regardless of our circumstances, God always urges us to have faith, and not be afraid.*

Nothing is too small or too big for God. Jesus gave out of his abundant power to heal, and we have been called to give out of our abundance and carry out God’s work in our world. He calls us to love one another as he loves us—including showing compassion to those who are sick and suffering. Jesus met people where they were and loved them into life. He is love in action. Love is costly. It takes something out of us, just like each and every healing took something out of Jesus. Sometimes God interrupts our lives. When he does, we can either adapt or stubbornly stick our own plans.

This passage in Mark shows the compassionate face of Jesus. He suffered with those who suffered, and he still serves the suffering today. He served those who reached out to him in vulnerable ways, and he still serves them today. He showed compassion to the suffering and the grieving, and he still shows compassion to them today. The example of this compassionate, suffering servant gives us hope for today and hope for the next life as well.

Something else that we learn from this story is that with God all things are possible. When things are impossible from an earthly point of view, they are possible from God’s point of view. When things are looking bleak, you can take comfort in the knowledge that God will be there to comfort you and give you strength as you face the challenges of each day. When we receive God’s grace, we end up taking Jesus seriously. And when we do, Jesus will change our tears into joy and our skepticism into amazement. Then we will find out what it means to be made whole.

Gary Smith shared this true story in the *Readers Digest* last fall: I had very little family time during my first four years as an Air Force chaplain at Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth, Texas. I was rarely home for dinner or evening time with my eight-year-old daughter, Amity. My next assignment was at the remote Gila Bend Air Force Auxiliary Field in Arizona. Lots of family time. I stood with Amity every night and admired the desert sunset. A new girl, about my daughter’s age, moved on base. Amity told her,

“You will like it here in the desert. My daddy and I watch the sunset every evening. When we lived in Texas they didn’t have sunsets.”

Sharing those sunsets with his daughter became a special memory for the chaplain and his daughter. His daughter may eventually learn from her daddy about a place where indeed there will be no more sunsets. At least, that is God’s promise given through the vision of John in Revelation 21 & 22: *“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away...There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever”* (Rev. 21:3-4, 22:5).

Jairus, the leader of the synagogue, has received the news that his daughter was dead. It had to be heartbreaking because he had come to Jesus in the hope that Jesus could heal his daughter. Now he believes that all hope is lost. But Jesus says otherwise. He tells Jairus, *“Don’t be afraid, just believe.”* We have an immense fear of death, and most of us don’t like to think about it or talk about it. We spend great sums of money trying to avoid it. But Jesus frees us from that fear, showing us that he brings hope and peace and life.

Dr. George Carson, the pastor at First Presbyterian Church, Beaver Falls in the early 80’s, told a group of us ministry newbies, all of us green seminary graduates that our preaching responsibilities don’t stop at the church door. When we are called on to conduct a funeral service for an individual that has no connection to the church, or any connection to the faith whatsoever, we have a perfect opportunity to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the family and friends who gather for the funeral. Dr. Carson would say to folks gathered at the funeral home or the graveside, *“The only hope I can offer you is the hope that is found in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.”*

All of us need to hear those words today, and hear the words of Jesus that he spoke to Jairus after Jairus was told that his daughter was dead.

*“Jesus told him, ‘Don’t be afraid; just believe.’”*

*Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present [you] faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,*

*To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.  
Amen.*