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The Christian Finds Comfort in Christ

Of all the sadness Christians experience in life, the sadness that comes with the death of someone we love is surely the deepest, and the sadness is especially acute when death is sudden and unexpected. Even at times such as this, Christians find comfort and calm in the words and works of Jesus. This week's Gospel reveals a Savior who cares about our grief; he walks and talks with us in sad times. In this last focus on the characteristics of Christians, we DEFINE CHRISTIAN as someone who finds comfort in Christ.

Sermon

Mark 5:21-24a, 35-43

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." So Jesus went with him.

Some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?"

Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "*Talitha koum!*" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this and told them to give her something to eat.

Introduction – There are some things in life that make us feel almost helpless; there doesn't seem to be much we can do. Sitting in a dentist's chair to have a tooth pulled is probably one of them. Trying to calm down a baby with a tummy ache is another. Going to a funeral is another. There's not much we can do, not much we can even say. We can send flowers or give a give a hug. Thoughtful but won't dry any tears. We can say, "I'm so sorry" or even quote a Bible passage, but it doesn't take the sadness away. I don't mean to demean or discourage any of those things; we do them and say them from a good heart. But they don't solve the sorrow that permeates a funeral.

That sense of helplessness is more intense when we're close to the person who died. There wasn't anything we could do. We couldn't stop the spread of cancer; we couldn't slow down the aging process. The accident happened; we can't go back and change it. We can get over toothache and we can quiet a crying baby, but nothing really takes away the grief that comes with death. Time heals all wounds, people say, but I'm not so sure that's true. Queen Elizabeth said, "Grief is the price we pay for love."

She was his precious little girl, just 12 years old. Dads have a special kind of love for their daughters. I don't know if she was beautiful, but she was beautiful to him. She was his darling and his treasure. He dreamed about her wedding day and her handsome husband and her tidy home and the grandbabies she'd give him. But she was sick, really, really sick, close to death and then she died. There was nothing he could do, nothing anybody could do. He walked toward home with a broken heart. Jesus was walking with him and Jesus wasn't helpless; there was something Jesus could do. What Jesus did is what we heard about in today's Gospel.

The writers of the four Gospels tell us about three resurrection miracles. Jesus raised Lazarus from his tomb, he raised a young man at Nain from his coffin, and he raised Jairus' little daughter from her bed. There were no others and there haven't been any others since. When we encounter death there are no promises of instant resurrections. But having Jesus at funerals makes a difference when grief is raw and sadness fills the air.

When Jesus Comes to a Funeral...

He shows his compassion for grief

He shares his perspective on death

The father was Jairus and he was an important man in Capernaum; Mark tells us he was one of the synagogue leaders, like on the church council. He wasn't looking for Jesus to bring his daughter back to life. For one thing, she wasn't dead when he came and that would have been a ridiculous request anyway. We don't know if Jairus actually was a follower of Jesus, but he had been watching Jesus and had witnessed the power Jesus had over sickness. He was desperate and so he fought through the crowds looking for Jesus. He wasn't ashamed to beg. **When he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with Jesus, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."** Jesus could hear the panic in his prayer and he didn't hesitate. **Jesus went with him.**

But the going was slow; the crowds were pressing to get close to Jesus and he could hardly move. He actually had to stop and deal with a woman who had touched him to be healed. Jairus must have been frantic. "Come on, Jesus; hurry up Jesus." And then the horrible news. Some people came from Jairus' home: **"Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?"** Jairus couldn't speak; it was like his life was draining out of him. Jesus heard the report but he kept walking. He understood the broken heart. He looked at Jairus and probably smiled. **Don't be afraid; just believe.** As if to say, "You trusted me enough to come and find me. Don't stop trusting me now."

Jesus didn't want this to turn into a circus. Death is private; it's a time for family. He knew Jairus didn't want people watching through the windows. Jesus told the crowds to back off. **He didn't let anyone follow him except Peter, James, and John.** When he arrived, he invited mom and dad into the child's room. Everything was quiet and that's how Jesus knew it should be. Through it all, from beginning to end, Jesus showed his compassion when he came to this funeral.

Jesus knows that death isn't natural. When God created Adam and Eve, there was no such thing as death, no such thing as sickness or old age or accidents or foolish mistakes. There were no diseases to catch. There was nothing to cry about, nothing to grieve about. Death happened and grief happened when sin happened. **Death came to all people**, the Bible says, **because all have sinned.** When Abel died—through no fault of his own, I might add—Adam and Eve were heartbroken. And people have grieved over death ever since. Jesus wept at Lazarus' funeral not because he was heartbroken; he knew what was about to happen. Jesus wept because

Mary and Martha were heartbroken. Jesus felt compassion for them because of the sadness and misery that death brings with it.

Jesus doesn't put us down for crying. He doesn't shame us for our sorrow. He doesn't think less of us when we grieve over the loss of someone we love. He may not bring a hot dish or stand in line to greet us or give us a warm hug, but we can be sure he understands. He says he does. King David knew from his own experience **that the LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.** He wrote in another psalm, **Lord, you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul.** When Jesus comes to a funeral, to every Christian funeral, he shows his compassion for grief.

2. The professional mourners showed up before Jairus even got home. That was the custom and the more prominent the family the more mourners showed up. The house must have been full of noise. **Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep."**

But they laughed at him. Well, of course, they did. Who would compare death with sleep? People don't snore when they're dead; they don't toss and turn. We don't say "Good Morning" when they come into the kitchen for their morning coffee. Breath is gone; the heart stops; we say goodbye.

When Jesus chased those mourners from that little girl's room, he was sharing a totally new perspective about death. Death isn't a snooze or a slumber for sure; death is death. But like sleep, death isn't permanent. Death doesn't last. At the moment of death our souls immediately ascend to the throne room of God and we're alive. At the end of time our bodies will rise from where they were buried and they'll be alive. And Jesus makes it happen. Sin is what causes death, but Jesus died to get rid of sin. With sin gone, death doesn't last. Jesus proved death doesn't last because it didn't last for him. Jesus was the first and we're next in line and so are the ones we love. That doesn't take away the tears; goodbye for a while is still goodbye. But in Christ there is a hello in the future and it will be a happy hello and an eternal hello. That perspective makes death different for us. Paul wrote, **We do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.** Our tears many still flow but we can smile through the tears.

After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this and told them to give her something to eat. Jesus did what he did here three times in his ministry: at Bethany, at Nain, and here. Jesus hasn't promised us miracles like this. Everyone we love will die and so will we. The Bible says that **The last enemy to be destroyed is death.** But there is something here for us. Jesus has the power to restore life with a thought or a whisper or the snap of his fingers. At the end of time, he will restore life with the sound of a trumpet. But he didn't do that here. He sat down on the little girl's bed and took her little hand in his. He looked into her eyes and spoke words she could understand: **Talitha koum!** When she opened her eyes and walked around Jesus told them to **give her something to eat.** Jesus cared about this little girl. Actually, the only one who loved her more than her father was Jesus.

Jesus loves us, too, and Jesus loves the people we love. There's no mass production with Jesus; no assembly line, no crowd control. The Lord says, **Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.** Jesus' little lambs sing, "Loves me every day the same; even calls me by my name." And we can sing it, too, whenever Jesus comes to a funeral. Because Christians find comfort in Christ. Amen.