

## Childrens

Good morning, boys and girls. Today we are going to work with something that all of you use a lot at home. (Bring out the toaster and plug it in so that the pieces of bread can be toasting while you are talking.) How many of you do this once in a while for breakfast? A lot of you. Do you know what is going to happen to those two pieces of bread that I put into this thing? (Let them answer.) That's right, they are going to be toasted. Somehow or another, that toaster is going to give off enough power to make regular bread into toast. It doesn't just happen. It takes power from the toaster to make the bread into toast. I don't know if the toaster knows it can give that kind of power, but I know someone who did know whenever he gave away some of his power to another person.

That's right. Jesus was the person who was kind of like my toaster. I remember a story about a woman who had been sick for a long time and was getting weaker and weaker. One day, when she heard that Jesus was coming near to where she lived, she made herself walk to where there was already a crowd. Then when she saw Jesus, she said a quick prayer and touched his clothes. Just like that, Jesus turned around and asked who it was who had touched him and made himself well. Jesus knew that his power had gone out of his body and into the body of someone else. He was glad, but he wanted to know who it was that believed so much in him that he would say a prayer and touch his clothes, knowing that he would be healed.

Now the woman was frightened because she could feel that she was well for the first time in a long time. This is what she thought would happen, but when it did, she was amazed at the power of Jesus. He had made her well. She came over to where he stood and fell down on her knees to tell him the whole story. Jesus saw what a wonderful thing had happened, and he put his hand on her head and told her to go on home and not to worry, for it was her believing that he could heal her that made her well.

Maybe the next time you see a toaster work and watch it use the power to make toast, you will think about the time that Jesus healed a woman when she touched his clothes. He, too, had great power, even the power to make sick people well, and he used it to make people feel closer to God. Amen.

I

Newspaper Columnist Mike Royko tells about a practical joke that was played on a man in Madison, Wisconsin. This man and three friends were enjoying a fishing trip at a secluded lake. They fished all day, had a few beers and played some poker. Every night they went to bed at about 10:00 and got up before dawn for more fishing. One of them, who we'll call Joe, was the first to his bunk one night. He was exhausted, and was snoring within a few minutes.

Then one of his friends had an idea. He got Joe's wristwatch off the dresser and changed the time to 4:45. Then they all got together and changed their own watches, including the alarm clock, to 4:45. The alarm was set to go off at five o'clock, or just fifteen minutes later. Then the conspirators turned off all the lights, took off their clothes, and went to bed.

Fifteen minutes later when the alarm clock went off, they all got up, shuffled around, and made the grumbly, miserable sounds that people usually make early in the morning. One of them put toast and coffee on. The only truly miserable one, of course, was Joe. He sat on the edge of his bed, shaking his head and moaning. He kept looking at his watch and complaining that he felt like he hadn't gotten any sleep.

"I must be getting old," he said as they dropped anchor and began fishing. Every few minutes, he'd glance at his watch and look at the eastern horizon and say: "What time have you got?"

"Five-forty," somebody would say.

"Boy, it's dark," Joe would say. And a little later: "What time have you got?"

"Six," someone would answer.

Then Joe began to get concerned. "Shouldn't it be getting light soon?" By the time his watch said 6:40, he had stopped fishing. He just sat there staring into the darkness. Finally, his voice cracking in genuine terror, he cried: "I'm telling you, something is wrong! It's not getting light today! It's not getting light!"

"It's the end of the world," his buddies hooted. "Doesn't matter," one of them said, "because the fish aren't biting anyway." That's when Joe caught on. And he took it rather well, although they did have to wrestle an oar out of his hands. (1)

It's a delightful story, but Joe's words are haunting if you think about them for a few moments. "Something is wrong! It's not getting light! It's not getting light!"

### **I. It Is Not Getting Light.**

There are times in all our lives when we will feel that soul-crushing terror. "Something's wrong. It's not getting light!" St. John at the Cross referred to it as the dark night of the soul. Jairus knew about that kind of darkness. He had come to

see Jesus. He pleaded with the Master, "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." Now is there a more helpless, a more desperate feeling than having one of your children become critically ill? Is there ever a time darker than that?

Albert Miller is a Lutheran pastor in Houston, Texas. His son, Dale, had been killed in an automobile accident. Now one day a colleague asked Albert about his family. Albert told him that they were fine, and he also told him that he had lost a son named Dale. "How old?" asked the colleague. "21," Albert replied. "How?" asked the colleague. "A careless truck driver," Albert replied. "When?" asked the colleague. "1972," Albert said softly. The colleague whispered but one more word "one word that showed the depth of his understanding. The word was, "Yesterday." More than twenty years before, but still only yesterday.

The death of a child is the most devastating event that can occur in a family. It can tear a family apart. One psychiatrist noted that, even though no adequate studies have been done, some authorities estimate that as many as 75 percent of couples may separate after the death of a child, especially if they do not seek competent help. (2)

Jairus was a man in pain: his little girl was dying. We know Jairus was desperate because he came to Jesus for help. You see, Jairus was a ruler of the synagogue, and his colleagues would not look well on the fact that Jairus had invited Jesus into his home to heal his little girl. They would be shocked. He would be humiliated. What credentials did Jesus have? Where had he gone to school? By what authority did he heal? Jairus couldn't say. But none of that mattered at this point. The only thing that mattered was the health and well-being of his daughter.

Some of you can relate personally to Jairus' despair, can't you? There is a Buddhist legend from centuries ago in which a woman in grief over her dead child went to Buddha to plead that the child might be returned to life. Buddha sent her on an unusual mission, promising to minister to her need when she returned. She was to go and collect a bowl of peppers from all the families who had not experienced grief such as hers. Mystified, but desperate for help, she undertook the assignment. When evening came, the woman returned "her bowl was still empty but she was filled with understanding. No one is exempt. Everyone finds themselves in darkness sooner or later. And it is natural at such times to question whether the light will ever come again.

## **II. Turning to Jesus.**

Jairus was a desperate man. His daughter lay dying, and he had to do something. And what did he do? He turned to Jesus. He was truly a wise man.

In a recent poll, George Gallup found that more than half of the Americans who are experiencing grief turn to God, prayer, and Scripture reading for comfort. And of those who do, 94 percent say that it is highly effective. Where else do you turn in those hours when you're in darkness, and it doesn't look like the light will come? Let me tell

you about a man named Robert. Robert had everything. He was a successful developer, and he was the CEO of a 32 million dollar business in the Boston area. But suddenly the bottom fell out. His business collapsed in the early 1980s, and he was plunged into bankruptcy.

"I had a wonderful firm with fifty people," Robert says of his former company. His company had helped disadvantaged people obtain affordable housing, but federal funds became scarce and they went bankrupt.

But not only did his company go bankrupt, his personal life went bankrupt too. In a three-year period, at the same time he lost his business, Robert's father died, his father-in-law died, his wife became an alcoholic, and his eldest child was committed to a hospital for a year.

One day as Robert was driving home, he was so distraught that he could hardly drive his car. As he later recalled that day he said, "I got out of the car and got down on my knees and prayed for help." He had hit bottom and felt totally defeated. He says, "I prayed for help, not believing that anyone could help me. But when I got up, I knew something extraordinary had happened. For the first time there was a clarity, a lightness, a sense of peace."

Robert had not been to church for many years, but after that experience he began attending again. He began reading the Bible and found himself drawn to the Psalms. He found they had meaning for his life. When he went into the church the first time, he read Psalm 30: "As for me, I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved." That verse spoke to Robert very personally. "I realized," he says, "that I had suffered from the sin of overconfidence." His life changed from that moment on. (3) He had learned not to put his trust in himself, but in God.

When Jairus reached that same depth of despair he turned to the only source of help he knew of. He came to Jesus and led Him to his house. The crowd that was with Jesus overheard their conversation and began to follow as well.

But before they arrived at the house some servants came with bad news. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why trouble the teacher any further?" The night-black terror struck Jairus when he heard the news. But Jesus placed his hand gently on Jairus' shoulder and said, "Do not fear, only believe." When they arrived at Jairus' house they found people weeping and wailing uncontrollably over the death of the little girl. Jesus asked them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." With that statement the mourners began to laugh at Jesus. They began to mock him. Clearly they didn't believe in him. But Jesus was unmoved by their laughter. He went off alone with the girl and spoke words of life, "Little girl, get up!" Immediately the girl got up and began walking around. It was a miracle.

The people who had laughed and mocked Jesus just a few minutes before were amazed when they saw the girl moving about. They had never seen anything like this.

The dead do not come back to life! Then Jesus told them to give the girl something to eat ” signifying that everything was all right. Jesus gave Jairus and his family the gift of life restored. I wonder what kind of effect this miracle had on Jairus?

There is a man named John Ulrich who is a new person thanks to such a miracle. In 1976 Ulrich's son was taken to the hospital with no heartbeat and no brain waves. Co-workers had found him at a work site. No one knew what had happened. The doctors managed to restore the man's vital signs, but for three days he remained in a coma. On the fourth day he awoke but he was completely insane. His father was beside himself. He says, "I walked out of that room and I saw a sign for the chapel and thought I might as well try that." There in the hospital chapel he prayed. The next day he asked his wife to pray with him. That evening John Ulrich prayed all night, "My shirt was soaking with sweat," he remembers.

Ulrich promised God that he would give up his bad habits, and even his good job if only God would save his son. The next day he returned to his son's hospital room. His son was sitting up in bed calmly talking to his mother. Ulrich sat down and talked to his son for two hours. "He was perfect," Ulrich says.

Ulrich followed through with his promise.

May I sum this all up in a rather frivolous way ” but a way in which some of us may remember what I've said this morning? Whether you are a basketball fan or not, you are probably familiar with the name Larry Bird, the former basketball great of the Boston Celtics. During a retirement party for Larry Bird in Boston Garden, former Celtics Coach K.C. Jones told of diagramming a play on the sidelines, only to have Bird dismiss it, saying: "Get the ball to me and get everyone out of my way."

Jones responded: "I'm the coach, and I will call the plays." Then Jones turned to the other players and said: "Get the ball to Larry, and get out of his way." (5)

That is basically our message for today. When those times of terror come ” when it seems the light will never come and you have no where else to turn ” give the ball to Jesus and get out of the way. You will discover, as did Jairus, that Christ will not let you down.

---

1. LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER, Jan. 6, '94, p. A12.

2. Ari L. Goldman, THE SEARCH FOR GOD AT HARVARD (New York:

3. Times Books, 1991), pp. 49-50.

4. James W. Moore, WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS...READ THE INSTRUCTIONS (Nashville: Dimensions for Living, 1993), p. 24.

5. Mike Bryan, CHAPTER AND VERSE (New York: Random House, 1991), pp. 290-291.

6. LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER, March 10, 1993, p. C2.

Il Fr Desiano

We have seen large numbers reported to us for almost a year and a half—the total pandemic numbers, the numbers who have had the disease in the United States and, like a drum roll, the number of people who have died in America. We remember when the numbers went above 100,000 and everyone was so shocked. But now the numbers are over 600,000 just in the United States, and over 4,000,000 world-wide. As shocking as our numbers have been, we hear even larger proportions from places like Brazil. All of this can numb us to the very experience of death, so that people become statistics, and statistics are just facts that we recite. Of course, entertainment may be the biggest force numbing us to the reality of death because every night on television, and just about every other movie released, has people shooting other people, or some murder crime that CSI or a British detective is trying to solve. “Death is part of life,” the more philosophically-minded remind us. “We shouldn’t make more of it than it is.” Our readings from the Scripture directly attack these ideas of making little of death or becoming numb to the reality of death. Because every death betrays the promise of life, and every life reveals the fundamental promise God has put into our hearts. As the book of Ecclesiastes says, “God has put the timeless in our hearts,” and we haven’t faced who we are in God’s eyes until we realize how every life points beyond itself to a promised fullness.

Our first reading today from the Book of Wisdom simply tells us that God did not make us for death. God formed us to be imperishable. We do not realize this when we read statistics in a report or when we watch yet another murder on TV. We realize this when people dearest to us die—making us feel so badly that we wish we could have died in their place. Often when a young person dies the grief is overwhelming because the survivors can imagine how much more of life that young person could have had. But even when someone old dies tears will flow, and often they will flow even more because of the long relationship we have built with the deceased.

When Jesus raises the daughter of Jairus, which we hear as the climax of a very busy Gospel, people cannot believe it. The crowd makes fun of Jesus and his promise of life. The crowd represents the cynical part of every one of us who think that the way to face death is to toughen up and move on with life. But death cannot be dealt with by denial. We see the results of this every day with the increasing violence in our cities and on our streets.

Death can only be dealt with by staring it down with God’s promise of life. When Jesus raises this little girl in the Gospel, just as he did in the other raisings of the dead in the Gospels, he looks directly at our despair and cynicism, and then he presents to us the God who is his Father, the God of the living, the God in whom all can find life. We are invited to understand our death not as a cynical defeat but as an opportunity to grasp more deeply the ultimate power of Jesus’ God who loves us through and beyond death. Before he raises Jairus’ little daughter, Jesus heals the affliction of a woman who has been bleeding for years. Her bleeding made her impure. Her bleeding drove her to the feet of Jesus. He could have ignored her, of course, but his making her life better is part of the same divine power that led to the little girl’s resurrection. In other words, if we believe in the fullness of life in God, we need to work for that fullness even now by the way we care for each other, lift each other up, treasure each other in the moments we have.

No matter what statistics tell us, they are all ultimately about the very real lives that you and I lead every day. In God's eyes we are not numbers or percentages; nor are we disposable. To show us this, his Son died the death that we fear so much, and, in the face of this death, God raised his Son just as he is raising us.



