

November 3, 2019

The Miracles of Jesus
The Living Dead
Mark 5:21-23, 35-43

Miracles were a large part of Jesus' earthly ministry. Webster defines a miracle as a surprising and welcomed event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws, and therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency. The miracles of Jesus are important because they underscored his message and revealed his priorities. That means, Jesus was not just a teacher or leader. He was God incarnate, who had divine power at his disposal. The miracles of Jesus are found in all four Gospels. The first miracle Jesus performed was the changing of the water into wine in Cana. The last miracle Jesus performed was when Jesus restored the ear of the arresting soldier in the garden. Only the feeding of the multitude is found in all four Gospels. The miracles of Jesus can be grouped into four categories. The first category is Jesus' authority over nature. The second category is Jesus' exorcisms. The third category is Jesus' resurrections. The fourth category is Jesus' healings. In this sermon series, *The Miracles of Jesus*, we are looking at one miracle from each category. I have called this message *The Living Dead*.

Today, we look at a resurrection miracle. The timing is perfect because it is All Saints' Sunday. In our scripture reading for today, Jesus resurrects a girl. Her resurrection is a foreshadowing of Jesus' resurrection, the cornerstone of our faith. The Master's resurrection changed everything, even the way we look at death. In the last year, eleven individuals have died from this congregation. During that same time period, we have welcomed thirty-six new members, eight by confirmation. We miss the eleven, but we know we will see them again in heaven, thanks to the resurrection of Jesus.

May we never forget:

Tom Stellers
Tom Burnet
Wilma Payne
Rob Johnson
Cheri Grishow
Joann Chichak
Mildred Brook
Christine Johnstone
Don Tinkey
Jerry Stoneburner
Kay Mckee

Mark 5:21-23, 35-43 ²¹ 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. ²² Then

one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. ²³ 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."

While Jesus was still speaking to the synagogue leader, some people came from the house of Jairus, "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?" ³⁶ Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe." ³⁷ He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John (the brother of James). ³⁸ When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." ⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, "*Talitha koum!*" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). ⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. ⁴³ He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this and told them to give her something to eat.

Norman Cousins (1915-1990) was an American political journalist, author, professor and world peace advocate. He once said, "*Death is not the greatest loss in life. The greatest loss is what dies inside us while we live.*" I know that quote is correct because I have witnessed it many times. If you have witnessed that quote at least once, say, "**Amen!**"

We find ourselves in the fifth chapter of Mark. Jesus is in Galilee, so his popularity is extremely high. That means, the crowd is thick. Everybody wants something from the Master. One of the faces in the crowd was a man by the name of Jairus. He was the ruler of the local synagogue. In some cases that position was paid, in other cases the position was volunteer. In all cases, the position was respected by the congregation and demanding. He oversaw both building maintenance and worship. He came to Jesus not with a problem within the local synagogue, he came to Jesus with a personal problem. His daughter is dying, and he knows Jesus has the power to heal her. In the mind of Jairus, time is important. He tries to get Jesus to his daughter before time runs out. In other words, he tries to get Jesus to his daughter before she dies. This is the problem. The man is not alone. Others went to Jesus that day with their problems. One of those people was a woman with a gynecological problem. That means, she was considered unclean by her society. The good news is she is healed simply by touching Jesus's robe. The bad news is her healing prevented Jesus from getting to Jairus's daughter in time. It is a tragic story. The girl dies, just as her life was beginning. When Jesus arrived the crowd is grieving, because all hope is lost. It is at this moment; Jesus does the unexpected. He resurrects the girl and returns her to her parents. That story resonates in our society because death is, and always will be, shocking. It does matter if death comes after a long illness or in an instant, death is shocking. If you will admit, death is

shocking, say, "**Amen!**" No one wants to see death invade their personal space. The problem is death is a part of life. How many loved ones have you lost?

Years ago, I was introduced to a book written by Elizabeth Kubler Ross, *On Death and Dying*. If you have never read it, I would encourage you to do so. It has helped many grieving people through the years. It has help me in my time of grieving. The concept is simple. When death invades our personal space, we naturally go through five stages. You know the truth. Grieving is a complex topic for several reasons. First, everyone grieves differently. In other words, you do not grieve the same as the person sitting next to you. Second, the same individual will grieve differently every time because every relationship in our lives is different. You will grieve differently for your spouse of many years, then you will for a high school friend you haven't seen in years. However, everyone does have one thing in common. Everyone passes through these five stages of grief. Some rush through a stage, others stay at a stage for a while. However, it is important for you to get through all five to resume your life. If you do not pass through each stage, then you stop living on the day your loved one died. So, what are the five stages of grief?

- 1. Denial** – Even when death is expected, it is a shock. It is a numbness. You just can't believe the person is gone. You thought they would always be there, but you were wrong. About a year ago, I worked with a woman who continued to text her deceased fiancé. She wondered why he didn't respond. She was in denial. Have you ever been in denial when a loved one died? You are not the only one. Everyone does it.
- 2. Anger** – At some point the emotions kick in, and the person becomes angry. Powerlessness is pointed outward and someone must be blamed. How many examples do you need? The doctor made a fatal mistake. The pharmacist gave him the wrong pill. The hospital is incompetent, or the family was inattentive. I wonder how many hospitals have been sued in the last year. I wonder how many doctors have been sued in the last year. People sue for many reasons. One of those reasons is anger. Have you ever been angry when a loved one dies? You are not the only one. Everyone does it.
- 3. Bargaining** – Sometimes, before death comes, we bargain with God. If my loved one is healed, I will spend the rest of my life serving you. Sometimes, after death comes, we bargain with God. We find bargaining in those "if only" statements. If only they would have found the tumor earlier. If only we would have recognized the illness earlier. If only he would have driven down a different road, then the accident would never have happened. Do you hear what you are trying to do? We want life to return to what it was; we want our loved one restored. Have you ever found yourself bargaining when a loved one dies? You are not the only one. Everyone does it.
- 4. Depression** – When the bargaining ends, the depression begins. In this case, depression is not a mental illness, it is an appropriate response to a

great loss. In many ways, we withdraw from life. There are many who stayed depressed after a death. In many ways they stop living. Have you ever felt depressed when a loved one dies? You are not the only one. Everyone does it.

- 5. Acceptance** – I explain it this way: We never really get over the death of a loved one, but we do adjust. Things will never be as they were, but you will find a new normal. Maybe acceptance isn't the right word? Maybe surrender is? How many times in your life have you been forced to accept the death of a loved one? You are not the only one. Everyone does it.

In the Christian faith, there is a sixth stage to grief. The sixth stage of grief is hope. In the Gospel lesson for today, Jairus and the people in his life were devastated. I am sure some were at stage one, denial. Some must have been at stage two, anger. Jairus, himself, must have been at stage three, bargaining. If Jesus would have arrived earlier, then his daughter would not have died. Jesus's attendance is not a requirement for the healing. When Jesus resurrects the lifeless girl, he gives everyone hope. Only the Christian faith offers real hope in the face of death.

Since January, I have officiated at twenty-three funerals, six from this church. Each one of those funerals ended with these words. Perhaps, you remember them on your sad day. They are words of hope.

Jesus was born in the ordinary way, yet he lived an extraordinary life. He never committed a single sin. He deserved to live an extra-long life, but it didn't happen. He was executed as a young man. It was a Roman form of death. Jesus was crucified. His corpse was placed in a tomb. Once dead, Jesus' friends came to pay their final respects. Those who came early in the morning, to get the horrible job done, made the great discovery. The tomb was empty! Somehow, Jesus had come back to life. I have never been able to explain how the resurrection happened, because I can't explain a miracle. However, I do know the resurrection of Jesus changed everything. It is the cornerstone of our faith, and it changed the way you are experiencing today. Without the resurrection of Jesus, it is over with the benediction or the lunch. However, with the resurrection, there is so much more.

When I was young, my mother always told me to tell the truth. She knew I wasn't too bright, and she knew it would be hard for me to remember all the lies. She said, telling the truth is easier. For this reason, I have always told the truth, even if the truth is hard to hear. Someone once asked me the question, what do you look forward to in your own death? I don't think about my death too often, but I gave them an honest answer. My answer is your answer. When I die, I look forward to seeing all those people who have gone on ahead of me. I think the person was disappointed in my answer. They wanted me to say, "singing in the choir". There is no way. They wanted me to say, "standing at the throne". The problem is, I am too hyperactive. When I get to heaven, I

long to see the people who have passed ahead of me, people I have missed for a long time. Can I ask you a question? Who do you want to see when you get to heaven? Who is the first person you want to see when you get to heaven? If there is someone you long to see, say, **"Amen!"** It going to be a great reunion, thanks to our resurrected Lord and Savior, Jesus!

Our Gospel lesson for today began in sadness. A little girl, the daughter of a good man, was dying. Then, the sad moment came. She died. Everyone grieved but the grieving did not last long. Jesus resurrected her, and the reunion began. Do you remember what Norman Cousins once said? He said, *"Death is not the greatest loss in life. The greatest loss is what dies inside us while we live."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**