

The Best Is Yet to Come.

Text: 2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27

2 Corinthians 8:7-15 (Series B. 5th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps.130

Mark 5:21-43

They arrived at Jairus' house, where Jesus saw the confusion and heard all the loud crying and wailing..... He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha, koum," which means, "Little girl, I tell you to get up!" She got up at once and started walking around. (She was twelve years old.)

Prayer:

There is an Eastern legend about a Hindu woman whose only child died. Her grief and sorrow overwhelmed her to the point that she could do nothing but mourn the loss of her only child. So she went to a holy man to ask for her child back. The holy man told her to go and obtain a handful of rice from a house into which death had not come. If she could obtain just one handful of rice in this way, he promised that her child would be returned to her. She set off on her journey, going from house to house, asking the question *"Is all your family here around the table - father, mother, and children - none missing?"*

But always the answer came back that there were empty chairs around each table where family members had once sat. As she continued on, her grief and sorrow softened as she found the cold finger of death had touched every family and that she was not the only one to grieve the loss of a loved one; death is universal.

I hardly need to say this with the recent heart-rending news of a collapsed 12-storey condominium tower near Miami. I hardly need to mention how the parents and family members felt as they heard the news that their loved ones had died or are presumed dead.

I think that most parents believe that they will leave this life before their children, and they hope they will never have to stand at the grave of one of their children. It comes as a shock when this doesn't happen.

We have gathered on a number of occasions to say farewell to friends and members of *St Ansgar's*. We have been stung by sadness that death brings in recent months and years.

These past two weeks have been busy; we were in Powell River, B.C., for my sister-in-law's interment, then to Vermilion, Alberta, to lay my first girl friend in Canada, *Jo-Anne Severyn*, to rest. She died at a young age from cancer. Life is strange; when we met 40 years ago, I never thought that I would be the one presiding over her funeral.

In the reading from Mark's Gospel today, we hear of a 12-year-old girl, just beginning life with all the hopes of becoming a young woman, the wife of a loving husband, and a mother of her own children, suddenly stricken with some kind of incurable and fatal disease. Her father, Jairus, is faced with the loss of his beloved little daughter. What can he do to defend her against the sting of death? What can he do to prevent the ache in his heart, as well as that of his wife, that comes with the death of someone we love?

With whom do you most identify with in today's Gospel reading? There are plenty of characters who have been stung by death. There are the little girl's parents, Jairus and his wife, who would go to any length to see their little girl well again.

There is a little girl whose life has been cut short. There are the confused disciples. There is the crowd wailing in Jairus' front yard; they don't know what to make of the comment that 'the little girl is not dead – *only sleeping.*'

There is always a deepfelt sorrow when someone young passes away. One of the largest gatherings that I have ever attended was the funeral of a young person taken early in life. This occasion was no exception.

And of course, amongst all this sadness, there is Jesus - the aching hearts, the loud crying and wailing, the tear-soaked tissues, then comes Jesus, speaking firmly and strongly – "*Talitha koum*" – "*Little girl, I tell you to get up!*" Earlier, I asked which of these people you relate to the most. I think that many of us relate to several of these characters in this divine drama:

- Maybe Jairus and his wife – death has stolen someone dear from you.
- Maybe you have begged God to help the sick and dying person, as Jairus begged Jesus.
- Maybe you have felt the hopelessness and despair in the face of the inevitable, as the parents of this little girl.
- Maybe you can relate to the crowd gathered to support and help someone in their grief.
- Maybe you can relate to the relief and inner peace that comes from knowing that death does not have the last say, that, as far as Jesus is concerned, our departed loved one is only asleep.

Death is no more permanent than sleep is permanent. This is my belief. All who believe and trust in Jesus will wake to a bright new morning with the heavenly Father, just as we wake to a new day, every morning; only, this time, the new day will be something so good and so perfect, it will be beyond our wildest dream.

Jesus took the little girl's hand and said, "*Talitha koum.*" She opened her eyes, and she stood up. He says to us, when we close our eyes in death, "Old woman, Young man, Little child, Newly-born infant, Sinners, and Not-so-sinners, All who have left life on this earth: *I tell you to get up.*" One day, he will say that to us, after we have closed our eyelids in death – "*I tell you to get up – arise to your first day in my heavenly kingdom.*"

Death is an enemy. It isn't part of God's original plan that we have to face death. But Jesus came to put an end to the awesome power that death has to draw the curtain at the end of our life, as if that is the end of us forever.

Jesus has assured us that we have forgiveness, and he has promised us a place in eternity. That is what encourages us, as we say farewell to beloved family members and friends. That's what helps us face our own death.

That's what helps us when death interrupts our lives, wrecks our happiness, and fills our life with grief. We know that Jesus is waiting to take us by the hand and say to us, "*I tell you to get up.*" *The best is yet to come.*

A family on holidays is driving along in their car, windows rolled down, enjoying the warm summer breeze. All of a sudden, a bee gets through the window and starts buzzing around inside the car. A little girl, highly allergic to bee stings, cringes in the back seat. If she is stung, she could die within an hour. "Daddy, daddy," she cries in terror, "*It's a bee! It's going to sting me!*"

The father quickly pulls the car over to a stop and reaches back to try to catch the bee. Buzzing towards him, the bee bumps against the front windscreen where the father traps it in his

hand. Holding it in his closed hand, the father waits for the inevitable sting. The bee stings the father's hand and, in pain, the father lets go of the bee. The bee is loose in the car again. The little girl panics again, screaming, "Daddy, it's going to sting me!"

The father gently says, "*No honey, it can't sting you anymore. Look at my hand.*" The bee's stinger is there in his hand.

Paul talked about the sting of death being removed in 1 Corinthians (15:55). He rejoices in the fact that the power of death to destroy us has been broken. "*Where, death, is your victory? Where, death, is your sting?*"

Like the father in that story, Jesus says to us, "Look at my hands." There we see the mark of the nails - the sting of death and the sting of sin. On our behalf, Jesus took all of the pain that death brings. He reduced death to a bee that has lost its stinger. That's the victory that Jesus won for us!

Several years ago, someone said to me that they doubted that they had been good enough to go to heaven. If ever that thought enters your head, please remind yourself of your baptism. God made a promise to us that he will be with us, through thick and thin, and has a place ready for us when the day comes for us to leave this life. There can be no doubt about it, in my mind.

Finally, here is a good story to finish with. A woman was diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given three months to live. As she was getting her house in order, she asked her pastor to come to her house to discuss some of her final wishes. She told him which songs she wanted sung at her funeral service, which Scriptures she would like read, and which outfit she wanted to be buried in.

As the pastor prepared to leave, the woman suddenly remembered something else. "*There's one more thing,*" she said excitedly.

"What's that?" asked the pastor.

"This is important," the woman said. "I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand." The woman explained. "In all my years of attending senior lunches and potluck dinners, when the dishes of the main course were being cleared, someone would inevitably say, '*Keep your fork.*' It was my favorite part of the meal because I knew something better was coming – like soft chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie. So, when people see me in that casket with a fork in my hand and they ask, '*What's with the fork?*' I want you to tell them: '*Keep your fork. The Best is Yet to Come.*'"

In hope of eternal life. The best is yet to come. Amen.

Prayer concerns: *Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Wess Bourgaize, Johannes Eidnes, Hanne Bourgeoise, Ellen Eriksen & COVID-19 patients, Essential and Frontline workers.*

O Lord of Peace and Wholeness, as the woman reached to Jesus, and the child awakened at his call, grant us the determination to reach toward You with fearless faith, genuine love, and

purity of intent to act for justice and mercy to prevail among all Your people. We ask through Jesus, the Healer of our souls; and the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier of our hearts; Who together with You reign as One God, now and forever. Amen.

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Beautiful Savior # 838
- Abide With Me # 629
- Glorious Things of You Are Spoken # 647

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