

Sermon Text (Matthew 9:18–26 ESV)

¹⁸ While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” ¹⁹ And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. ²⁰ And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, ²¹ for she said to herself, “If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.” ²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well. ²³ And when Jesus came to the ruler’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, ²⁴ he said, “Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. ²⁵ But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. ²⁶ And the report of this went through all that district.

Jesus Gives Us Hope

Death can be a scary thing. This is especially true for those who have no hope. To them, death is the end. So, to make death seem less scary, they try to soften it by describing it in nice sounding terms. “He is playing eighteen holes on the golf course in the sky.” “He lived a good life, and now his legacy lives on.” “He will continue to be with you forever, so long as you keep thinking about him.”

The New Testament has its own way of describing death. It says that death is a peaceful sleep for those who die in Christ. To the world, describing death as a peaceful sleep may seem like just another way to try to soften it and make death seem less scary, and we can even think this way too, especially when we have just experienced the death of a loved one. However, while death can seem like the end to us, it is not an end for those who fall asleep in Jesus. This is because Jesus gives us hope that, on the Last Day, he will wake us up.

Our reading for today begins with a ruler kneeling before Jesus and asking him to lay his hand on his daughter so that she will live. We find out from the Gospels of Mark and Luke that this ruler was named Jairus. We also find out from these two Gospels that Jairus’ daughter wasn’t dead yet, but she was near death. This doesn’t mean that the Gospel of Matthew is giving an inaccurate report of what happened. The account was simply condensed.

Even though Jairus' daughter wasn't dead yet, she was so close to death that Jairus had little to no hope that she would be able to recover. The only hope he had was that Jesus could heal her. Jairus wasn't basing his hope on nothing. Jesus had already healed many people who were sick. He healed an official's son who was at the point of death (John 4:46–54). He healed a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years (John 5:1–17). He healed Peter's mother-in-law, who was sick with a high fever (Luke 4:38–39). He healed a paralytic (Mark 2:1–12). And he healed many others besides these (Matthew 8:16–17; 4:23–24).

Jairus had more than enough proof that Jesus had the power to heal his daughter. And then he watched Jesus heal a sick woman who touched the fringe of his garment on the way to Jairus' house. Seeing Jesus heal someone right in front of him no doubt gave him even more hope than he already had that Jesus could save his daughter's life. He had no reason to fear that his daughter would die so long as Jesus made it to his daughter in time.

Then the bad news came. According to the Gospels of Mark and Luke, after Jesus healed and reassured the sick woman, some men arrived to tell Jairus that his daughter had died. Jesus didn't make it to Jairus' daughter in time after all. Hearing this news could cause anyone to lose hope, but Jesus reassured Jairus by saying, "Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well" (Luke 8:50).

What Jesus said to reassure Jairus he also says to reassure us. Jesus entered this world to save us from death by his own death and resurrection. As Jesus said to Martha when her brother Lazarus died, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25–26).

Despite knowing this, death can still be a scary thing. We can fear the deaths of our loved ones, not wanting to experience the loneliness caused by them no longer being by our sides, or

worrying how we will provide for ourselves and our families without their help. We can also fear our own deaths, worrying that it will be painful or that we will leave our families without the help that they need.

But it's not just physical death that we can fear, but also eternal death. We know that we are by nature sinful and that we rightfully deserve eternal punishment in the fires of hell because of our many sins, a fact that can become clearer to us the closer to death that we get. As a result, we can wonder whether we lived a good enough life or whether we have a strong enough faith to get to heaven.

When any of these fears enter our minds, Jesus offers us reassurance and hope by telling us, "Do not be afraid; only believe" (Mark 5:36). Jesus gives us the faith we need through his Word and Sacraments. Because of this, we believe that Jesus experienced all our sufferings and took all our sins on himself on the cross. We believe that he paid the price for all our sins by his innocent suffering and death. We believe that he did everything necessary to save us. And we believe that he will remain with us through all our struggles, giving us the strength to persevere until the day we enter the peaceful sleep of death and enter eternal life in heaven.

Jairus believed and put his hope in Jesus, even after he received the terrible news that his daughter had died. His friends did not have the same confidence. In fact, the men who came to deliver Jairus the bad news also told him not to bother Jesus anymore since his daughter was now dead (Mark 5:35). In addition, the people who had gathered at Jairus' house to mourn his daughter's death laughed at Jesus when he told them that "the girl [was] not dead but sleeping" (verse 24).

Like those who didn't believe that Jesus could raise Jairus' daughter from the dead, we are tempted to doubt Jesus' power over death. We know that God has revealed through his Word that

we will rise again on the Last Day and that our bodies will be reunited with our souls. However, despite knowing what the Bible says, it can be difficult for us to have hope that we will rise from the dead. After all, Jesus' power over death doesn't change the fact that our loved ones are, for the moment, gone. We might even wonder why Jesus didn't prevent the death of our loved ones if he has so much power.

Additionally, when our loved ones die and we are faced with the immediate reality of death, we might think that death is the end. Since we have only ever experienced life on earth, we tend not to give much thought at all to life in heaven. So, knowing that we will not see our loved ones again in this life might cause us to think that we will never see them again, despite knowing that the Bible says that we will see them again in heaven.

When we are tempted to doubt Jesus' power over death and think that death is the end, Jesus, gives us reassurance and hope. Jesus simply saying that he has power over death is one thing, but he also backed up his words with his actions. One of the ways he did this was by raising Jairus' daughter from the dead.

Even though no one besides Jairus seemed to believe that Jesus could raise his daughter from the dead, Jesus proved them wrong. He entered Jairus' house, took his daughter by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (Mark 5:41). And she arose.

This is not the only time that Jesus raised someone from the dead. He later raised the widow of Nain's son from the dead (Luke 7:11–17). He raised Mary and Martha's brother, and his friend Lazarus from the dead not long before his own death (John 11:1–41). And, in the greatest raising of all, Jesus raised himself from the dead on the third day after his death.

If Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would have no hope. If death had kept its hold on Jesus and kept him in the ground, then that would mean he isn't God. And if Jesus wasn't God, then he would not have paid the price for our sins. But Jesus did rise from dead, and by his resurrection, he proved he is God and defeated death, giving us hope.

But it was not just physical death that Jesus saved us from. He also saved us from two other kinds of death: spiritual death and eternal death. We are all by nature sinful, meaning that we were spiritually dead from the moment we were conceived and could only sin all the time. Even our good deeds were like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:4). Because of the sins we committed, we rightfully deserved to suffer for all eternity in the fires of hell. We couldn't escape this fate on our own, because we couldn't choose to do good, let alone choose to believe in Jesus. However, on the cross, Jesus paid the price for all of our sins so that we will not enter eternal death in hell when we physically die, but eternal life in heaven. Additionally, he applied his perfect life to us so that God the Father no longer sees us as his enemies who deserve eternal death in hell, but as his own dear children who deserve eternal life in heaven. So that this reality can be ours, Jesus brought us to faith through his Word and Sacraments. In the waters of Holy Baptism, our sinful natures were drowned, and our new selves rose up.

Through Baptism, Jesus has already raised us from the dead, making us a part of the saints triumphant, even though we have yet to physically die. Jesus has made us members of his holy body, as he does with all believers. Therefore, our believing loved ones who are already sleeping are not so very far away from us because we are all united in Jesus. Now, whenever we pray to God, join together in praising him, or receive his body and blood at his holy table in his Supper, we are joining in praying, praising, and feasting with the saints triumphant who are already sleeping.

Since Jesus defeated death in all of its forms, the death of the body is no longer the end for those who believe in him, but a peaceful sleep. Death is no different than falling to sleep peacefully in our beds. When our bodies enter the peaceful sleep of death, our souls will be with Jesus in heaven. Then, on the Last Day, the sure hope that we have in Christ will come to pass. When Jesus returns, he will wake all those who believe in him from their peaceful sleep, which include us and our loved ones who are already sleeping, and will reunite our bodies with our souls. But our bodies will not be the imperfect bodies we died in. They will be perfected, and we will never experience the sufferings of this world ever again. Then, Jesus will take all believers in him to heaven—all the saints—to live with him for all eternity.

Those who have no hope do not believe that this could possibly be true. To them, the sure hope that we will live again is a misguided and empty attempt to make death seem less scary. However, this sure hope is a reality for those who die in Christ. Jesus has conquered death by his innocent death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. Because Jesus has conquered death, we will not die, but live. Because Jesus has conquered death, we have hope.