

LAUGHING MATTERS
Sermon, July 18, 2021
Vacation Bible School Sunday
Text: Mark 5:35-43

*Joyful, joyful we adore Thee, God of Glory, Lord of Love,
Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee, opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day!*

We've been singing this hymn in Vacation Bible School for a quarter century, now, and it is always a favorite ... some lyrics in the subsequent stanzas are a bit difficult for the younger children, but just about all of them over the years have learned to sing this first stanza with great gusto! The theme of our "DESTINATION DIG!" VBS curriculum this week was *"Seek Truth? FIND JESUS!"* I would add, *"Seek joy, seek fulfillment, seek wholeness? FIND JESUS!"*. Not to oversimplify, but I believe the reason Jesus Christ lived, the reason Jesus Christ died, the reason Jesus Christ rose again was so we might live *joyfully* and *well*, beginning right now and on into eternity. I've said this several times from this pulpit, and I'm sure I'll say it several more times before I eventually retire, but if I've learned nothing else in my years of ministry, I've learned this: We will never understand God until we get it through our heads that God is the most joyous Being in the universe. God did not create the world in order to judge it, or in order to dominate it, or in order to make it obey the dictates of His will. God made the world to delight in it, He made this world and all that is in it to share in His overflowing joy and love; and He delights when we discover the delight of His good ways.

If you've been in this congregation for awhile, you'll know I've also been long convinced that one of the great hindrances to joyful living in the present is the painful memories of past failures that ever haunt us in our present. I'm also convinced that the path to joy, the only path out of old hurts and failures, is the path of *forgiveness* (*when God forgives, He closes the gate on the past. We're the ones that keep prying it back open, but that's another sermon*). And if you've been in this congregation awhile, you'll also know I've long been convinced that one of the most effective ministries of the church, and perhaps especially in ministry with young people, is to do all we can to provide *joyful* memories, *good* memories, happy memories. Memories of service in mission, memories of healthy relationships, memories of good clean fun, wholesome and enjoyable activities, memories of loving, supportive, lasting friendships ... as well as good memories of adults who love and encourage and nurture and build up, rather than bad memories of adults who misuse or abuse or discourage. Memories of singing such moldy oldies as *"Kum Ba Yah"* and *"Rise and Shine"*, two songs that bring back a flood of happy memories for me beginning back in church camp when I was ten years old, which is when I first learned these songs. In fact, one of the sadder and more difficult aspects of the past fifteen-sixteen months was all the memories that were NOT made with cancelled May Breakfasts, cancelled retreats and mission trips, cancelled SCHOOL, cancelled sporting events, proms, graduations ... SO many life-enhancing and life-changing memories are made in the course of one short year. Time is precious; life is short, and it is meant to be lived ... and lived well. Happy memories of joy in our past can do so much to help us live joyfully, confidently and freely in our present and our future.

We are in the business of making happy memories of laughing *with* God, enjoying life as He would have us enjoy it ... for He really does want us to live well, to enjoy this gift of life in all its fullness, beginning right now and continuing on into eternity! We have zero interest in making memories of life lived laughing *AT* God, which is a sad phenomenon in our increasingly secularized culture. When we laugh *AT* God, when we join in with the secular, cynical choruses mocking piety, scoffing at morality, chastity, integrity, honor, making light of God's good ways ... in short, when we don't take God seriously and live accordingly ... more often than not that makes for really *bad* memories, regretful memories, destructive memories, painful memories, memories that continue to wound and cripple rather than heal and/or inspire. People laugh *AT* God when they take Him lightly, when they don't understand Him, or they cynically laugh at God because they think He is hopelessly irrelevant to their situation(s).

The people in Jairus' home are doing just that. They are laughing *AT* Jesus, scornfully and derisively laughing *AT* God in the flesh, because they did not really know Him, they did not understand Him, and they thought He was entirely out of His element and place in this particular situation. But after they saw what He could do, you can be sure the derisive laughter stopped, and was replaced by the laughter of joy, because a young child literally came alive at the hand of Jesus. But I'm getting ahead of the story a bit.

A few weeks ago we started with the story of Jairus, a prominent leader of the local synagogue in Capernaum, who was the father of a very sick little girl. He goes out to seek Jesus, because he wanted his daughter to be well. When he does find Jesus, this distinguished man threw himself at Jesus' feet in full view of a very large crowd, pleading with Jesus to come to his house and heal his daughter. As mentioned last time, we are told in other sources that the synagogue has already taken a public position on Jesus, calling Him a false messiah. So, this

really wasn't a good career move for this synagogue leader. But when your child is dying ... when anyone you love is enduring great suffering ... you're not thinking much about good career moves or public image. All you're thinking about is the suffering of the one you cherish. Jairus will do anything, try anything, if it might save his little girl. He had heard the miraculous stories about Jesus, so he came seeking Jesus, to beg His intervention.

Jesus accepted the invitation, and they head off to Jairus' home, and a large crowd of people followed along. The parade was interrupted by the healing encounter with a woman who had been suffering twelve years, which coincidentally or not was the entire lifespan of Jairus' daughter; we talked about this encounter two Sundays ago. We are told that even while Jesus was still speaking to the now-healed woman, some men from Jairus' house came to tell Jairus his daughter had died. We are then told, *"Ignoring what they said, Jesus told Jairus, 'Don't be afraid, just believe.'"* Jesus then dismissed the crowd, taking only Peter, James, John and Jairus with Him. They go to the home, and find the mourners have already gathered. There is a lot of commotion; there are people crying and wailing loudly, and Jairus' friends, neighbors, and associates are probably all there. Jesus says to the mourning crowd, *"Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead, but asleep."*

Well, you can imagine the awkward response. First there's the awkward silence which usually follows when someone says something really stupid and/or inappropriate at a time like this. Then you can imagine the murmurs beginning, and growing into snickering and then into outright scornful laughter. They laughed at Jesus ... derisively, dismissively. And some of that laughter is certainly directed at Jairus for bringing this Man into that home. *"Where'd you find this guy, Jairus?"* How can Jairus hope to remain respected when he pins his hopes on this holy man who doesn't even know a dead body when he sees one? Jairus stands to lose credibility in the community, and he stands to lose even his livelihood, by bringing Jesus into his home.

But while they are all laughing at Jesus and Jairus, Jesus took charge! He just shooed everyone out of the home except for the parents and His disciples Peter, James and John. He then went in to where the little girl was, took her by the hand and raised her from her deathbed in what is really an extraordinarily ordinary scene. Aramaic was the vernacular of the day; it was the common parlance of Jesus time. Mark is unique in including Aramaic phrases in his Greek text (*he does so five other times; see 3:17, 7:11, 7:34, 10:46 and 14:36*). Mark gives us this ordinary phrase, *"Talitha koum"*, which we are told means, *"Little girl, I say to you, get up!"* I've read elsewhere that this was a colloquial routine phrase used in that day and age by a mom affectionately waking up her daughter in the morning ... roughly akin to *"Wakie, wakie, little girl. C'mon, it's time to get up!"* He speaks to the girl softly, tenderly, using this ordinary phrase to get an extraordinary result. This is almost another sermon, but that's a scene I believe will be replayed for each one of us when He comes to our deathbed ... He'll take us by the hand and affectionately say, *"Wakie, wakie!"* and we will be awakened, arising to be eternally young and alive and well in Paradise.

When we've looked at this passage in the past, I pointed out three things to note about Jairus, three things I'm sure his little girl learned about her dad after she was healed: **First**, I am sure she learned that Dad took the initiative and assumed the crucial parental responsibility of bringing his child to Jesus, like so many faithful parents in this sanctuary this morning have done. You brought your children to a place where they could seek and encounter Jesus. More precisely, Jairus brought Jesus to his child. Note that *he* sought out Jesus. He did not send any of his subordinates, he didn't send the babysitter, he didn't send the grandparents. This good father assumed the parental responsibility of seeking out Jesus *himself*, and then bringing Jesus to his child. **Second**, he was not at all reluctant to bring Jesus into their home! Remember, as the synagogue leader, Jairus is taking a big risk. But he doesn't care about the risk, because he wants his child to live. He wants his daughter to be well, so he brings Jesus to her, right there where they live. **Third**, Jairus not only brought Jesus into his home, he understood that if his daughter was to be well, he would have to allow Jesus to *take charge* of his home. So he gives Jesus authority in that home; note that Jesus is the one who chose who was to stay, and who was to go.

Jairus allowed Jesus the authority to bring into that home who or what Jesus desired, and he allowed Jesus the authority to just get rid of those people and those things in that home that would hinder His ministry of life and healing, and Jesus just ran out of the house all those who scorned and mocked and laughed at Him and/or made light of His ways. And I've always believed this as a father and a pastor: the only way our children will have a chance to live, and live well, is if we bring Jesus Christ into our homes *and* permit Him to take charge of our homes. Is there anything in our homes that will hinder the ministry of Jesus Christ to our families? If so, why allow it there? Part of responsible parenthood is just keeping people and "stuff" out of our homes that will harm our children; including any and all influences that hinder the nurturing, healing, life-giving work of Jesus Christ in their lives.

We don't know how long Jairus' daughter went on to live, but I don't believe there was a day that went by, that this girl didn't think, *"I'm alive today because my daddy brought Jesus into my life."* Perhaps she grew to have children of her own. Perhaps Jairus' grandchildren heard the story again and again of how Grandpa once put his reputation on the line and brought Jesus Christ into their home, gave Jesus Christ charge of the home, and how as a result their mother was healed and given the gift of life.

What a happy memory. What an effective ministry.