

Mark 5:21-24a, 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 rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet ²³ and 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." ²⁴ So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him... ³⁵ While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?" ³⁶ Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, **"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 ruler, 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 walked 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.

Prayer of the Day:

O God, you have prepared joys beyond understanding for those who love you. Pour into our hearts such love for you that, loving you above all things, we may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Alleluia. (Mark 8:34b)

Sermon:

I'm guessing you knew when you came in already. If not, the hymns have probably given it away at this point. It's July 4th, the day on which our nation celebrates its independence. Historically, it was on July 4th, 1776, that the Continental Congress approved the final wording of the Declaration of Independence. They'd been working on it for a couple of days after the draft was submitted on July 2 and finally agreed on all of the edits and changes and the signers did their thing. In other words, July 2 was the day the congress declared independence and on the 4 the paperwork finally got done. I would imagine there is a joke in there about red tape and governmental paperwork, but we'll leave it alone. Today though as our thoughts turn to the celebration of our independence, we are introduced to a synagogue ruler, his daughter, and a tragedy that is difficult to come to grips with. As Jesus interacts with it all He declares Independence for us, **INDEPENDENCE – FROM DEATH!** Here we see that we have **FREEDOM FROM FEAR THROUGH FAITH** and **FREEDOM TO CELEBRATE AT CHRIST'S COMING.**

I want you to set aside the fireworks and the celebrations for a moment today and set a very different scene before your eyes. It's here at church but it's not Easter though the flowers are certainly everywhere. It's not a wedding, though the family and the friends have once again gathered. It's a funeral. I know, this can be such an uncomfortable place that we have come up with over 200 euphemisms to avoid saying the word which lands us here, death. Words fail us, often it's just tears and a hug. And this funeral, it's the funeral of a 12-year-old girl so a smaller coffin, the laments of a life deemed too short by family and friends. Ah and the friends, young themselves struggling with the emotion of this particular day. Then he walks in. Strangely confident, unphased by the tears, unphased by the grief, unphased by the death and approaches the parents, "The girl is not dead, only sleeping." Can you imagine the shock and the horror on the faces of those in attendance. Perhaps some would even snicker at the guy who clearly isn't quite right. Ah, but then Jesus was perfectly sane. He just knew the truth. He knew who He was. He knew why He had come.

I've never had to experience the emotions that Jairus was encountering. I never want to. His daughter was 12 years old and on her death bed. There is no doubt that he had tried everything he possibly could have, chased every possible cure, nothing was working.

Now as he comes to his last hope for help his words say it all. The words translated "*My little daughter is dying*" are a perfect portrayal of the grieving father's heart. Very literally he says, "*My dearly loved little girl is at her last.*"

Jairus was face to face with a fearful foe. Nothing seemed to be able to deter the grim reality of death. His love, his day's medicine, his devout life lived as leader of God's people, death didn't care about any of that. It wouldn't even stop when it was the life of his child and now Jairus in fear of what seemed to be inevitable, fell pleading to the only hope left.

Maybe you didn't have to come to grips with mortality in this way, I pray you haven't. The reality however, is that all of us to one degree or another have had to stare at this enemy. His breath is hot and putrid, his visage terrifying and there isn't a soul alive that doesn't hesitate a little when they see him near. Death seems all powerful, unstoppable, relentless.

Imagine the cold reality of the words of those who came to him as Jesus was on His way. "*Your daughter is dead,*" they said. "*Why bother the teacher anymore?*" I suppose one could say a spectacle ensued, weeping, wailing, tears from those who truly were affected and those who did this sort of thing professionally as the custom dictated. All of it was really just another veiled attempt to pull away from the reality, unmoved and unmoving. Death had struck again, nothing could change it.

But I want you to key in on Jesus, even here, especially here! *Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe."* The author of the book of Hebrews tells us, "*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1)*" Believe what? Hope what? that even here in the face of death there is not reason for fear. No reason for fear because Jesus has a solution, not an empty euphemism to put lipstick on the pig of death nor some busy work to try and take our minds off of it. No, a real solution to the problem.

Thank God for Jesus. In our lesson, He displays the power to conquer even this foe. Even when crowds thought He was crazy and powerless against the enemy, His words shatter the opponent. He speaks a few simple words, "*Little girl, I say to you, get up!*" and the words ring in the air, He does what no one else could have ever accomplished, death disappears. Jesus is the victor we have always hoped for and it's true not only for the little girl but for all who are His.

Jesus could not be contained by this enemy. Even when the icy cold grip of death found its way toward Him on the cross it could not claim Him until He allowed it to and even then it could not hold Him for long. Easter morning plain for all to see, the angels displayed an empty tomb and a risen Savior greeted Mary and the disciples. Jesus words for the 12-year-old girl ring true forever, "*Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.*"

In faith, this truth is ours! Sure, we will still experience the unknown of death and that thought might still make us tremble a bit but we need not fear this foe. Death is now no more permanent than slumber. That's what Jesus meant with these words. I lie down at night knowing, or at least expecting that I'll rise in the morning to face a new day with its challenges and joys. Death is no different. I lie down in death knowing not expecting that my soul will live on forever in heaven unscathed by death and that a day will come when Jesus will come and His voice will be heard again and then, yes, even my mortal frame will open its eyes not to a day of challenges but an eternity of only bliss, perfect forever in heaven.

Before we say "Amen", imagine another tomb another procession but this time no body. "He is not here, He is risen, just as He said," proclaim the angels. You can almost hear Paul's triumphant declaration which has thundered over Christian funerals for centuries since that fateful morning. "*Death has been swallowed up in victory.*" "*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?*" ⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* ⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Brothers and Sisters, this fourth of July as we rejoice in the birth of our nation with all of its freedoms, or at least the completion of the paperwork, recall a declaration of independence that far outweighs anything a nation could ever provide, a freedom better than anything this world could write into existence. Because of Jesus Christ, because of the cross, because of God's gift of faith you have independence, **INDEPENDENCE – FROM DEATH!** Amen!