

11.6.2016 Trinity 24 (Matthew 9:18-26)

*“While Jesus spake these things unto John’s disciples, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped Him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live... And when Jesus came into the ruler’s house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed Him to scorn”* (Matthew 9:18, 23-24)

If you’ve ever been in the very unfortunate position of having a group of people laugh at you those words can hit you hard; and the text doesn’t just say they laughed at Him, but that *“they laughed Him to scorn.”* They were making fun of Him, mocking what He said, and ridiculing Him. Because of our love for Him the fact that they were treating Him this way is upsetting to us, but let’s consider this scene and based only on human reason and experience decide if scornful laughter was actually a valid response to the tragic events of that day.

The people gathered together at the ruler’s house that day were very familiar with death – much more familiar than you or I. The modern medicine that we rely on to save the lives of our children, the same medicine that saved the lives of Hope and Elizabeth wasn’t available two thousand years ago. Certainly many of these people had watched helplessly as their own children died and today they gathered to offer their condolences and support as Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, lamented and mourned the death of his only daughter. The Scripture tells us that in the pain and heartache they felt at the loss of this twelve year old girl they made noise – they mourned, they wailed, and they wept (Luke 8: 41-56).

In the midst of all this turbulence – the noise, the pain, and the tears; Jesus arrives at the ruler’s house. *“There was nothing beautiful or majestic about His appearance,”* (Isaiah 53:2) nothing to make anyone think that He was more than just another mourner coming to pay His respects. Then this Man who was a newcomer to this entire heartbreaking situation tells the people that they should all leave *“for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth”*. This Man, who from every outward appearance looks no different than any other man enters this tragic scene and tells you – a person who has seen the ugly face of death that your eyes deceive you *“for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth”*. At this point do you simply throw away a lifetime of real and sorrowful human experience or in the midst of this tragic situation do you cling to human reason and laugh Him to scorn?

Consider another example from our Gospel reading this morning. Imagine you know a woman *“which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years”* A woman *“which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any”* (Luke 8:43). Nobody was able to offer a cure and to a reasonable human being after all these years her situation appeared hopeless. Then one day she says to you that she has found a way to be cured. She tells you about Jesus. She says to you that she believes if she can just get close enough to Him to *“touch His garment”* she will be healed. This woman that has spent her life savings on every possible treatment, all to no avail, is now telling you that what every doctor could not heal will be cured just by touching this Man’s clothing. Would any reasonable human being believe her or would experience and human reason lead you to the conclusion that this illness had finally driven her mad? Would you laugh her to

scorn?

Here is one more example for you to consider: The Cross of Calvary. Imagine living two thousand years ago – a time when crucifixion was the brutal, torturous, and barbaric means of executing the most wretched and notorious criminals. It is Friday and you are outside the city walls at a place called “*the place of the skull*” (Matthew 27:33). There a Man beaten beyond recognition and covered in blood hangs by nails on a Cross. The sign above His head reads: *JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS* (John 19:19), but from your vantage point you can see the people have left their King to suffer and die alone. Even all but one of His closest disciples ran away from this gruesome event. John is the only one that remains and he stands there at the foot of the Cross with Jesus’ mother, “*and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene*” (John 19:25).

As you stand there watching a mother cry for her dying Son you wonder what terrible crime He must have committed to bring about such a horrific end to His life. You live in a time and place where suffering is common and you’ve watched people die, but you’ve never seen anything like this. Now imagine... What if at that moment the disciple John turned to you and shared the message of this Man’s Gospel, the Good News. What if at that moment John told you that your only hope for forgiveness, your only hope for mercy, and your only hope for eternal life is found in submitting to this Man as your Lord and Savior because this Man hanging in front of you on the Cross is God. Would you believe or would you look at John and laugh him to scorn?

The scandal of the Cross and the examples found in our Gospel reading are powerful reminders that we shouldn’t think too highly of ourselves. It wasn’t a lifetime of experience or finite and flawed human reason that saved us – it was the grace of God. “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God*” (Ephesians 2:8). What a gift we have in the faith that saves. To those who reach out to Jesus through the eyes of faith He says, “*Be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole.*” To those who seek Jesus through the eyes of faith He says, “*the maid is not dead, but sleepeth.*”

The world wants to laugh scornfully at these words of Christ. Man wants to say to Jesus, "No, she’s not asleep. She’s dead." The foolishness of finite and fallen human reason cannot see the greater truth of God. In his foolishness man calls the words of Christ lies and His miracles a myth. Human reason cannot accept that the illness plaguing us can only be healed through Christ and what we call death is really a kind of sleep – a sleep that is easily awakened when Jesus takes you by the hand. Our sinful reason resists this truth and a more complete knowledge of God. Our human reason stands outside like those “*minstrels and the people making a noise*” – mourning, wailing, and thinking death is the end. Jesus Christ, the Word of God, pushes through the crowd of fallen human reason saying, "Stand aside! Make room for Me!" He breaks through the foolish ways in which we resist Him, takes us by the hand, and raises us to new life.

The faith that saves is all about Christ – first, last, and always. Like Jairus and the woman in today’s Gospel we must come to the realization that nothing we can do will cure what ails us or those we love. Saving faith looks inside, and finding nothing left on which to depend, looks up to Christ. Jairus was the ruler of the synagogue, yet he realized that he was powerless to save the life of his only daughter, so he bowed down in faith at the Savior’s feet. The woman had spent all

her money on doctors who could not heal her and so she too approached our Lord in faith bending low to touch "*the hem of His garment.*"

We bend low this morning as we kneel at His table. We reach out in faith to *JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS* our Lord and Savior, our God and King, to be healed from the illness which plagues us. At His table we do not touch the hem of His garment, by faith we receive His most precious Body and Blood – the spiritual food that makes us "*whole.*" Through His gifts we are strengthened and prepared for the day when He shall take us each by the hand and lead us home – to His eternal kingdom.