

²¹When Jesus had again crossed over in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around him near the sea. ²²Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came. When he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet ²³and repeatedly pleaded with him, “My little daughter is near death. Please come and place your hands on her so that she may be healed and live.”

²⁴Jesus went with him.

³⁵While he was still speaking, people from the synagogue ruler’s house arrived, saying, “Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher anymore?”

³⁶But when Jesus heard this report, he told the synagogue ruler, “Don’t be afraid. Only believe.” ³⁷He did not allow anyone to follow him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. ³⁸They went into the house of the synagogue ruler, and Jesus saw a commotion with people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹When he entered, he said to them, “Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.”

⁴⁰They laughed at him. But after he put everyone out, he took the father of the child, her mother, and those who were with him and went in where the child was. ⁴¹Grasping the hand of the child, he said to her, “Talitha, koum”! (When translated, that means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise!”) ⁴²Immediately the little girl stood up and began to walk around. (She was twelve years old.) They were completely and utterly amazed. ⁴³Then he gave them strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and he told them to give her something to eat.

A man walked to the front of church carrying in his own arms the casket that held his infant son’s body. That day, he was the only pallbearer His face was not stoic. Tears dripped to the floor in a flood of emotion. He set the casket down up front, went over to sit by his wife, and the funeral service he never expected to attend began. The pastor read the Gospel that we read this morning. And those words, “The child is not dead but sleeping,” rang out and sent a chill down the spine of everyone in the congregation. Maybe these words don’t mean much to us on a normal Sunday morning service, but there are times in life when these words mean everything. Today Jesus shows us two important truths about his and our relationship with death and mourning. He shows us that he mourns with us in our sadness, and he gives us a whole new perspective on death.

It is clear that mourning is not a foreign feeling to Jesus. The shortest passage in the Bible says, “Jesus wept.” Why did he weep? He was mourning the death of his friend Lazarus. He could see the faces and hearts of those who had lost a loved one, and his heart went out to them. But death hurts. It hurts because of sin. Death reminds us that by nature, sin is our master. And left to our own devices, it will torture us to death. I don’t really like those crime shows and movies where they are looking for depraved serial killers, but even the worst ones have nothing on the corruption and destruction of sin. Death is an unnatural sight, even for Jesus. God had not made the world to die. He had made the world to live forever. But what we see here shows us something more about Jesus’ love than what we see from Jesus at the funeral of Lazarus. He knew Lazarus. He had a friendship with Lazarus. But he didn’t know the people here. This shows that Jesus mourns for all those affected by sin and death.

That brings us to the Gospel today. As Jesus is traveling, he meets a man names Jairus. Jairus is a leader in the synagogue, maybe comparable to a church council member. Because of this, he is risking his position by coming to Jesus. His friends at the synagogue were quickly turning against Jesus. He’s putting a lot on the line by going to Jesus.

But he comes to Jesus with a plea. Bowing to Jesus, he says to him, “My little daughter is near death. Please come and place your hands on her so that she may be healed and live.” You listen to those words and your heart

breaks. It's his little girl. It's the apple of his eye. And he's about to lose her. Parents that have had to bury children can relate to this man. This wasn't how this was supposed to go. She was supposed to grow up. He was supposed to give her away at her wedding. He was supposed to hold her children in his arms in his old age. Then, she was supposed to attend his funeral. Not the other way around. What Jairus sees in Jesus is a last-ditched effort. He has tried everything else. Why not at least ask the miracle worker who has just shown up in town?

Jesus agrees to go with Jairus. But on the way, Jesus stops to heal a sick woman. And by the time this interaction is over, the synagogue ruler's family arrives with some bad news: "Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher anymore?" His final effort has failed. This Jesus was not able to make it to his daughter in time. His worst fear has been realized.

But Jesus mourns with Jairus. He doesn't tell him to get ahold of himself or accuse him of not trusting God enough. Jesus knows that the hurt of death is not sinful in and of itself. Instead, Jesus says, "Don't be afraid. Only believe." I've got to assume Jairus is ready to give up. In his mind, Jesus has done all he can for Jairus. Now it's time to thank the teacher and send him on his way. But Jesus is not done with Jairus yet.

He spends time with him. He travels with him back to his home. Compare this to the time Jesus had healed a centurion's servant from afar. Jesus had the power to heal this man's daughter while she was sick at home. But he also has the power to heal her even after death. Why not raise her from far away? It's because Jesus' presence matters. Jesus cares about people and wants to show them he is with them in their hardest moments. This is how he mourns with Jairus.

Jesus mourns with us too. He mourns with us when we face loss. It's hard to imagine, but Jesus cares about the people we lose more than even we do. You think about how heavy the death of a parent, child, or spouse can weigh on you, but it weighs all the more on the God who loves them more. And in his love for us, he speaks tenderly to us when we are mourning. He blesses us with many comforts. You don't know how much your sympathy cards mean to people until you receive them in a time of mourning. You don't know how much it means to the family when you make the effort to show up the funeral until that unexpected friend shows up to give you a hug. You don't know what the meal train for the widow or widower does to boost their spirits and keep them eating when all food tastes bland until you're the one too weak to even microwave some supper. But more than that, you don't know the effect you have when you get to reassure them of the hope that is theirs in Christ until you've heard the voice of the Savior come from the mouth of a fellow believer.

It doesn't only happen at the side of the casket though. We probably spend more time mourning over the destruction of sin. Jesus mourns with us as we grieve the sinful world around us. We see the coldness that people show to each other. We see the hatred of one group against another and vice versa. As we look at our world, we see a lot that has been ruined by sin. But Jesus also mourns with us as we look at the bombed-out places of our own lives where our sins and the sins of those around us have created frustration and longing for wholeness.

Don't think that Jesus is nowhere to be found in your mourning. He is always near, working everything you need. He is always telling you what you need to hear. His voice is on your bookshelf and even on your phone. Read it! Hear it! And those words he says to Jairus are words we need to hear when our mourning in life overtakes us: "Don't be afraid. Only believe." It is ok for us to mourn. In fact, our Savior mourns with us. But through the tears, a smile appears as we understand what it means that our Lord is at our side.

Jesus is not just offering an understanding love. He's acting on that love to fix the heartache in peoples' hearts. He knows our needs, but he also provides for them. We see that as Jesus arrives with Jairus at his home.

It's clear his child has died, because the professional weepers and wailers have been called. This was a custom at the time. But Jesus has a question: "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping."

Sleeping? The people are confused. This girl has not fallen asleep. She's not in some Romeo and Juliet coma. Her pulse has stopped. Her brain is no longer functioning. She's dead. Either Jesus is the world's worst doctor, or he knows something they do not. They laugh at the notion that this little girl could be sleeping, and Jesus sends everyone but his three disciples and the two parents out of the house.

Their group of six ventures into the room they're keeping the body. She's lifeless. Her hands are cold as Jesus grabs them. And he says, "'Talitha, koum'! (When translated, that means, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise!')"

Notice how Jesus speaks about her tenderly just like her loving father did. "Little girl." The girl opens her eyes to new life. She gets up. Jesus tells the parents to get her some food. In their shock, they aren't even thinking about how weak and needy she still is, but Jesus is.

Death to life. It's the impossible. I really have a hard time casting too many stones at those who laughed at Jesus. I have a hard time casting blame because I'm familiar with the permanence of death too. Stuff wears out and gets thrown away. People wear out and die. Death is certain and irreversible. Or is it? Jesus gives us a new perspective on death here. It's not death. It's sleep. And that sounds backwards. It sounds like wishful thinking. It certainly doesn't sound like the life we know. But that's because it's not.

Jesus does it. He makes death into mere sleep when raising this little girl from the dead. He does it for a widow's son too, and even for his friend Lazarus. But then we see his final act. Three days after his own death, he himself rises to life. Jesus proves that he can call death sleep, because he shows his power in raising the dead.

What's our takeaway. Should we expect Jesus to stroll into the next funeral we attend and say, "Old man, I say to you, arise"? No, but we do expect a resurrection. Why? Because Jesus has made death into sleep. And on the last day, after our souls have been basking in the glory of heaven, waiting for the end of struggle and sin on earth, they will be reunited with our perfectly remade bodies. We will rise at the beckon call of our Savior as he tells us to get up from our slumber. Amen.