

‘DON’T BE AFRAID. JUST BELIEVE.’

Mark 5:21-24a, 35-43

Jesus said, **“In this world you will have trouble,”** John 16:33. And the Greek word translated as trouble, THLIPSIS, literally means to be hard-pressed, squeezed, or pressured from every side—like being caught in a vice-grip; like being trapped beneath a rock and a hard place. To this day we use the expression, “Oh, I am under so much pressure.” What type of pressure? Pressure at home. Pressure at school. Pressure at the office. The pressure to succeed, conform, compromise, and produce results.

“In this world, you *will* have trouble,” said Jesus; not if, might, could, possibly, or even probably; but will. And the truthfulness of His words is reflected not only in our personal lives and troubles, but in the daily news: in wars and terrorism; in natural disasters and the threat of pandemics—the latest watchword is coronavirus; in senseless crimes and political corruption; in increasing persecution and attacks on Christianity; in front-page headlines and back-page obituaries.

Trouble. Trouble. And isn’t it trouble that changes our perspective of the world? When young and inexperienced, we view the world as a happy, carefree, magical place filled with fun, games, cotton candy, and endless summer vacations. When we are older, however, we come to see the world as poor Job came to see it: **“Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble,”** Job 14:1. A verse often read at funerals.

And what shaped Job’s world-view if not his troubles; this man of God who lost virtually everything—home, family, wealth, health, property, possessions? The older I become, the more I appreciate the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes: **“All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun,”** Ecclesiastes 1:8-9.

I can remember the precise year my view of the world changed. The year was 1963, and I was ten years old. That was the year my parents divorced. That was the year President J.F. Kennedy was assassinated. I sat for hours in front of a black-and-white Zenith TV, watching the president’s funeral; watching the president’s son, little John-John, salute the presidential casket as it passed.

Suddenly, I no longer saw the world as a happy, magical place, but rather as a place where bad things happened; where marriages failed; where “I love you” was not always forever; and where ten-year-old boys had to stand alone before family judges to declare which parent they preferred to live with. No child should have to make this

choice. No child can choose one parent over another without feeling he has betrayed both. I know from personal experience.

When trouble comes, how do we endure and overcome it? This question has been asked by people for millennia. It has been debated by the world's greatest thinkers and philosophers: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. It has been the subject of countless books.

Yet, despite all the centuries, debates, and books, the human approach to suffering and trouble has never risen above locker room pep-talk: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going;" and "Tough times never last, but tough people do." Can you imagine saying these words to people living in dire economic circumstances—no food, no wardrobe, no shelter, no money, no hope? Can you imagine saying these words to a parent who has lost a child, like Jairus did in today's text? "Well, Jairus, sorry for your loss. Sorry about the loss of your twelve-year-old daughter. But hey, when the going get's tough, the tough get going. And remember, tough times never last but tough people do."

How is this any different from the empty, well-worn, even if well-intentioned platitudes, "Hang in there;" or "Try not to worry so much;" or Scarlet O'Hara's infinitely naïve "Tomorrow is another day," or Little Orphan Annie's "The sun will come out tomorrow; bet your bottom dollar, tomorrow?"

Inherent in all these philosophies is the mistaken belief that somehow human beings can manufacture the strength and wisdom to overcome all their problems; that somehow everything in an uncaring universe will work itself out for our good. Nonsense. That isn't what the Bible says. The Bible doesn't say "Everything will work out for the good;" but rather "**We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,**" Romans 8:28.

The Bible doesn't tell us to "Be strong;" but rather to "**Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power,**" Ephesians 6:10. The Bible doesn't tell us to look inward but to look upward. "**I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth,**" Psalm 121:1-2. The Bible doesn't tell us to hope in ourselves but to hope in God and the infallible truth of His word. "**Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God,**" Psalm 42:5-6.

In the very midst of the most hopeless, heartbreaking, and impossible circumstances, the only thing God ever asks us to do is to trust Him. Trust that He will

deliver us. Trust that He will act at the right time and in the right way. Trust that He will do the right thing. Trust that He will provide the strength to endure. Trust that He is in fact the God He declares Himself to be; namely, the God who loved us enough to sacrifice His own Son, Jesus Christ.

And where is this better illustrated than in today's text—in the heartwarming words of Jesus to Jairus: **“Don't be afraid; just believe?”** This is the message of today's text; a message Jesus intends for each of us as much as He intended it for Jairus. There are no complexities to this message; no limitations, no difficulties, and no situations to which the words of Jesus do not apply, from the first day of school to the last day of life. The message remains: **“Don't be afraid; just believe.”**

In pondering these words of Jesus, it is important for us to see the circumstances in which they were spoken; not pretend life, but real life; not a theological premise but a dying child. And in these real circumstances, it is equally important for us to see how faith operates—what Jesus meant by the words **“just believe.”**

Was Jesus saying “believe in yourself?” Was He saying “try a little harder?” Was He saying “when the going gets tough, the tough get going?” Or was He saying, “My child, regardless of what you see, hear, think, or feel; regardless of how difficult the trouble is in your life, go on believing in Me?” This finally is the force of Jesus' words in our text. In the original language, **“just believe”** is in the present tense, which means ongoing, uninterrupted action. “Go on believing. Never stop believing.”

Knowing how to overcome troubles is one of the reasons we attend church on Sundays and read our Bibles at home. Attending church has nothing to do with ‘being in the church;’ that is, nothing to do with the building, cement, ceiling fans, pews, or hymn board. Attending church is all about hearing the word of God. And hearing the word of God is all about applying the power of God to real life.

People who say, “I don't come to church because I don't believe God's word is relevant to my life,” fail to understand real life; fail to understand the power of the word of God; and fail to understand that God's word is intended for real life. This is why Jesus Christ came to be one of us and shared in our humanity; as written in the Gospel of John: **“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us,”** John 1:14; or as written in the Letter to the Hebrews, **“Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity,”** Hebrews 2:14.

Like you, I would like to see our congregation grow. Like you, I would like to see the pews filled to capacity each Sunday. But the truth is, whether there are nine or nine hundred in the pews is immaterial. I don't stand in the pulpit to entertain or amuse

or perform, but rather to share the word of God with people I care about and am called to serve. Why? Because I know the same words of Jesus that you know: **“In this world, you will have trouble.”** And when that trouble comes, I want us to be ready. I want us to stand strong and firm in the name of the Lord.

It is one thing to talk about Jesus when life is trouble-free, and another to talk about Jesus when a child is dying; as was the case with Jairus. It’s one thing to talk about eternal life when daily life is good, and another to talk about eternal life when spending one’s last days in a hospice. The setting of today’s text then is one of real-life and real trouble. It is in this setting that the Savior says, **“Don’t be afraid; just believe.”**

I don’t intend to say much about Jairus today. One reason for this is that Scripture says little about him. He is mentioned only twice in the Gospels, once in Mark 5 and once more in Luke 8. All we really know about Jairus is that he was a synagogue ruler—the Greek word is **ἀρχισυνάγωγος**; that is, a layperson responsible for the physical operation of the synagogue. We also know that Jairus was the father of a twelve-year-old daughter.

However, what little we do know about Jairus is enough for us to easily identify with him. When we meet him in Mark 5, he is in serious trouble. His only daughter is sick and dying. And in desperation, he has come to Jesus Christ for help. Getting to Jesus, however, must have been difficult. We’re told twice in the text, verses 21 and 24, that Jesus was surrounded by a large crowd.

If you are a parent, you can imagine how Jairus must have fought his way through the crowd. You can imagine his urgent cries: “Move. Please, get out of the way. I need to get to Jesus. Don’t you understand? My only daughter is dying”—while others no doubt resisted his attempts and pleadings and abruptly replied, “Hey, wait your turn, buddy. I was here first. I got troubles of my own, you know.”

When Jairus finally reached Jesus, he fell down at His feet and begged for the Savior’s help. And again, as parents, we can imagine his sighs and sobs and groans as he prayed, **“My little daughter is dying. Please come and put Your hands on her so that she will be healed and live,”** Mark 5:23. This same verse states that Jairus **“pleaded earnestly”** with Jesus. The Greek literally says that ‘he pleaded much’ with Jesus. He wept. He poured out his soul. What a heart-wrenching picture.

In your troubles, have you ever prayed like that? I know I have. I prayed that way on the day before my father died, standing beside his hospital bed and watching him struggle to take every breath. “Please, Jesus,” I prayed. “Please, do something.

Please save him. Please don't let him die." Could Jairus have sounded much different? Over my life, I've not only prayed like Jairus, I've fallen facedown like Jairus—not on the sandy shore of Lake Galilee, but on the red carpet of a dark church building, where I pleaded with God to save a marriage instead of saving a life. The story of Jairus is our story; my story and your story. The story of unexpected trouble and of turning to Jesus for help.

If I were to ask for your personal stories, how many of you would include words like “in my trouble, I turned to Jesus for help, and guess what, Pastor Weis; things got even worse?” Hasn't this happened to you? It happened to Jairus. Just when circumstances started to improve—verse 24 states that **“Jesus went with him”**—messengers came with the sad news: **“Your daughter is dead. Why bother the teacher anymore?”** Mark 5:35.

To this point in our text, what have we learned about faith? We've learned that faith turns to Jesus in times of trouble. That's what Jairus did. We've learned that faith fights through the crowd and noise, that is, persists in reaching out to Jesus. That's what Jairus did. We've learned that faith does not arrogantly demand, but humbly pleads; falling at the feet of Jesus and relying upon his grace and mercy. That's what Jairus did. We've learned that faith is known to Jesus and acted upon by Jesus. Jesus went with Jairus in his trouble. Jesus goes with us in our troubles as well.

But there is more to learn about faith from this text; namely, **that even when our troubles worsen and seem all but hopeless, faith ignores the circumstances and relies upon the certain promises of God.** Notice. When messengers arrived with the news of the death of Jairus' daughter, Jesus did not say, “Well, I'm sorry. We tried. If only you had come to Me a little sooner.” Instead, Jesus ignored the message. Jesus ignored the message because Jesus is God, and God cares nothing about human impossibilities. And Jesus called upon Jairus, in faith, to ignore the human impossibilities too. Verse 36: **“Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, ‘Don't be afraid; just believe.’”**

By the grace of God, Jairus did believe. How he must have felt at that moment, knowing his daughter was dead, I don't know. What I do know is that he continued to believe on the long walk home. He continued to believe despite the impossibility of his circumstances. He continued to believe when he reached home and saw the mourners weeping. He continued to believe when he heard the mourners ridicule Jesus for saying **“the child is not dead but asleep,”** verse 39. He continued to believe when he and his wife sat by the bed of their dead daughter. And the result of trusting in Jesus Christ? Taking the child by the hand, **“Jesus said to her, ‘Talitha koum!’ (which means,**

‘Little girl, I say to you, get up!’). Immediately the girl stood up and walked around,” Mark 5:41.

Dear friends, I don’t know what troubles you may be facing today. Health troubles. Financial troubles. Relationship troubles. Pain. Worry. Grief. Loneliness. Loss. What I do know is that today, this hour, this moment, amid all of your troubles, Jesus Christ is saying the same to you as he said to Jairus: **“Don’t be afraid; just believe.”** ‘Believe in Me to do the right thing; not what you consider best but what I know is best. Believe in Me to deliver you from all your troubles, at the right time and in the right way. Believe in Me to give you the strength and wisdom you need in times of trouble. Believe in Me to change your times of trouble into times of joy.’”

Finally, isn’t that what God promises us in His word? If you had the opportunity to read the pre-service meditation for this morning, Psalm 30, I pray you found comfort in its words: **“Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me; O LORD, be my help. You turned my wailing into dancing, You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to You and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give You thanks forever.**

Jesus said, **“In this world you will have trouble.”** But praise God, the passage does not end there. Jesus went on to say: **“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”**