

“Confronted with Death and Life”

I suspect that most (if not all) of you haven't given a thought today about your death. That's the way we go through life – living – not thinking about death --- at least, not until we are confronted with it.

For most people, COVID was not a problem – but for a few, it was serious, even deadly. If you've watched the news recently – you've maybe seen the story about the bride-to-be whose father had a stroke on Father's Day, and is not expected to live long enough to see his daughter get married – so they moved the wedding up. And then there are the families of the 156 unaccounted ones in the condominium collapse in Florida – who, even now, are confronted by death.

Today, the Lord comes to us, and He speaks His Word to us. In the Gospel reading – we see that Jesus is confronted with death as well – but it's not unexpected. For this is why He came into this world and took on our flesh and blood – to die. But it is YOUR death that is first and foremost in His mind. Yes, He daily is confronted with His own death – but all this He does, because sin has brought death to you.

The initial confrontation is with Jairus whose daughter is “at the point of death.” No doubt this is unexpected – crashing in on Jairus like falling building. Children are not supposed to die before their parents. Out of the blue. Unexpected. Death is on the doorstep.

Jairus is a ruler of the synagogue – so he knows the Scriptures and what they promise about the Messiah who is to come. And Jairus comes to Jesus, because he believes that Jesus is the Messiah. He falls at His feet and worships Him by faith – imploring Him earnestly to heal and give life to his daughter.

To use the words of the psalmist in the Introit for today: “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” Jairus lifts up his eyes to Jesus – who created his daughter's life – trusting that He will keep her life.

Before the Maker of heaven and earth can make His way to the ruler's house – Jesus is again confronted with death. “There was a woman [in the crowds] who had a discharge of blood for twelve years ...”

Anytime we see blood on the outside of our body – it gets our attention – it's a reminder of death – life flowing out of the body. But this was not the normal discharge of blood – but had been going on for 12 years. This woman had “suffered much under many physicians.”

Twelve years of suffering – mental if not physical pain, frustration, depression. What we might not realize is that this discharge of blood also made her to be ceremonially unclean under the OT law – that is, she was unable to come into God's presence in worship. She was cut off from the holy things.

She could go about her day to day life – but her blood, and who it came into contact with – was a daily burden. She'd spent all she had on doctors and treatments – but they could not heal her. Now, here she is, just one amongst many in “a great crowd” – with nothing to offer the Lord – no expectation that He should take note of her – deserving of nothing.

But she too knows the one true God and the Messiah He has promised to send. “If I touch even His garments, I will be made well.” She knows and believes that Jesus is the Holy One of God – and as one who is unholy, she dares, by faith, to touch the Holy One. She lifts up her eyes to Jesus – her Savior – who has come to make the unclean, clean – the unholy, holy – the cut off, reconciled – the dead, alive.

“I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.” (Ps. 121:1-2, 5-8)

The Lord Jesus Christ has come to confront death – the death of Jairus' daughter – the woman with the discharge of blood – and your death. God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son to die on behalf of the whole world, all mankind, all who are dead in their trespasses and sin.

His death is for all – but life only comes to those who believe.

The great crowd pressing in on Jesus that day had many things in common – including the truth that all were sinners who had earned, and were deserving, of death – and the truth that Christ had come for them, would shed His blood to atone for all their sin, and by whose blood they would have life.

We are not told about everyone in that crowd – but Jairus and this woman are set before us – as those who were confronted with death, believed in Jesus, and received the gift of life. Others laughed at Jesus – thinking Him a fool because He said the little girl was sleeping, when in truth she was dead.

To Jesus – and to all who lift up their eyes, trusting Him with their life and death – death is but a sleep. He speaks the Word – He touches death – and death departs and life returns. It's what He does – daily, continually, expectedly – like waking each day from a night's sleep, or a brief nap.

Today Jesus presses into this crowd to confront death – your death. Did you hear what He said to you? “Talitha cumi.” Arise! Did you hear what He said? “I forgive you all your sins.” Did you hear what He said? My body, My blood. For you, for the forgiveness of all your sin – and where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation.

Come and touch the holy things – the Holy One of God. He comes to cleanse you, make you holy, and give you His life that has no end. Lift up your eyes to the Lord – who made you, who preserves your life, and who keeps your life – in this world, and for all eternity. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.