

Festival of All Saints Day (Trinity 24) – Vicar Anderson sermon
St. Matthew 9:18-26 “Death is Only a Sleep.”
November 5/6, 2022 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

+ + +

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the blessings of giving us life. That you have given us a time of grace here on earth. We repent of our sins as we forget what the outcome of our sins are and how serious it is. We ask that you keep us in your care until the day that you call us home where we will wake up in paradise with you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the 9th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, for she said to herself, “If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.” Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well. And when Jesus came to the ruler’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, “Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And the report of this went through all that district.

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who with touch and His Words can bring people back to life, who rose from the dead destroying death, and with a great shout on the last day will raise your bodies from the grave, dear fellow redeemed:

The funeral has been set. The casket has been walked into the church by the pallbearers. It is shut and sitting long ways across the front of the church. I don't even have to ask you to imagine this scenario because everyone has probably witnessed this exact scene. Funeral's make people uncomfortable and that is understandable because death, is not natural. With the Fall into sin, this became the outcome. The LORD told Adam and by association all of Adam's descendants, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19) There it is as plain as day in Genesis from God. He gave us breath and he can and will take it away. The question is how do we face what is to come of this? What can we do when our casket is the next one in front of the church?

The Holy Gospel for today shows us the comfort that we have when we are facing death. Matthew dives right into specifics, the synagogue ruler's daughter is dead. He has faith that Jesus can heal her, that she will live. We don't know what happened to this girl. She could have

been sick; she could have been injured in an accident or had a sudden health crisis. What we do know is that the gospel records that her health turned to the point that she was dying and that she died. Her time of grace was up. On their way to synagogue ruler's home, a woman who has suffered for twelve years with chronic bleeding has faith that Jesus can heal her. The other gospels record how she had gone to doctors and suffered under them, trying to find a cure. She had run out of options and she knew in her heart that there was only one option left. Now her disease is chronic. If she isn't healed this bleeding condition will stay with her until she dies.

The girl and the woman have the same problem happening to them. Problems in this life can arise that hurt the body, in the woman's case, the bleeding that she had would have stayed with her. We have many illnesses and various types of cancers that we face. The doctors will do all that they can, but it can be hard to hear the words that there are so many months left. The girl experienced the problem that will happen to all earthly bodies. A sickness or aging, or even a perfectly healthy body can and will die. There is no getting around it. Unless the end of the world comes now, our fate will be a casket in front of the church that all of your loved ones will see. A fate that we do deserve. As Jesus provides assurances, he shows that the world mocks the assurance that he brings.

He told the mourners that the girl was only sleeping. He brings out comfort, but the world doesn't see it that way. How can death be a sleep? It most certainly doesn't look like a sleep. You have been to funerals; you have seen the lifeless body lay in the casket. It's sometimes hard to disagree with the world when they say that's all we get for an ending from this world. A lifeless body in a box, dead in utter darkness never to wake up again.

In the woman and the girl, we see the physical outcome of sin and we see the spiritual outcome. We can have our physical ailments that can stick to our bodies, our sins stick to our bodies as well. It's not the harshest of sins that sticks to us. It is every single sin that we have committed. All of them, every bad thought, word and deed against God. They cover us and we cling to them, then God tells us what happens to us because of our sins. It is stated clearly in the first half of Romans 6:23, "*For the wages of sins is death!*" There is only one outcome for us when we stay in them and let them cover us. Our sins put us at God's wrath. We have done what is wrong and because of our sins, we deserve the most severe punishment. The world has a hard time dealing with death, the world wants to live forever. It does its best. Many medicines, hygiene products, lifestyles, etcetera. The world has come up with many things to try and beat death. Our text for today shows us that death isn't looking for a ripe old age. The other gospel writers record the girl was 12. *The wages of sins is death.*

We know how hard death can be. Our text shows us. What it boils down to is that we deem death as being unfair. Why did that little girl die, that's not fair? Why did my mother or father die, that's not fair? Why did my brother, or sister die, that's not fair? We easily find ourselves saying this. Usually when we say this then we come back at God and say, "You're not being fair God. Why do you get to determine who lives and dies? Why do you get to decide when my child, when my mother, my father's time of grace is over? As we try to tell God what to do because of what we think, God comes back and tells us how just and fair he is. He asks you and I, is it fair that you have broken my laws and commands? Is it fair that you have done what I have commanded you not to do? What punishment should be handed down for your sins? This was the command since the beginning of the world. *The wages of sins is death.*

Verse 25 reads, *"But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose."* Jesus is the conqueror of sin and death! Jesus tells us exactly who he is, that He is true God. The woman had faith that if she even just touched His cloak, she would be cured. Jesus tells her it is her faith that made her well. The faith that she had in him. This wasn't a superstitious thought. This was putting all hope on something outside of herself. She put her weight on His shoulders. Just as Jesus takes the woman's disease away from her, he takes our sins away from us. Romans 6:23 Fully reads, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"*. Nothing that we could earn. Only Jesus could live a perfect life—a perfect life lived for us. Then Jesus conquered our death.

He showed His power over death by going into the house where the girl had died. Jesus steps into the presence of death and shows that death is just a sleep. He ignored the mourners. He ignored the reports that she was truly gone. Jesus took the dead little girl by the hand and she came back to life. Death is conquered by Christ who with his Word can bring anyone back to life. We see how he is the master over death. He faced death for us. He took our punishment. After Jesus died on the cross, he rose three days later! Death is just a sleep. *Where oh death is your victory? Where oh death is your sting?* (1 Cor. 15:55) Jesus raised the girl with His Word so he will also raise us too with His Word. Because of Jesus resurrection we know that our death is only a sleep, we will rise from our sleep when our Savior calls us out of the grave by the power of His Word.

Jesus calls us to trust in Him like the woman and the synagogue ruler did. They did not get what they asked for because of some power in them, but because they knew they could not make their situation better. Only Jesus could. Faith always looks to Jesus. Jesus does not waver, but faith can. The trials of this life can cause our faith to dwindle. Just looking at our Scriptural account and there is no way that I could hold it together, to hear that my little daughter has died. The faith that we have is a passive faith not of ourselves but a faith that is found in Jesus alone. We receive this gift from Christ as it all works in one motion. The Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts, that we put solely in our Savior because He has never lied to us. Jesus has told us that he has conquered death. He tells us that he will raise you from your sleep.

For believers, Jesus tells us that death is only sleeping. As sad as it is when we see a casket of our loved ones whom God has called home, what comfort we have because of our Savior Jesus Christ. He said, *"Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping."* (v24) We do not need to fear what is to come like the world does. The world sees death as final. They are worried about what they think is unknown. They can have that sadness lead them into despair. It can be hard to live with no hope in what is to come. Therefore, we celebrate All Saints Day and it brings comfort to believers! Jesus teaches how death is only a sleep because of what he has done. Jesus has destroyed death and because of this the bodies of the saints are only sleeping as our souls are in heaven. Death has no hold on us. It is a peaceful sleep. Just as Jesus raised the girl by taking her hand and telling her to rise, He will tell us to rise with a shout on the last day. This glorious shout will raise all the dead, just as Christ raised himself from the grave. We will be with Christ in paradise.

The fear of the casket has been overcome and it wasn't by our doing. Death tries to crush us. Death wants us to fall into despair because of the sins that we have committed. Death is the law

laid out in front of you. It stares you down because this is the wages for your sins. Again, death has been overcome. Jesus has destroyed death. The world will laugh at us. We know that it is only a sleep. Death cannot hurt us.

Unless Christ comes bringing the last day with him, we will eventually find our bodies lying in the casket. We will continue to see our loved ones in them. We know that they are sleeping. We know that this is not the end. Our sins do not hold us down in the grave. Death has no sting. Christ has put an end to death. In the third article we confess our faith knowing that our bodies will rise. We have comfort as we confess, "I believe... in the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." This means that when Jesus comes with a shout on the last day, the Holy Spirit "will raise up me and all the dead, and will grant me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true." (3rd Article Meaning) Amen.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

+ + +