

1 July 2018
Pentecost 6
Confirmation of Joanna Douthwaite

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Three Daughters”

Text: Mark 5:21-43 (Lamentations 3:22-33)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

His little girl was dying. He didn't know what to do. He would do anything for her - *anything!* But what could he do? Death had her in its clutches. He never felt so helpless. He had been so overjoyed when she was born. He had watched her grow. She was twelve years old now, just becoming a young woman. But no matter how old she got, she would always be his little girl.

So when he hears the news . . . that Jesus just got off the boat that just came ashore, he didn't hesitate. For he had heard. How Jesus healed. People who were demon-possessed, who had fevers and leprosy, who had withered and useless limbs - it didn't matter what it was. Jesus gave them healing and life. So it must be for him, for his daughter. He would go to Jesus. He didn't want to leave his daughter's side, but this was his only hope. He would fight through the crowd with all the desperation and determination that only a father could have. He would fight for his daughter's life. There wasn't much time . . .

Well, he did it. He got through. He had gotten to Jesus, and Jesus was coming with him. He was anxious at first, but with each step they took, he had more and more hope . . . he allowed himself to start to think of the future again . . . of his daughter getting married . . . of grandchildren . . .

So when Jesus suddenly stopped . . . no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no! ***Who touched me?*** Who touched me? Probably 50 people touched you Jesus! Maybe more. Who cares? C'mon! . . . But Jesus cared. He could see it in His face. He could hear it in His voice. And he knew Jesus wasn't going anywhere until He got an answer. And that hope he just started having again . . . well, the monster of fear and anxiety had returned.

It was a woman. She had been bleeding for twelve years - the same amount of time that his daughter had been alive. He felt for her. But still, Jesus, remember? Death? Let's go!

But it didn't matter. For just as he heard Jesus speaking, he heard another familiar voice. One of his servants. In fact, they both said the word “daughter” at the same time!

Daughter . . . Your daughter . . . has made you well . . . is dead.

He froze. He couldn't move, couldn't speak, couldn't think. He felt the life rushing out of him. He had done everything he could; he had fought so hard . . .

But then Jesus looked at him and said, ***Do not fear, only believe.*** And Jesus started going again. And now it was like Jesus was saying: *Your little girl, death, remember? Let's go!*

So he did. Through the fog of grief, confusion, numbness, and fear.

They got to his house. How long had it taken? He didn't know. But long enough that the mourners had gathered. He heard the wailing when they got close. The wailing pounding deeper and deeper the nail of grief that was stabbing through his heart. And then laughter . . . but not happy laughter; disbelieving, mocking laughter. Jesus had said she was just sleeping. Oh that it were so!

And then it was quiet. It was just he and his wife and Jesus and some of Jesus' disciples in the room. And with the same voice that He spoke to that woman on the road, Jesus spoke to his daughter: ***Talitha cumi. Little girl, arise.*** And she did. There would not be just one, but two daughters, given life this day.

After they ate, after the mourners had left rejoicing, after Jesus and His disciples had left, after all the hubbub had died down, I'm sure Jairus told his daughter what had happened. How sick she had been . . . how worried to death he was . . . the hope he had in Jesus . . . his crushing grief at hearing the words of his servant . . . how his fight for her ended, but how Jesus would not stop. That He kept fighting. And He won. Even over death itself . . .

Jairus didn't know it then, but that's not the last time he would hear of Jesus conquering even death itself . . . Some people laughed that same mocking laugh when they got word that Jesus' tomb was empty and that some were saying that Jesus rose from the dead . . . but not Jairus. Death took his little girl, but Jesus kept fighting. They put Jesus on a cross, but He kept fighting. They laid Him in a tomb, but He won. He arose. What Jesus had done that day for him, He had come to do for all people.

And He has. Because, well, there's another twelve-year-old daughter who Jesus raised from death. She's actually here today. Her father isn't one of the rulers of the synagogue, but a pastor. This little girl was born dead *in sin* - the sin passed down to her by her father! Some people laugh at that statement - that disbelieving, mocking kind of laugh - because she looked quite alive when she was born. But spiritually she was not. But that father brought her to Jesus, that He might touch her and raise her to life. And He did. Through water and the Word, through Holy Baptism, Jesus said to her, ***Talitha cumi. Little girl, arise.*** And she did. It wasn't as dramatic as it was that day in Jairus' house, but it was the same problem, the same Jesus, the same fight, the same gift.

And now, that father told his daughter what happened to her. Taught her about Jesus. And, as Jesus told Jairus, he is going to *give her [now] something to eat*. The Body and Blood of Jesus, who would not stop fighting for her. The Body and Blood of Jesus which died for her and rose for her, to give her life. Life now and life forever.

And so Joanna learned about sin and death. The sin and death she inherited from her father, and the sin and death the Commandments show her. The sins she does the evidence of the sin and death she needs rescuing from. The sin and death she confesses with us at the beginning of the Divine Service here every week, where Jesus comes to this house to raise all of us to life with His forgiveness.

And she learned who Jesus is - this man who is God enfleshed, God incarnate, come to fight for us and for all people. A fight to the finish; a fight to the death. And that just like with Jairus, just when all looked hopeless and lost, just when it looked as if death had won, Jesus won. He rose from death so that all of us who die might rise too. With Him. And be sons of His Father in Him, and with His Spirit in us. That yes, it's true! God wants sinners as His children and to live with Him forever.

And so Joanna also learned to talk to our Father - our Father who provides for all our needs, and to whom we pray for every need of every person, and know that we are heard. That our Father is always doing what is best for us . . . even when our bleeding lasts twelve years . . . even when hope seems to turn to hopelessness . . . even when our loved ones are taken from us. *Do not fear, only believe*, Jesus says to us still today.

And then there was that day when Jesus said *Talitha cumi* to Joanna - October 30, 2005. She learned about that day, too, when she was baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And now her Father is going to give her something to eat. She learned what that is too: that just as God's words are not just words but words that are living and powerful, and that just as God's water is not just water but water that raises from the dead and gives life, so too this food she is going to receive is not just bread and wine, but that under this bread and wine God is going to feed her with the Body and Blood of His Son. The Son that created her, the Son that died for her, the Son that rose for her, the Son that raised her, the Son that baptized her, the Son that cares for her, the Son that forgives her, is now the Son that will give her Himself to eat and drink - to keep and sustain her in her new life. His food for His life in His daughter. And today she says AMEN to that.

But not just Joanna. Today we remember all this, too. The same problem, the same Jesus, the same fight, the same gift, for us. That learning the catechism isn't just about learning facts, but learning Jesus. And learning how Jesus comes to us still today, here, in this house, in the Divine Service. Touching, raising, forgiving, giving hope and life. And that this is for all people - of every age, nationality, ethnicity; no matter what sins beset us and that we struggle with; no matter how others see us and perceive us. Jesus is here to touch

us with His love and forgiveness, His hope and life. All that we need.

For as we heard from the book of Lamentations earlier:

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”*

Now, usually, I think, we hear lamentations *during* catechism instruction, not at the end of it! At the end is rejoicing! But what wonderful words, here. Wonderful words spoken by Jeremiah *in the midst* of trial, trouble, and tribulation. Words of faith. For Jesus is with us exactly in the midst of those times, as He was with Jairus. And therefore they are not hopeless times. There are never hopeless times with Jesus. And so whatever you are going through, whatever struggles, you have a faithful God with you.

And you know, every catechism class is different. Different students, different questions, different dynamics. And different memories. I think Joanna will remember hers because of what happened in the middle of it - when a falling tree interrupted our class and delayed things a bit. But, as she learned, it was the tree that *didn't* fall, and the one who hung on it, that made the difference. I hope she'll remember *that* tree more than the one that fell, and remember the Word of God she heard today - this word of not two, but **three** daughters. All given life, all given healing, all **given Jesus**.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.