

**Fifth Sunday after Pentecost • July 1, 2012**

*St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA*

*Rev. Braun Campbell*

Mark 5:21-43

“Desperate”

“Life is good.” Some friends of mine who are outdoor enthusiasts like the line of t-shirts and other apparel which display that phrase. You might see them around more often in these days of summer if you get outside with others to hike or picnic, or maybe catch some fireworks for the Fourth of July. These clothes are usually pretty colorful, and sometimes there's a graphic that goes along with the text, depicting different outdoor sports or activities like golfing or fishing or off-roading – there's even one for grilling. (I'd like to see a shirt featuring hammock-lounging, in case you happen to come across one.)

Life is good, especially for those of us who live in this time and place. By and large, we have food and shelter and clean water. We've got transportation to get to where we want to go, and we've got climate control that keeps us comfortable most everywhere we go, even when the days get hot. We've got leisure time available for our recreation and options upon options for how to put that time to use. For people like us who are largely comfortable and well-supplied from day to day, life is indeed good. We trust in the systems and structures that stand around us, keeping life stable – like two strong trees on which you hang your hammock.

But what happens when that changes? The winds can pick up, blowing your hammock to and fro; you get tossed out on to the ground. If you spouse or your child was struck by a terminal illness, what would you do? If you had a debilitating, persistent health condition that disrupted your day-to-day life, even throwing off your ability to work or do things that you'd once taken for granted, how would you address it? Even though there's been much debate about it in the public realm as of late, our country has built up the most sophisticated medical field – including all associated professionals and available resources – in our entire world. Seeking to care for your loved one or for yourself, how many doctors would you see or how many treatments would you try if there was hope for a cure, something that would get life back to the way it was meant to be? How much money would you spend to save your child's life? How many experimental procedures might you be willing to endure to fix things once and for all? But going to the doctor doesn't mean that your spouse or child will get better. Taking a pill doesn't mean that you'll be cured. As the days and weeks – and even years – pass by, you might start to wonder if there's any hope for the future. You can't give up, though, because giving up means certain death. **Life is good; death is bad.** You're longing for hope, seeking it wherever it might be found. There's a word for your situation: **you're desperate.**

We hear about some desperate people in today's Gospel account. When you consider how you'd feel and the lengths to which you'd go to find healing when things fall apart, Jairus and the bleeding woman don't seem all that different from us. They've tried everything they could think of, yet nothing has worked. But then the word comes that Jesus is back on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. His fame here has grown to the point that crowds of people have gathered around him, looking to see what great thing will happen next. As a leader of the synagogue, Jairus would have been one of the most well-respected members of the community. In his desperate search for hope for his young daughter, Jairus falls down at Jesus' feet, trusting that Jesus could bring her back from the brink of death. As they go, a woman pushes herself through the crowds to get to Jesus, too. She'd been treated by doctor after doctor, giving up all her wealth in seeking a cure for a condition that only worsened; yet she, too, trusted that this Jesus could make her whole. These are a couple of desperate people, indeed.

You heard what happened next. The woman touched Jesus' clothes and immediately she was made whole – she felt it. Jesus stopped the procession taking precious time to seek out the person that had touched him. It wasn't magic that had healed this woman, but God's grace. Jesus affirmed her and the lasting nature of the healing she'd just received, sending her with the assurance that God has answered her search for hope. Healing that woman proved costly to Jairus' daughter. The professional mourners that the culture required when someone had died had already gathered and begun their loud and showy work at the synagogue leader's home. Jesus' assertion that the girl was only sleeping seemed folly to

them; so he went on, taking only her parents and his three closest disciples. And again with a touch, Jesus drove out death.

Jesus heals. With his touch, Jesus comes into our lives and drives out death and dying. The woman whose story we heard would have been considered ceremonially and culturally unclean. By her touch, she would have even rendered unclean all the people that she would have had to push past in order to get close to Jesus. But when she touches Jesus, she doesn't make him unclean; rather, just the opposite takes place: Jesus' holiness and power from his Father drive out the uncleanness in her. At Jairus' house, Jesus comes into contact with the unclean when he touches the lifeless body that lay in that room. And again, Jesus' touch drives out death and the young girl is restored to life – death has no power over him; it cannot withstand his command.

We have a Savior who overcomes death. **Life is good. Death is bad.** It's not a part of God's original design, and yet each and every one of us is born infected with this terminal illness. We live in fear of death, the death of our loved ones or our own death. That makes sense, because death is not good. So God sent His Son to do something about it. Jesus did not come only to bring healing to people who would, ultimately, die. He came to fix the problem once and for all, to bring us the hope that we need in this desperate and ailing world. Jesus brings healing that overcomes death, in our living and even in our dying. On that day when our Lord comes again, the dead shall be raised. Healing shall be given. Jesus delivers the ultimate resolution to our search for hope. Our hope has its goal in him. That's where it was for the woman who bled, that's where it was for Jairus: Jesus.

As we come into the Fourth of July and celebrate the gift of freedom that we enjoy as Americans, I encourage you to consider another Fourth: **the Fourth Petition.** As you pray the Lord's Prayer and ask God for your "daily bread," you're not just asking for a morsel to eat. You're asking Him for everything that you need to sustain your body and life. Here in the United States, you can find the motto "In God We Trust" on our currency and engraved on buildings. But for much of our nation, those are just words without substance. As Christians, though, as people who look to Jesus for your hope, the truth of "in God we trust" forms lives. You can depend on Jesus, the Son of God, from day to day, for in him you have the sure sign that you have a God who cares for your needs both spiritual and physical, a God who provides hope in a desperate world. God cares about the practical things: Jesus raises Jairus' daughter, then instructs her family to give her some food to eat – she'll be hungry!

Rather than a set of systems or structures of human design, it is Jesus who will give you hope when the winds blow strong and upend your hammock. Technology and medicine are indeed great gifts from God when used appropriately; however, they can and do fail, passing things that they are. Not even your money or your strength is a lasting source of hope: don't turn to them. **Turn to the cross instead.** As you pray the Fourth Petition later on in this service and then in all the days ahead, remember that you have a God who gives you your daily bread.

Life *is* good, especially when you remember from Whose hand it comes, because in Him, you have hope.

**Amen.**