

“TWO FOR THE PRICE OF NONE”

Matthew 9:18-26

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity (OT: First Series; NT: Series I)/All Saints' Sunday

November 6, 2016

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson is from *The Gospel According to Matthew*, chapter 9, verses 18 through 26. It is on page 687 of the pew Bible.

In this gospel lesson, Jesus gives us two miracles for the price of ... well ... *none*. And as he does this, he demonstrates his power over death, both as a process, and as a terminal event at the end of life.

Please stand, as you are able, for the gospel. From Matthew 9, we begin reading at verse 18.

¹⁸ 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.” ¹⁹ And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. ²⁰ 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, ²¹ for she said to herself, “If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.” ²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “**Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.**” And instantly the woman was made well. ²³ And when Jesus came to the ruler’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, ²⁴ he said, “**Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping.**” And they laughed at him. ²⁵ But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. ²⁶ And the report of this went through all that district.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

November 1 was All Saints’ Day. On All Saints’ Day we remember those who fell asleep in Jesus before us. We do not worship the saints, and we do not pray to them, but we do remember them, and we thank God for them.

When we call them “saints,” we do not mean they were perfect. We do not even mean they were necessarily good by human standards. We simply mean they have been made holy by the blood of Jesus Christ. So for all of us who believe in Jesus, we can rightly refer to ourselves—to you and me—as “saints,” despite plenty of apparent evidence to the contrary. But on All Saints’ Day, we specifically remember those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

All Saints’ Day was on Tuesday, and we didn’t have church then, but it’s worth observing, because death affects us all.

In our congregation there was one member within the last year who fell asleep in Jesus. His name is Carlyle, but everyone called him “Bud.” Today we remember him. We thank God for his life. We thank God for a “blessed end,” that is, that he fell asleep believing in Jesus. We thank God that his soul is with Jesus now. And we remember Jesus’ promise to return and raise his body from the dead.

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And I know that many of you are already thinking of others who died in the faith this past year. I won't try to name all their names, because I would miss some, and that wouldn't be fair. But I know some of you are thinking of brothers or sisters. Some of you are thinking of a parent or a grandparent or an aunt or uncle. Some of you are thinking of friends. Some of you are thinking of children—perhaps even children who never lived long enough to receive a name. And many of you are thinking of saints who fell asleep in Jesus two years ago, or ten years ago, or fifty years ago—maybe even longer.

We thank God for their lives and his faithfulness to them. We thank God that their souls are with him now. And we remember Jesus' promise to return and raise their bodies from the dead.

Sometimes people die. Sometimes they die too soon. In this gospel lesson it was a twelve-year-old girl. Matthew doesn't tell us she was twelve years old, but Mark and Luke have longer versions of this double-miracle story, and they give us the girl's age. She was twelve years old (Mark 5:42; Luke 8:42). They also tell us that her dad's name was Jairus; he was a ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum (9:1; Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41). He was a real man. His daughter was a real twelve-year-old girl. And she died. It was a tragedy.

When a twelve-year-old girl dies, it is obvious to everyone that twelve years old is too soon. But if the Bible is to be believed—and it most certainly is—then we should also believe that 112 is too soon. 912 years old is too soon. Whatever age it is, it is too soon.

Let me explain. When God created everything, he created it good. He even called it “very good” (Gen. 1:31). But death is not good. Death is bad—very bad. The Bible calls death “the last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26). God did not create death, and he did not intend for us to die. Death was our choice. It is a choice our first parents—Adam and Eve—made for us. And they made the wrong choice. That is why death began.

Sometimes people ask me, “If Adam and Eve hadn't sinned, would they have lived forever?” The answer is, *yes; they would have*. “Death [came into the world] through sin.” That's Romans 5:12. Without sin, there is no death.

When God put Adam and Eve in the garden, he gave them one prohibition. He said, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17). Had they not eaten the fruit, they would not have died ... ever. But they did eat. And they did die.

For those of you who know the rest of the story, you might be thinking, “But they didn't die right away. God said, ‘in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’ But they lived several more years.”

Well, if that's what you are thinking, you would be right. Adam lived to be 930 years old. His heart didn't stop beating the day he ate the fruit. But he did start dying.

Physical death is more than just that one terminal event at the end of life. Death is a process. For some people it is a very painful process. But it is a process that occurs in every sinner. Adam and Eve started dying the moment they became sinners. We start dying the moment we become sinners, which also happens to be the moment we are conceived. Death is a process that is going on inside all of us, even as we live. Sounds like a paradox, doesn't it?

And this is especially paradoxical in children. We watch them grow, and develop, and get stronger. It seems like they are becoming more and more alive every day. But the biblical

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teaching is that they too are dying. And if we pull out a microscope and observe their cells, we will see that the Bible is right. Death is a process that begins at conception.

For some children, this process of death overcomes them very early in life, even before they are born. Somewhere around 20% of children die as a result of miscarriage. And on All Saints' Day, it is appropriate to remember those we have lost, even if we may not know about it. Whether it happened in the past year or at some other time, some of you have experienced that loss. And it is obviously way too early. Whenever a child dies, it is obvious to everyone that it was too soon.

And Jesus agrees. So when this broken-hearted father comes to Jesus and begs for help, Jesus goes. Jesus had been in the middle of teaching and answering questions when this ruler came in and knelt before him. This was an act of worship. And he confessed his faith in Jesus. “Come and lay your hand on her, and she will live” (9:18). So Jesus got up and went with him. Class dismissed. The teacher has to go undo death.

But as Jesus was on his way to undo death, he was touched by a woman who was on her way into death. She had been suffering from a hemorrhage—or a discharge of blood—for twelve years. This must have caused her great suffering. Her life would have been at risk on a regular basis. And on top of that, the bleeding made her ceremonially unclean. She couldn't go to the temple. The bleeding was a constant reminder that she was creeping closer and closer to death, every single day. She was very well acquainted with the process of death.

But she too—like the dead girl's father—had faith in Jesus—specifically in the *touch* of Jesus. The dead girl's father knew that if Jesus would come and lay his hand on his twelve-year-old daughter, she would live. And this woman believed that if she could only touch Jesus' garment, twelve years of bleeding would stop. And it did. Jesus turned and noticed her and said, “Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well” (9:22). Or we could also translate it, “Your faith has *saved you*”—that is, in the whole and complete sense of being saved both in body and in soul.

And notice what Jesus calls her. He calls her, “*daughter.*” Just like the twelve-year-old girl, this grown woman is called, “*daughter.*” This is a beautiful and comforting title. It is a reminder that she has a Father who loves her. It is a reminder to all who trust in Jesus—regardless of age—that we have a Father in heaven who loves us and takes care of us.

So she touches Jesus, Jesus turns and speaks to her, and “instantly the woman was made well” (9:22). Twelve years of bleeding instantly stopped. She touched Jesus' garment. And Jesus reached down into the process of death, and made it stop. He put it on hold. We assume, and rightly so, that eventually this woman got sick and died again. But not that day, and not from that discharge of blood. Jesus has authority over death, and he used that authority to help her.

Then Jesus continued on his journey to the dead girl. When he got to the house he had a bit of an altercation with the mourners. There were flute players, who must have been playing some kind of dirge. And there was a crowd that was pretty shaken up. There were mourning, and rightly so. That's what you do when someone dies, especially when they are obviously way too young.

But Jesus says to them, “Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping” (9:24).

And they all laughed at Jesus, not in the “funny, ha-ha” kind of way, but in the “this guy is a fool” kind of way. Most anyone can tell the difference between death and a nap. But what kind

of fool is this Jesus? He hasn't even walked into the house yet. He hasn't even seen the dead girl. What makes him think she is just sleeping?

But Jesus is no fool. He knows what he is talking about. It's not that the people were wrong. The girl really was dead, and Jesus knew it. But to Jesus, death is not death. So he managed to get the crowd out of the house, and he went inside. He took the girl by the hand. He picked up her cold, dead, little hand ... and it got warm. “And the girl arose” (9:25).

When Jesus took her by the hand, he reached down into death, and he said, “Not today.” He brought her back. He woke the girl up from death.

So what does this mean for us? Especially today, when we remember our brothers and sisters, our parents and grandparents, our husbands and wives, our aunts and uncles, our friends and even—like Jairus did—our children, what does God's Word say to us today?

Well, Jesus teaches us proper vocabulary. He teaches us a new word for death. He teaches us the *right* word for death.

Sometimes we find it so blunt and devastating to say that so-and-so died, that we use euphemisms—these substitute terms—instead of the word *death*. We say that grandma *passed away*. But that's not Christian vocabulary, because Jesus never speaks of dead people as if they are actually gone, and we shouldn't either. As Christians we have the privilege of using terminology that confesses our hope in the resurrection of the dead.

So the next time you feel like saying, “So-and-so passed away,” don't. You don't have to say it. You get to say something better. Say, “My grandma,” or, “my brother,” or, “my father,” or, “my child fell asleep in Jesus Christ.” Say that, because it's true.

Your loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus Christ are not gone. Their souls are with Jesus now in heaven. And this is good. This is so very good. But it's not even the best part. Even though they are with Jesus now, they are also waiting for something better. They are waiting for that Day when Jesus will return to earth to raise the dead from sleep. He will awaken the ashes, bones, and dust of his dear saints. He will put body and soul back together again. And he will transform us into his own likeness.

This is our blessed hope. Jesus has authority over death. So he calls it sleep. And he proves his power by waking this twelve-year-old girl up from death.

But simply waking her up from death is not enough. Remember, death is a process, and it is a process that is continually occurring in sinners. Death is the result of sin, and if Jesus is going to deal with death in any lasting way, he is going to have to deal with sin. As long as sin remains, that twelve-year-old girl will die again, and so will we.

Death is the final enemy, but it is merely the result of a different enemy that comes first. That enemy is sin. If sin causes death, then something must really be done about sin, in order to make death stop forever.

Before the sermon we sang a battle hymn, “The Son of God Goes Forth to War” (*Ambassador Hymnal*, 165). It might seem kind of strange to sing a war song when we're talking about how bad death is. I mean, haven't we had enough violence? Isn't that the problem?

Yeah. But what does the Son of God go forth to war against? Is he going to war against some oppressive dictator or a band of evil pirates? No; it's a different kind of war. He is going to war against sin, death, and the devil.

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And what kind of weapons is he using? Is he using swords or guns or bombs? No. He is using “his holy and precious blood” and “his innocent sufferings and death.” When we sing, “The Son of God goes forth to war a kingly crown to gain,” what kind of crown are we talking about? We’re not talking about a crown of gold. It’s a crown of thorns. And when we sing, “His blood red banner streams afar,” how did the banner get to be blood red? It’s Jesus’ blood.

When the Son of God goes forth to war, he does not go to inflict violence. He goes to suffer violence. His battlefield was the cross. He went to war with sin, death, and the devil, and he defeated them by dying. He won the battle by suffering the punishment for sin, so that sin can be removed. And when sin is removed, the process of death will stop.

Now when Jesus returns to raise the dead, death will be undone forever. And he proved it with his own resurrection. After he had been crucified and laid in the tomb, he woke up again, and he showed us what a body is like when sin is gone. And it is glorious. It lives forever in perfection. This is the blessed hope we share for ourselves, and for all the saints who have fallen asleep in Jesus before us.

Now as we eat and drink this body and blood that was poured out for us, we participate in the same body and blood that is shared by the saints all around the world. It is the same body and blood that was shared by the saints who have fallen asleep in Jesus before us. And so, as we eat and drink, we are one with each other ... and with all the saints, for all are one in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.