

Asking Jesus, Pt. 2
Come and Lay Your Hands on Her
Mark 5: 21-24;35-42

**First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

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This morning the plea made of Jesus is particularly poignant. A desperate father asked Jesus to heal his daughter with the words, “Come and lay your hands on her.” We’ll continue to follow the five-step process we are using during Lent as we explore the questions and requests we brought to Jesus in the gospels. We have already prayed, read the story and identified the key phrase. So let’s go to step two:



Who’s Asking?

Jesus had just returned by boat from the other side of the Sea of Galilee. A great crowd awaited him on shore. A man named Jairus hurriedly pushed his way through the throng and fell before Jesus’ feet. The gospel tells us that he was one of the rulers of the synagogue. If we think of a local church today, Jairus would have been one of the elders. Perhaps Jairus oversaw the weekly services of prayer

and the teaching of God’s Word. He was a dedicated and spiritual man. But in this scene, Jairus himself is thinking of only one identity. He is a father. And his only daughter, is dying of an illness. His request is coming straight out of his fatherly heart. Though his daughter was 12 years old, so close to adulthood, Jairus called her his little girl. A daddy may grow to see his daughter become a woman in all her fullness. But a deep part of him always and forever sees her as his little girl. She’s in the soft spot of even the most rugged heart. Who’s asking? A dad.



The Question Within the Question

It’s obvious that Jairus wants his daughter to be healed of her illness before she dies. But we know that all the events recorded in the gospels speak beyond themselves. They are emblems of the way Jesus encountered human suffering. In this painting by George Jacomb-Hood, we see the daughter exhausted upon her bed. She is limp and lifeless. Overwhelmed by her illness.

All seems hopeless. With this image from later in the story in our minds, let's look closely at how Jairus phrased his request. Our translation says, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live." Imagine that heartfelt request being spoken straight into this painting's scene of a girl whose life has expired from dreadful disease.

Now quite often it is not particularly helpful to look at how a more literal translation of the original language might sound. Our English Bibles are beautifully rendered. But as I studied this passage, I was struck by the phrasing Jairus used. He literally said of his little girl, "She is holding at the end." I turned that over and over in my mind. She is holding at the end. She is grasping for the finish line. She's straining toward her appointed conclusion. She's on the verge of tumbling into the darkness. Whatever purpose she had in these 12 years, it's nearly completed. She seems to be holding onto death harder than she's gripping life. Won't you come and pull her back from the brink? Won't you stop her from going into the darkness with a touch of your hand?

I realized this scene can be about a whole lot more than a physical disease. How many of us have loved someone so much it makes our bones ache? How many who have loved that way have felt the powerlessness that for all your love, you don't know how to save someone? She's reaching toward the end. I don't know how to get her back. He's pushing toward the cliff's edge and he can't hear me calling to him. I've done everything I know to do and it's not enough. They seem to want to grasp the darkness more than the light.

Mental illness with its incessant, intrusive dark thoughts can impel people toward an untimely end. It's far, far beyond just having a straight talk where you tell someone to get it together. They can't.

Natural rebellion and a sense of invincibility drives many adolescents to risky behavior. But some in their woundedness and anger push beyond just doing stupid things toward a sprint to reckless ruin. We try to warn them but our words slough off like rain water.

Middle aged crazy unravels marriages and careers. People know better but get fooled again by their deep need to full for the same old bright shiny objects of forbidden sex, displays of power or conspicuous consumption.

The despair in the declining years, particularly the prospect of a long, humiliating, debilitating disease can impel people to reach too soon toward their end. Giving up, or worse.

My loved one reaches toward her end. Won't you come? Please, please, please won't you come? The request within the request is the deep heart cry that Jesus would answer the human despair that strikes those we love.



And there's more to be seen in a close look at Jairus' plea. "Will you come and lay your hands on her, that she might be made well, and live?" Jairus begs Jesus to put his hands on her. To make skin to skin contact. In this painting by Edwin Long, Jesus tenderly leans over the girl. Healing light shines through the window. He gazes on her so sweetly, looks straight at her, his face radiating life to her face. He takes her by the hand just as Jairus

asked.

Such touch was not necessary for Jesus to heal. But the heart of Jairus' request was that through hand to hand clasping, the great exchange could be made. To take her illness into himself through touch. And through the same touch to pour his health into her. And even more, to take our broken humanity and give us his new creation. To take our sin and give us his forgiveness. This is the word of Isaiah's prophecy about the Messiah, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...He was pierced for our transgressions...and with his wounds we are healed." (Is. 53:4).

And there's a bit more. Jairus asked, "that she may be made well, and live." That word for "well" is the very same word that means "save." It's a simple word with layers of meaning. It's what Peter shouted when he was sinking in the waves, "Lord, save." It's also the word used to be transferred from spiritual death to eternal life. Touch her that she may be *saved*, in every sense of the word. Heal her body. Restore her relationships. Forgive her sins. Bring her into life-giving relationship to you. Make her well that she might live, in the fullest sense of the word. Live with everlasting life flowing through her and out to others.

Won't you come and lay your hands on her that she might be made well and live? This is a deep prayer. I invite you to pray this daily for a loved one for whom

you have particular concern. Pray it in all its fullness with your whole heart. Come to him Lord Jesus. Take her hand in yours precious Lord. Make him well. Save him through and through. That she may live with everlasting life in every moment.



Jesus' Reply.

The twist in the event is that the little girl died before Jesus got there. The family had already begun the loud wailing that accompanied untimely death in that culture. Jesus, though, seemed unperturbed. Death did not frighten him with finality the way it does us. He told a stricken

Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe." His quiet words contrasted with the loud sobs of grief coming from the girl's room. Jesus entered the room of death and mourning. He spoke confidently, "The child is not dead but sleeping." How crazy this sounded. Jesus was too late. People knew death when they saw it.

But as we have seen from the first, Jesus was remarkably self-possessed, because he was entirely devoted to his Father's mission. He shut out all the doubt in the onlookers as he sent them from the room. Then, as Jairus requested, Jesus took the girl's hand in his own. He took her grip off of death and placed it into his own everlasting life. Gently, he called her back, "Little girl, I say to you arise!" Live again. Live some more. Live in fullness. Glorify God and love others in this restored life I give you. Arise!

Of course this "arise" is one of the two words used for resurrection. Immediately the girl got up. And of course this word for "got up" is the other resurrection word in the New Testament! Jesus saved her. She began to live again in the world, so touchingly symbolized by Mark's recording that they gave her something to eat.

Through this tender story we discover that with Jesus, death's grip is broken. Christ has shattered the cell doors of Hades. We don't have to stay in the lonely, personal hell of our sin. We don't have to fear everlasting separation from our Lord or our loved ones. The entire experience of death is different for those in Christ. Amidst the tears common to all at graveside, a quiet peace pervades those who know the one who passed through death and hell for us.

In this story we begin to discover the depths of Jesus' willingness to go into the very rooms of death and despair. He enters the room where the little one has died and brings his peace into the swirling chaos of grief. He brings his light into the darkness. This story speaks way beyond this one event. It's an emblem for the one who died and lived again so that we who die can know hope. It tells us that Jesus does not prevent every illness or every death. Quite the opposite. Our struggles and losses occur within his sovereign providence. But that is not the end of it. This story shines the light that all this dying does *not* have the last word. All these ways that cause us to reach toward our end are *not* the end of the story.

So hope arises even for those who have lost loved ones to suicide. Some we love seem to be undergoing a despair untouchable by all our psychiatric skill. But Jesus who willingly passed through the hell of God-forsakenness is not baffled by their experience. Some we love experience an internal contradiction so strong it seems only self-violence can resolve it. But Jesus, caught in the crossfire of human rejection and divine wrath upon the cross, has already resolved every source of shame and every situation of paradox in his own person. Whereas our self-harm will *not* soothe the pain, pay the price incurred, or fill the voids we undergo, Christ's self-offering has created an atonement that dissolves even seemingly indelible stains.

Jesus did not avoid the room where an untimely death occurred. He did not avoid the realm of death to which all humans go. Rather he went there. He died as the sinless one who was made to be sin on our behalf. He went to the inky darkness of the state of death so that we never go there alone. Now he leads us through. We like Jairus are dismayed by all this suffering. But Jesus himself went off the map into the wasteland of hell. There are no regions of human experience unknown to him. The Father did not rescue his Son immediately from the cross. He underwent the plummet into death's isolation so that we cannot leap, no matter how angrily we push off, beyond his embrace of all human suffering. Jesus knows. And still he loves. We have not the power to negate that love even by the rashest act. We are not alone, nor are the most tangled and wayward of his sheep. So Catherine Aslanoff triumphantly declares, "Christ's descent into [death] is his presence in our various hells, both personal and collective; our illnesses, our infirmities, our wars, our gulags, our asylums, our murders, our suicides, our death."

This request of Jairus becomes our prayer for individual loved ones and for a world torn apart by war. These little ones reach toward their end. These little ones are dying. Won't you come. Lay your hands upon the warring and the murdered. Lay your hands on the addicted and the wandering. Lay your hands upon the

adulterers and the swindlers. Lay your hands on the betrayed and the swindled.
That they might be saved and lived.

And so the words of Jesus become the very gospel that Christ's people are called to proclaim in word and deed. We go to the broken ones and to the broken places. We say as we offer our lives, in Christ's name, "Little girl, arise!"

Responding in Prayer

Ah, dear Jesus, Lord of love,
How often in this hard world
Those we love reach too soon for death!

We love them so,
But we can't break the grip
Of powers too strong for them.
Won't you come?
Take her hand in yours.
Change her grip on death
To a clasping of life eternal.

Transfer his despairing reach for the end
To an embrace of wellness now.
Save, Lord!
Won't you come?
Won't you take hands with us?
Won't you make us whole
That we might live?

Raise us! Get us up.
Still the voices that too soon
Declare our end.
Make us new within.
Take our hand and lift us up.
Won't you come?