

Live as One Who Is Dying

The Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity

November 19, 2023

Matthew 9:18–26

In the Gospel reading today we learn what it means to live and what it means to be saved. We are shown how to live and how we are saved. Our natural inclination is to look for what we must do to be saved. We normally think of how we should live as we must be obedient to God's commands. And when we look at the Bible it seems to show that we must indeed do something to be saved and must indeed live according to God's will as He has laid them out for us in His commands. Often the Scriptures implore us to have faith in Christ, to believe in Him for salvation. Jesus says in today's Gospel reading says to the woman, "You're faith has saved you." And in the Scriptures aren't we often commanded and exhorted to follow God's commands?

It's pretty clear, isn't it, that we must do something in order to be saved and then we must do something once we are saved? But this is actually the deception of our sinful nature. The devil also joins in on the deceit, tempting us to see those commands of God as something that falls upon us to bring about. But how much power do you actually have to save yourself? How successful are you at actually keeping God's commands? We need to recognize that we can no more save ourselves than we can bring about our life in the first place. We are no more able to live holy lives according to God's will than we can keep from sinning.

Why all the demands, then? Why does Jesus speak of people's faith saving them? Why does God demand of us to live a certain way? It is because what He demands He brings about. It's true that we must do what He tells us to do. But we turn that into that we must bring about what we must do. We cannot. We simply are unable to. That we think we can shows all the more that we do not trust in God alone for salvation but would rather look within ourselves to some degree.

This is not how the Scriptures actually show us though. The Bible shows us how on our own we are people under the power of death. The moment you are born you become one who is dying. Some live a long life, some have their lives cut short at too early a time, and some barely make it out of the womb, and there are those who even die in the womb. Everyone, all of us in this life, are dying. It's just matter of time.

The world cannot handle death. People go to extraordinary lengths to avoid it. Or they embrace it as a good thing. But death is not good. It is the result of sin. We were not meant to die but to live. Death came about through sin and Satan would like nothing better than for us to either be in mortal fear of death or to embrace it as some harmless state.

But as Christians we do not need to fear death. And we shouldn't see this world as a hopeless state that just ends in death. What we need to do is look to Jesus. This is what the man did in the Gospel reading. The man who approached Jesus had remarkable faith. His daughter had died. But look at the faith of this man. He said to Jesus if You come and lay Your hand on her she will live. Usually people came to Jesus for healing. Immediate healing is remarkable enough. But when people died their loved ones spoke to Jesus as that being the end of the matter. Not with

this man. He believed Jesus could bring her daughter back to life. That is faith we're not used to seeing.

Jesus agreed with the man. He was on His way with him to his home when He was interrupted. This time a woman came up to Him. But she was not intending to talk to Jesus. She had suffered for twelve years from bleeding. She needed relief. If only I touch the hem of His robe I will be healed. Again, remarkable faith. I don't need to tell Him. He doesn't need to touch me. He doesn't need to say anything. He has the power to heal me from only my touching His robe. When she did Jesus turned to her and spoke to her in light of her great faith. Take heart, daughter, your faith has saved you. And she was healed in that instant.

Jesus made His way to the home of the little girl. The mourners were there. He told them to leave because the girl was not dead but only sleeping. They laughed at Him in scorn. What kind of a person would come into a person's home and tell the father that his daughter is not dead but just asleep? Nevertheless, He had them taken out of the room. Then He laid His hand on the girl and told her to get up. And she did. She was alive. Jesus brought her from death back to life.

The woman who came up to Jesus was dying, albeit slowly. The girl had already died. This is the lot of all of us in this life. We are dying and the only thing we don't know is when we will actually die. But we should live as those who are dying. We should not try to avoid death. We should not attempt to circumvent death. We should not fear it. We should not embrace it as the end of all there is to our life. We should have faith. The man had faith. The woman had faith.

It's striking that the girl didn't. She was dead. And yet Jesus brought her back to life. In these three people we see the nature of faith and what it means not only to live but also what it means to be saved. We see in them that we are not able to save ourselves. Even the faith we have in Christ is not something we are able to produce. Yes, we have faith in Christ, but the Holy Spirit is the one who brings about this faith through the Word, through Baptism—through the work of Christ in through these things.

In Romans 10 it says that faith comes by hearing. The man whose daughter had died and the woman who was suffering from illness had heard about Jesus. They believed in Him. What about the girl? When Jesus spoke to her she could not hear, she was dead. But, then, there it is. Faith is what God brings about. Salvation is what God brings about. The hearing that faith comes through, this too is what God brings about. And He brings it about in the speaking of it. So when Jesus spoke to the girl, He brought about the hearing in her she needed in order to do what He told her, which was to get up.

These people were dying. One had already died. Live as one who is dying. You eat food to keep you alive even though you know that it sustains you only for a time. You do also with the heavenly food you need. You need to be in the Word of God to sustain you. Otherwise you will die spiritually. You need to be fed with the very body and blood of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to sustain you and strengthen you and keep you spiritually alive. He lived as one who was going to death. And He did. He went into death for you and me. He died to save us, so that death

does not get the final say for us. We have life and yet we live as those who are dying. Because it is only in dying that we will be raised to eternal life. Amen.

SDG

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