

Mark 5:21-43 | *The Unrolling Scroll*
Retirement Sunday, Pentecost 6 – June 30, 2024

“I didn’t know it would turn out like this.” That statement could be uttered under a variety of circumstances and with a wide range of emotions and vocal inflection. It could be said with a tone of exuberant joy because of a surprisingly positive, happy turn of events. On the other hand, it could be expressed with a deep amount of sorrow and grief because of what we regard as an unexpected negative, sad turn of events. Both scenarios, however, point to the fact that none of us knows what is ahead of us in this life. We only experience the future when we get there, and what at one time seemed so far away has suddenly turned into the present. If we are honest with ourselves, we realize that we are not the masters of our own destiny. Our plans don’t always prevail. But our Lord’s plans do. It is really true that all of us have an autobiography. For most of us it will be in mental form - not written, but remembered. But suppose it were written. Let’s accept the premise of the hymn sung earlier that all our life is like a scroll. You could think of that ancient way of recording history with pages of parchment glued together and attached to two wands, called umbilici (like an umbilical cord). As you move one umbilici to the right and the other to the left, you read the text. Or, in more modern terms, think of your smart phone which is also a camera for most of us. We go to the pictures and scroll through them, don’t we? But in terms of the plot of our life, both scrolls only go so far for now. There is more to be written and pictured. How much more, we don’t know. What will be described or pictured in our remaining future days, we also don’t know. Or do we?

Throughout forty years of ministry I’ve learned that when a noteworthy Sunday comes, I need not search for a special text to preach on; rather, the prescribed readings in the church’s lectionary always suffice. God’s Word, after all, speaks to every occasion of our life. That point was driven home to me in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on America on September 11, 2001. I didn’t have to look for a special text because the epistle for that late Sunday in the season of Pentecost was from Hebrews 13 and spoke directly to the situation at hand, *“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”* In those long months when we were dealing with Covid in 2020 onward, how often didn’t the Word of God speak directly to the situation then.

So today as I deliver my last sermon to you as the pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, the Word of God does again what we expect of it. The dramatic account of Jesus dealing with Jairus and his sick daughter as well as the woman with her bleeding problem speaks to our present situation and reminds us of the remark, *“I didn’t know it would turn out like this.”* For their lives, too, were like an unrolling scroll, and ongoing biography. Let’s talk about their situation and relate it to ours and consider these two seemingly contradictory points: 1) we don’t know what is ahead for us; 2) we do know what is ahead for us.

There are few things that are more emotionally wrenching than to see a child die. But that was the situation Jairus faced. We don’t know what affliction the girl suffered, or how long she had to endure it. But we know she was in a critical condition, and as the events of the text unfold, word was received that she, in fact, had died. It’s not a stretch of the imagination at all to think that Jairus and his wife probably said to themselves, *“I didn’t think it would turn out*

like this.” After all, parents hope and expect that their children will live long, healthy, productive lives. Years before this they wouldn’t have thought that this was in their future. Parents usually predecease their children. It seems totally wrong when a parent has to bury a child. Similarly, the woman with her 12-year long problem, probably questioned her circumstances many times through the years with the same response, *“I didn’t think it would turn out like this.”* Presumably before these 12 years of misery she enjoyed relatively good health. There would have been no reason to think that her future held something like this. The unrolling scroll of the biography of the family of Jairus and this woman and her family had tragedy and heartache in it, which they had to face.

Some of us have been there already. For others of us, those days may be coming. It may be the death of a child or a spouse; or an ongoing health concern. It might be a marriage that fell apart, children or grandchildren that wander from the Lord, a financial reversal, career goals that fell short. It might even be a fall into some sort of sin that caught you unexpectedly, for which you now feel an overwhelming sense of guilt and shame. All in all, it’s a bad moment in the unrolling scroll of your life, and you want it to go away. As a pastor, it is a solemn privilege to be there with you at those crucial moments, and to give you the assurance that despite doubts and fears, anger and rebellion against God, that He still loves you in Christ; that He cares for you; forgives you and strengthens you. Despite our unfaithfulness, God remains faithful. We don’t know what lies ahead in the narrative of our life, but God knows. And He does not just know this as a passive observer, He is involved, in a loving way for our good.

It's interesting how the events in our text unfold. Just when Jairus has the attention of Jesus and they are about to make their way to his home, there is the interruption of the woman with her problems. Don’t you wonder what went through the mind of Jairus, *“Hurry up, Jesus. Can’t this wait.”* If it were you, don’t you think you would have been a little impatient with the Lord, or frustrated with the woman who stopped the progress? But, of course, our Lord is in control of the situation. And He controls it with a view toward our good, for our eternal salvation.

Here again the readings for the day affirm that fact. Consider the Introit from Psalm 121, *“I lift up my eyes to the hills from where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.”* And the Old Testament reading from Lamentations 3, *“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”* And that is why, dear friends, even though we do not know what the future holds in this life, we do know what the future holds eternally – because of Jesus.

All of our Lord’s miracles show Him to be the God-man Savior, the One came into the world as one of us, like us in every way except without sin. He can sympathize with us in all of life’s circumstances, because He experienced the results of a fallen world. But He Himself never fell into sin. Yet He took sin upon Himself for us, wearing the filthy rags of a sinful beggar, so that we, by grace through faith could wear the white robes of righteousness. As St. Paul says in our epistle for today, *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He*

was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you, through His poverty might become rich.” His miracles of nature show Him to be the King of Creation. His healing miracles, including raising the dead, show Him to be the master of life and death. Taken as a whole, His miracles point forward to the sure and certain future that is ours because of Him. The raising of the daughter of Jairus and the healing of the afflicted women show us that His blood, shed on the cross of Calvary, cleanses us from all sin, and His resurrection guarantees that because He lives, we will live also.

All the activities of a pastor are an honored task, but it is a special privilege to preach the Gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection at the death of your loved ones. None of us knows who will be the next name entered in that big black book of official records. As our hymn said, *“Time like an ever-flowing stream soon bears us all away.”* But that causes us no worry, because God is our help in ages past and our hope for years to come.

Today we come to the altar for the Lord’s body and blood. There you have forgiveness for all your past sins and a foretaste of the feast to come. It’s really true that the Sacrament of the altar is where heaven and earth meet. After today I leave you physically. But I will never leave you mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. It has my joy and honor to be your pastor.

I do hope to see some of you again on this earth, as we can recount pleasant memories and rejoice in the special friendship and fellowship that is ours as members of Christ’s Church. But some of you I will see again only in eternity. And what a glorious reunion that will be as we sing eternal praises to God in glorified bodies in a new and perfect Creation. Until that day comes there may be unexpected, sorrowful turns in the road for all of us. I assure you that Christ will be there for you, just as He always is. And for you and me, the best is yet to come, all because of Jesus. We don’t know what the future holds in this life, but we do know what it holds in eternity.

So I leave this pulpit for the last time with a hymn stanza, which many of us sang together at the bedside of a dying loved one. It was our prayer for them as well as our prayer for ourselves.

*Lord, let at last Thine angels come,
To Abram’s bosom bear me home
That I may die unfearing;
And in its narrow chamber keep
My body safe in peaceful sleep
Until Thy reappearing.
And then from death awaken me,
That these mine eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, Thy glorious face,
My Savior, and my fount of grace,
Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend,
And I will praise Thee without end. Amen.*