

Only Believe Mark 5:21-43 6th Sunday after Pentecost July 1, 2018

“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” Mark 5 Only Believe

Dear friends in Christ, one of the best things about living out in the country is the sun. Most days when I get up I can look out and see the sun peeking over the horizon and giving color to the hills and valleys. In the evening it colors the sky in pinks and oranges and purples. It is a beautiful sight and it is easy to believe in a good God as I look at the wonders that he created; at the beauty that he sustains. And that is just the sunrise. It doesn't speak to flowers and trees, to cats and dogs, to blue skies and light breezes. On Iowa summer days, only believe seems easy and unnecessary, because every breath feels like believing.

It's the attitude of those who say they can worship God better on a nature hike or a golf course or a combine than they can in church. And it is tempting, for God did make me and all creatures, and it is our duty to thank and praise, serve and obey him. Or as Paul writes, “since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.”

God says only believe, and Creation is his and speaks his glory. Our problem is that we do not listen well. We hear our own voices. Creation speaks God's glory loudly, but we hear in our own accents. Everyone sees nature, and suddenly they say all people have a road to God, and yet they never mention the way to the father, our Lord Jesus Christ. Even Eve saw the good in creation when she looked at the fruit and saw that it was good for food and pleasing to the eye. God never intended seeing nature to be enough. God agrees with the young boy who says to his dad, you say we can worship God, hear his voice and pray to him, in the park as well as at church, but we never do.

Now you might be wondering what this has to do with the Gospel reading. What does this have to do with the woman afflicted for 12 years? She had seen the glory and grace of God. She knew God was acting through him, and that many had been healed. And she touched his robe and she was healed. And if the story stopped there, maybe you could say each of us must reach out to God in his own way. But it doesn't end there. God gives good gifts, even healing. But he wants us to see him and his word in the gift. So Jesus speaks a word, and finds the one who touched him. Jesus speaks a word, and says this too is a gift of God, grasped by faith. He says that God saves, as he makes sure the healing doesn't come without his word. Go in peace, our faith has made you well. God saves, only believe.

How much more with Jairus and his daughter. We may see the goodness of God in nature in summertime, 'but he isn't in summertime in Iowa. He went to Jesus and before Jesus got to his home, Jairus heard the news: Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher?' He saw the blackness and hopelessness of death. The goodness of God was hard to see in his circumstances. He had nothing to hold onto except the words of Jesus, “Do not fear, only believe.” And those words are enough to continue.

“She is not dead but only sleeping,” more words. Words that don't seem to be the truth, words that are laughed at. And yet they are still the words of God, even when science and nature and reason say they are false. And Jesus put the others out of the house and with the mother and father and three disciples we went in and took the girl's hand and said more words, Talitha Kumi. Little Girl, I say to you arise. And God shows himself ruler over nature and even death, for she rises. And he shows himself as a God of compassion and heals the girl. And he shows his personal compassion, giving this girl to his parents and the sign to his friends. He heals and raises not to proclaim himself to the nations, though he is exalted among the nations, but because he cares for even the little girl, even the parents by her side.

And he speaks a word to you too. I forgive you your sins. He went to the cross and took your sins on himself, and rose to share his life with you. He says I forgive your sins, I give you life. Only believe. I give you my word. And that word seems small when nature and reason seem against it, that the sins are great, that death is big, that it seems easier to find comfort in I've lived a good life than in I will be raised. But he tells you you will only sleep, that he will raise you up. Only believe. And while you must believe his word, it is hard to believe

his word, so he does more for you. He gives his word combined with water, so you may see your sins washed away. He sees you rise from the water with new birth as his child. He gives you the bread and wine combined with his word, his body and blood for you to see and hear and taste and feel, that the lord is good, your sins are forgiven, for his body and blood are for you. Only believe.

God gives good gifts, even life and salvation, not for us to claim as our own but to receive from thanks with his word from his hand. Our life and salvation do not exist apart from him. So believe in the God who speaks to you. Believe in the God who gives his gifts. Hear his word, and only believe.