

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

“In the very midst of life Snares of death surround us,” Martin Luther penned, and we just sang. It’s not an easy tune to sing. We’re thankful for Mike’s strong leadership.

The tune is hard to sing, but the sentiments of the hymn are even harder for us to hear. “In the very midst of life Snares of death surround us.” We know it to be true, but it’s a hard truth for us to hear: death surrounds us . . . unexpected death, untimely death, horrible death, tragic death, and sometimes welcome death . . . death after a prolonged illness, death because of a misunderstanding, death because of rage, death because of war, death because of an accident . . . death after a long life, death at the beginning of life, death in the prime of life. “Snares of death surround us.” All of us here have surely experienced it, some of us recently, and we still mourn our loved ones who have died.

Jesus was in Galilee. He had been crisscrossing the Sea of Galilee teaching and preaching and doing miracles; and everywhere He went, He drew a crowd. In our Gospel, Jesus had again crossed the Sea, and a crowd gathered. In that crowd was a man named Jairus, a ruler in the synagogue.

Jairus came up to Jesus to plead with Him — you see, not all of the religious leaders rejected Jesus. Jairus fell at Jesus’ feet and told Him: “Snares of death surround me.” *“My little daughter is at the point of death”* — not quite yet dead, but dying. “Come and save my daughter,” he begged. “Lay Your hands on her and heal her. Do one of Your miracles for me! My daughter is young. I want her to live!”

Who among us has not prayed similarly? If not for a daughter, for a son, for a husband or wife, for a mother or father? We want our loved ones to be healed and live, and yet the snares of death surround us. Death holds us in its steely grasp.

And you know why we die! Death entered into the world through a man — into a world that didn’t know death through Adam — because Adam disobeyed and ate from the tree whose fruit was forbidden. *“[I]n the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”* (Gen. 2:17). Adam ate, and Adam died; then Seth died; and Enosh died; and Kenan and Mahalalel and Jared died; even long-lived Methuselah died, as has every man and woman ever since —except Elijah who was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind surrounded by chariots and horses of fire, as you recall. But he’s simply the exception that proves the rule — the general rule is true: man now is mortal. He dies. The apostle Paul says it this way: *“sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”* (Rom. 5:12).

All sinned. Even before God gave Moses the Law there was sin, an “inbred sin . . . that lurks within our nature” (LSB555:3). It’s the “old Adam in us,” and it truly is sin. It condemns (Augsburg Confession, II:2), and yes, it leads us into even more sin, as

Jesus teaches: “*from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person*” (Mark 7:21-23). God is therefore just. We are sinners, and so we die.

Death is a hard reality for everyone, but it is hardest for us when the one dying is young — as Jairus’ daughter was. Jairus came and pleaded with Jesus, and Jesus clearly had compassion on him; He went with Jairus without hesitation.

Now, as you heard, Jesus was delayed as He traveled to Jairus’ house. I’m not going to focus on this part of the narrative. I’ll summarize it quickly. A woman with a chronic medical condition needed Jesus’ compassion, too. Physicians hadn’t been able to heal her. She touched Jesus’ garment, believing that doing so would heal her. And it did; her condition was healed by Jesus’ power; He commended her bold faith; and then He continued on to Jairus’ home.

In the meantime, his daughter had died. “*Why trouble the Teacher any further?*” some told them dejectedly. They knew that Jesus had shown Himself to be a healer ... but He surely couldn’t raise someone from the dead, could He? Indeed, He could, and He did.

When Jesus arrived at Jairus’ home, He was met by the mourners. They were “*making a commotion and weeping,*” but Jesus told them, “*The child is not dead but sleeping.*” “*And they laughed at him.*”

Jesus was not deterred by their laughter. Indeed, He would have to endure worse ridicule than that at the house of the High Priest and later at the Praetorium of the governor. But Jesus knew that He had been sent to die, and also that death would not be able to keep Him from life. He knew also that He would make death nothing more than slumber for believers (LSB938:1), for He would give us the fruits of His resurrection victory over death and the grave.

That’s why Jesus said to Jairus: “*Do not fear, only believe,*” and Jairus’ faith would not be in vain. Jesus took the girl’s hand and spoke a word to her: “*Little girl, I say to you, arise.*” And she did; she woke up; she lived again; she got up and walked about — “*In Him was life*” (John 1:4); “*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live*” (John 11:25).

Dear friends, this is Jesus’ promise to us. And this same Jesus lives to hear our pleadings even in the face of death, and He promises to be with us. When Luther reminds us that “snares of death surround us,” he asks, “Who shall help us in the strife Lest the foe confound us?” And he answers, “Thou only, Lord, Thou only!” “In the midst of death’s dark vale [when] Pow’rs of hell o’ertake us,” “Who will help when they assail, Who secure will make us?” “Thou only, Lord, Thou only!” “In the midst of utter woe When our sins oppress us, Where shall we for refuge go,

Where for grace to bless us?” “To Thee, Lord Jesus, only!” Yes, as snares of death surround us, we turn to Him who for us took on flesh and became subject to death, who endured the bitter suffering and death of the cross, but who overcame death on the third day, rising to life again, and who shares His victory with us.

Therefore, this narrative gives us the courage not to fear, but only believe, as Jesus said. Believe that the Lord will not cast off forever; believe that His steadfast love never ceases; believe that His mercies never end, that His faithfulness is great, that He is good. Believe that Jesus came to win for us salvation in the forgiveness of our sins. Believe that, as we faithfully come to Church, we encounter this living Jesus, who by His Word and Sacraments strengthens our faith and assures us that, in this faith, it is done as we believe — we are saved. Believe that, as we come to Church to encounter Jesus, we are built up in hope, not just for this life, but for life eternal, as we wait for our own resurrection and life.

For the Scripture is clear and unequivocal: for believers, death is but a time of sleep. That’s what St. Paul says of those who have died in the faith. They have fallen asleep — not “soul sleep” as Pastor Teasdale mentioned last Sunday, but death, the breathless sleep of the body ... the soul to Jesus, and the body to dust (Eccl. 12:7). St. Paul writes, “[W]e do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.” Therefore, he says, “encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:14, 18).

Indeed, thus encouraged, we can face these snares of death that surround us. and we can “lay ... calmly in the grave This form whereof no doubt we have That it shall rise again that day In glorious triumph o’er decay.”

We can entrust “to earth ... What came from dust and turns to dust,” for “from the dust [it] shall surely rise, When the last trumpet fills the skies.” Our loved one’s “soul forever lives in God, Whose grace his pardon hath bestowed, Who through His Son redeemed him here From bondage unto sin and fear.”

We can rejoice that “His trials and his griefs are past; A blessed end is his at last; He bore Christ’s yoke and did His will, and though he died he liveth still.”

We are comforted that “He lives where none do mourn and weep, And calmly shall his body sleep, ’Tis God shall death Himself destroy, And raise it into glorious joy.”

Our loved one may have “suffered pain and grief below.” Nevertheless, “Christ heals him now from all his woe; for him hath endless joy begun; He shines in glory like the sun.”

And from that graveside, we can “leave him to his rest, and homeward turn, for he is blest.” We still have life ahead of us, and “we must well our souls prepare For death may seize us everywhere.”

Therefore, we pray: “help us, Christ, our Hope in loss; Thou hast redeemed us by Thy cross From endless death and misery; We praise, we bless, we worship Thee” (Evangelical Lutheran Hymnbook, 538:1-8).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.