

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

Today, in our Gospel lesson, Jesus has crisscrossed the Sea of Galilee and returned back to His hometown. Now Jesus had taught with authority there; He had healed people and cast out demons. It's no wonder that when He returned home, Jairus, even though he was a synagogue ruler, called upon Jesus when his daughter became deathly ill. "*Lay hands on her; heal her; make her live.*" Jesus does not hesitate. He goes with Jairus.

Now as they were going, Jesus perhaps delayed a bit by the crowd that thronged Him, word came to them that the girl had died. No need for Jesus any longer. But Jesus continues on to Jairus' home where He encounters the professional mourners—that's the way they did back then, especially the rich. People were paid to weep and wail and beat their breasts.

What happens next is what I want to focus on today, for "[Jesus] said to [the mourners], '*Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.*' And they laughed at him." Jesus was deadly serious, and they laughed at Him.

I don't know about you, but most people don't like that very much — being laughed at, mocked, made fun of. Oh, if you're a comedian, telling jokes or playing a fool, it's one thing. Comedians try to get people to laugh at them. But it's embarrassing when you're being serious or trying to make a serious point, and people laugh at you.

I wasn't a Hoosier then, but I remember how the news media mocked Indiana's Junior Senator who became Vice President, Dan Quayle. I'm sure it was tough for him. They laughed at him when he misspelled the word "*potato*" (he spelled with an 'e' at the end.). They laughed at him in debate when Lloyd Benson made his biting remark, "*I knew Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you are no Jack Kennedy.*" They laughed at him when he made that prescient remark about Murphy Brown glorifying in unwed motherhood, trying to shine a light on the disintegration of the family. Comedians had a field day with Vice President Quayle. Of course, he has been shown to be right — single motherhood is not good and is a leading indicator of poverty — but "*woe are we*"! He did misspell potato.

As Christians, you know that we are laughed at today — often by those in academia or the news media, who consider themselves intellectually superior to us. They laugh at us—perhaps because we're so "unscientific" as to believe what is written in the Bible, things like a world that was created relatively recently, and that was done relatively quickly—in six days; things like, eight people and pairs of animals surviving a global flood in the unseaworthy boat called an ark described in

Genesis. Of course, it's not unscientific at all, and scientists who hold a Biblical worldview are doing science.

They laugh at us because we believe in "*by definition, ahistorical*" [Reza Aslan] things in the Bible, things like, restoring a dead child to life as we have in our Gospel; things like, being born of a virgin or being raised from the dead. Of course, they're not ahistorical because they really happened and are reported and recorded by eyewitnesses.

They laugh at us and worse than laughing, they chide us and call us name because we're "*on the wrong side of history*," things like the struggle for life or for God-instituted marriage. And struggle is not over. The struggle for life is more than forty years old, and it might have seemed as if we were on the wrong side of history. But the tide seems to be turning back to life. We struggle on. The struggle for God-instituted marriage is just beginning. Who knows where it will be in forty years, if we continue to struggle?

But not only do we not like the laughing and the chiding, but often we become a bit embarrassed and shrink away, and do not speak up for the truth. He who Himself was laughed at has something to say to you. "*Do not fear, only believe.*" Those are Jesus' words to you in times of distress, in the face of death, as we confront the mockery and ridicule.

Do not fear, Jesus says, for the Spirit reminds you: the Lord will not cast off forever. Do not fear, for the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. Do not fear, for His mercies never end. Do not fear, for great is His faithfulness. Do not fear for the Lord is good. This is good news, for these are more than promises — they are statements of fact.

That does not mean that you won't have to bear up under a heavy yoke of sorrow and strife—even embarrassing mockery. It may even seem like you're all alone with your burden. But the apostle reminds you that you're not. "*The same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*" But I remind you that in the midst of your suffering the Lord is still with you; He has compassion. You may be grieved for a time — sin afflicts our lives, but His steadfast love endures forever.

That's what our texts today remind us of—God's desire to hear us and answer our prayer. They remind us of His power to do the impossible — curing that which doctors could not, raising to life a child who had died. They remind us of His loving care for us to come in our need and serve us.

Therefore, we need not fear. But rather believe, Jesus says. And lest we think that this faith is something that we can do by our own power, Jesus reminds us: "*with man this is impossible.*" But by this word of Jesus, the Spirit comes to call

us and enlighten us, sanctify and keep us in the faith. The Spirit moves you to trust that no matter what happens, the Lord is there for you, that He cares for you, that He will hear your cry for mercy, and do what is best for you.

Of course, salvation is what is best for us — what we poor sinners need the most is a Savior. And He did not leave us without comfort here especially. For Jesus, Himself, laughed to scorn, despised and mocked, pierced in hands and feet, laid in the dust of death for you. But for Jesus, it was only a three-day sleep in death. Jesus knew what He was talking about for Jairus' daughter — she was only sleeping, and Jesus raised her from death. He would tell His disciples, too, of His short stay in the grave, rising from the dead on the third day. And He tells us of the impermanence of death for those who only believe, who look to the Son and believe in Him who atoned for our sin, bestows forgiveness by a word, and gives resurrection and life.

This is so for you who believe. This is so for the Charleston Nine who being there in church, were studying God's word, welcoming a deranged gunman into their midst. Death is but a time of sleep. That's how St. Paul refers to those who have died in the faith. They have fallen asleep. And *"since we believe that Jesus died and rose again,"* he says, *"even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep."* And he says, *"encourage one another with these words."*

Therefore, I say to you, *"do not fear; only believe."* Even should a hate-filled gunman strike you or loved ones down, Christ is there for you. His victory is yours. And truly the last laugh is yours. For when these things happen, the world stops laughing, especially as families display their faith, when they don't lash out in anger — though it's there — and they don't cry out for vengeance — though their flesh wants it, and the world encourages it. No, the world stops laughing at Christians, who when reviled don't revile back, but rather speak words of forgiveness to an almost indescribable malevolence, who love in the face of hate, knowing *"love covers a multitude of sins."*

The world wants to laugh at us, at our bloody Christ, at our foolishness at Christ risen from the dead. But, the world stops laughing and stands in awe of what that act of love motivates. It motivates words of forgiveness as we have been forgiven — Christ-motivated grace. And I do mean grace for what was it but undeserved kindness shown to that killer — but also to us. Christ's grace shown to Jairus and his daughter, to the woman with the flow of blood, to all of us sinners, then flowing through us into the world.

So, don't fear their laughing. Only believe, and you have life in His name, for as Jesus says, your faith has saved you. Therefore, rejoice.

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