

Sermon for the 4th Sunday after Pentecost (B), Proper 8
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Lamentations 3:22-33, Psalm 30, II Corinthians 8:7-15, Mark 5:21-43

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and
Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

"And they laughed at Him."

-- Mark 5:40a

Alongside this week's carnage and the senseless brutality of war—I beg your pardon for using phrases which have by now become cliché—and the dedication of billions of dollars on all sides to the destruction and rooting out of the other, a brief space was allotted in the news media to report on a dramatic act of philanthropy, still defined as 'love of human kind.'

That act was, of course, one billionaire's donation of billions of dollars in stocks and bonds to the foundation already set up by another billionaire. This was done, according to the press releases, to join forces in supporting research to find a cure to all major *infectious* diseases. Such cures have been found in the

lifetimes of many of us. Today's Gospel and Jesus' raising of Jairus' daughter makes us think especially of the vaccines against diseases such as diphtheria, smallpox, whooping cough, measles and polio, all diseases that used to kill or cripple so many children of our own society, in our own families. These diseases and countless others, including especially HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis are still killers and crippers on a massive scale in the developing world. Jesus' healing of the woman with the hemorrhage makes us mindful of that 'wasting disease' that robbed many of our grandmothers and great aunts of vitality and decades of life before modern gynecological research and the availability of treatment for women was widely available, as it still is not in most of the developing world.

Perhaps the miracle stories in today's Gospel touched the hearts of the men who have consecrated their fortunes to discovering undiscovered cures for infectious diseases. Who would not want to be able to heal as Jesus healed, to restore life and hope as He did? May the Holy Spirit move others, including the

leaders of nations and the boards of directors of pharmaceutical companies, to consecrate their profits from healing the sick to *delivering* those cures which *already exist* to those who most urgently need them and can least afford them.

The reaction of the Disciples amid the crowd, on the one hand, and of the mourners in Jairus' house, on the other, is instructive for us. The Disciples essentially *mock* Jesus for asking "Who touched me?" in the midst of a crowd. And, even after Jesus declares the woman cured, the Disciples seem to take no note of this whatever. Only the woman He has cured knows His power, and now His love as He calls her 'daughter.' As He enters Jairus' house, the mourners *laugh* in Jesus' face as He declares of the little girl, "She is not dead, but asleep." Oblivious to the great miracle that has just occurred, unnoticed in the midst of the masses pressing in on Jesus, the mourners know only their mourning. They do not expect the power of the Kingdom of God to come so near them. Do we? Do we fear that power, or welcome it?

What if the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation succeeds in achieving its stated goal? What if there is the possibility to save life, and what if children and adults continue to die from diseases for which the vaccines now exist? What if God's liberation from the bondage of illness breaks into our world, more than it already has? What if our responsibility before God and our neighbor were that of stewards of life, and not simply the duty of mourners with a social conscience? 'What if?' Our responsibility is a matter of the *present*, and not of the future of a billionaire's dreams. Though it is true that young and old suffer and die of diseases as yet beyond healing—both infectious and non-infectious diseases—it is true as well that many more succumb to the world's selfishness in failing to share and deliver the blessings of nutrition and preventative health care that do exist in abundance sufficient for most.

Our Lord is not the least bit deterred by the mocking of His own Disciples in the midst of the crowd or by that of the mourners in a house where a little girl lay dying. He will give

the gift of God that is at hand to both woman and child. When asked by a reporter whether he thought the Gates Foundation goal was realistic, one research scientist and professor of medicine replied "Absolutely!" He pointed out that money like that which will now be available for the purpose of fighting what he described as 'neglected diseases,' will have a tremendous impact. "But," he added, "the effect of this endowment goes well beyond that. We are beginning to see students of the highest caliber streaming into our programs in medical research in numbers that have never been seen before in this country. They are excited to work in this area, and that is the greatest hope of all."

Where people believe that something great, something genuinely important and world-changing is about to happen, where they believe that they can be part of that, people will give themselves to that change, will dedicate their lives to actualizing what is potentially real, and they will become part of that reality. It is true, we live in a world torn by war, a world in which starvation and disease exists in the midst of plenty. But we also

live in a world into which God's Kingdom, God's power and God's possibilities have broken and established a base of operations, a center of life and hope in the healers and in those who are healed. May the Holy Spirit grant us the faith to be part of that community of hope and healing, on behalf of the whole world but also according to our own need and occasion to love to the glory of God the Father. ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who love us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to Our God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✠ Amen.

S. D. G. !