

June 28, 2015

St. Mark 5:21-43:

“What God Ordains Is Always Good...Right?”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our sermon hymn for this morning was titled, "What God Ordains Is Always Good." It is easy to sing that when you are in good health, have a nice home to live in, have a good job, make good money, go to a good school, have plenty to eat, nice clothes to wear, good friends, a car or maybe two, books, magazines, television, computers, smart-phones, games, toys, and all the free time in the world. Indeed, "What God Ordains Is Always Good" is easy to say when you don't have a care in the world.

Take one of these things away and the complaints begin. In fact, have you ever noticed that your prayer life becomes a lot more vigorous whenever it seems that what God ordains is Not so good? Things get serious when our world starts crumbling down. It is in those moments that we have a lot of questions about God. Part of the problem is that we believe that becoming a Christian is a guarantee that God will pretty much do what we want. That is a bad misconception. When we think that way, it is easy for complaints to move into doubts and doubts to hopelessness. It is hard thing to sing "What God Ordains Is Always Good" when things are not going our way - when things are considered to be bad.

Consider if you would for a moment this man by the name of Jairus. He is one of the rulers of the synagogue. Certainly he should receive good things from God for who he is and all that he has no doubt done. And here we find him coming to Jesus in what we would call a bad moment - where it doesn't seem that God is ordaining good things at all. His daughter is sick - she is more than sick - she is at the point of death. At the time she was only twelve years old. As we would tend to think of it, her adult life was just at the very beginning. But here she is, before she can live what we might consider a full life, here she is slipping away from this world at such a young age. It just doesn't seem fair from our perspective.

And can you imagine what it must have felt like for Jairus? Only someone who has suffered such loss can really begin to identify with the sense of helplessness and pain that is associated with such things. So Jairus finds Jesus, much like we might seek him out in our most difficult moments, and what does he do? He falls at his feet and begs him: "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live (Mark 5:23)." One can certainly sense the desperation. And Mark records, "And he [Jesus] went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him (Mark 5:24)." It almost appears out of nowhere that a woman then shows up who has been having a discharge of blood for 12 years "and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse (Mark 5:26)."

In the woman with the discharge of blood we have another example of a person who had to wrestle with the words: "What God Ordains Is Always Good." Still, I want you to concentrate on what Jairus had to be going through. Imagine that your child is in the hospital in critical condition. The child is connected to the machines. And there you are in the room when the machines start beeping and buzzing and lights are flashing and alarms are sounding. You rush into the hallway for the doctors. As they approach the room, they stop in the hallway to attend to a woman who needs a bandage on her wound. Yeah, it's a bloody wound, but she isn't bleeding to death. I tend to think that we would be inclined to lose our minds!

Would you be thinking: “What God Ordains Is Always Good?” I seriously doubt it. Probably you would be screaming down the hallway at the doctors. Now, I know that our text doesn’t tell us exactly what Jairus thought. But it does say, “While he [Jesus] was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, ‘Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further (Mark 5:35)?’” It was wonderful for Jairus’ sake that Jesus heard what was said and responded: “Do not fear, only believe (Mark 5:36).”

We are like Jairus’ daughter and the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. Sometimes it doesn’t seem that God is coming fast enough to help. Sometimes it feels as if he isn’t coming at all. But the words of Jesus are just as much for us as it was for Jairus on that day so long ago. “Do not fear, only believe.” While it might seem that God does not understand the seriousness of our troubles, the truth is that he does understand. While it had to be hard for Jairus, it might be also good to ask: Can you imagine what it would have felt like for the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years if Jesus would have ignored her?

It is hard to believe “What God Ordains Is Always Good,” but if you consider the outcome of the whole account in our Gospel lesson, you will note that the bleeding woman is healed and Jairus’ daughter is raised from the dead. It says of the woman, “She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, ‘If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.’ And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease (Mark 5:27-29).” And of Jairus’ daughter it says, “Taking her by the hand he said to her, ‘Talitha cumi,’ which means, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise.’ And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement (Mark 5:41-42).”

It is here that we are to understand that while it might feel that God is far away from us, he is not. We see this in Jesus. And while we may only have Jesus with us in the means of grace, we are to still understand that in the forgiveness of sins, whatever is understood as “bad” will still end up being healed. Whenever we think that God is against us, our eyes must shift to Jesus and all that he has done for us in his life, suffering, and death. It is Jesus who has taken to himself all of our infirmities and even death itself. And as he has suffered for our sins and the consequences of our sins, we are to understand that his objective for us is forgiveness and healing.

While we sometimes want it immediately, we are to understand that God moves in the context of a sinful, fallen world. As he moves in a sinful, fallen world, it often seems that he is slow in keeping his promises. It sometimes feels as if he is far away from us. But we are to understand that the outcome of the thing is always in keeping with his goodness. His loving heart never fails. His loving heart is in the sending of his one and only Son. He therefore bids us to believe that his goodness is truly good in all things. And he encourages us to trust in him no matter what - even in the moments when we beg and wonder why he doesn’t do what we want him to do immediately. We must remember that the objectives of God are quite different than ours. Frequently, our objective is for an immediate good down here, while his objective is an eternal good in his forever kingdom.

Did you notice in the Gospel lesson that the people laughed at Jesus when he said “Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping (Mark 5:39)?” The world laughs at what we believe. But, Jairus goes in with Jesus and watches his daughter rise from the dead to his astonishment. In the same way, he raises us up in his time. If only we would hold onto what he promises in his Word and not let go. The outcome for us will be wonderful. Even if we die, we will be awoken from our death. He will take us by the hand and raise us to a perfect life that will never end!

You might recall that in our Old Testament lesson that the prophet Jeremiah says, “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him (Lamentations 3:22-24).’” If you happen to read what comes before this passage, it is quite the eye-opener. In the preceding verses we read this: “Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: (Lamentations 3:19-21).” Indeed! “Affliction . . . Wanderings . . . Wormwood and the Gall!” But “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases!” We see that in Jesus and this is what we call to mind and thereby have hope. It really is true. “What God Ordains Is Always Good . . . Right?”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott