

“Waiting for the Salvation of the Lord”

“It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord” (Lamentations 3:24–26).

My introduction to college occurred in the fall of 1987. I was 17 years-old, away from home for the first time, and enrolled in a psychology class that met from 7:30 to 8:30...A.M! Every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, I peeled myself out of bed, threw on a baseball cap and sprinted to class in an effort to make it on time. It was quite an adjustment for me, and, as if the early hour of the class wasn't enough, my psychology prof was nuts. He was an ill-tempered, wild-eyed, unpredictable man in his early sixties who typically spoke in a tone so soft you had to strain to hear him, but then, out of nowhere, he would explode with a shout that made everybody jolt straight up in their chairs.

I remember one particular lecture he gave on Maslow's "Hierarchy of Need." It's a common-sense theory of motivation which teaches that human needs hold different levels of priority. Starting with basic physiological needs, the "Hierarchy" moves on to the need for safety, then to the need for love from family and friends, then to the need to be esteemed by others and, finally, to, what Maslow referred to as "self-actualization" where our creative potential in society is fully realized. At one point in the lecture, he got right down into the face of a frightened freshman and proceeded to illustrate his point by telling this unlucky student, "I could sit here all day and listen to you talk; with long-suffering patience, I could discuss your questions and debate your positions; I could do this all morning without batting an eye..." And then the volume of his voice began to rise, "but if I got a call that my daughter was in an accident and was in the hospital, I would knock your block off trying to get out the door!!!"

We all thought the guy was crazy, and he probably was, but the idea behind Maslow's "Hierarchy" has always stuck with me and, a few years later, when I was a first-time parent with a young daughter who was suffering from a dangerously high fever, my concerns about esteem and creative potential went right out the window and I'm sure I broke a few traffic laws getting her to emergency room that night. When you're a parent, you get a crash course in Maslow's Hierarchy, and when your child is hurt or sick or suffering, every other need seems to shrink in comparison. And that's what makes Jesus' actions in today's Gospel reading so remarkable.

In this text, we are introduced to a father named Jairus whose situation was desperate. His daughter was sick and dying. As a synagogue ruler, he must have had some resources to get the care his daughter needed, but it obviously hadn't worked. So Jairus went to the One person he knew had the power to heal, and, when Jairus met Jesus, his need for respect in the community quickly vanished, and, in front of the large crowd, he dropped to the ground and begged Jesus, "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).

The father's need was dire, he had nowhere else to turn and, with no time to waste, Jairus pleaded to Jesus for help. And, Mark tells us, Jesus went with him...and then the waiting began. A woman from the crowd approached Jesus. She had been suffering from a bleeding disorder for twelve years. Mark tells us that she had spent all she had on treatments, but nothing had worked. She, too, had come to Jesus in desperate need, seeking only to touch the edge of Jesus' garments, believing that this simple contact with Jesus would heal her. And, that's exactly what she did. And, that's exactly what happened.

Following this secret healing, a bizarre exchange occurs. Mark tells us that Jesus perceived that “power had gone out from him” and “immediately” began to question the crowd about who had touched Him. The response of the disciples seems to underscore the curious nature of Jesus’ question, but it obviously had a purpose because the woman, now healed, fell down before Jesus and admitted her action, and, throughout the entire conversation...*Jairus must have been frantic!* His young daughter was on the verge of death. Jesus had agreed to help, but now He stood and talked while the life faded from his little girl. What was Jesus doing? Didn’t He recognize the seriousness of the situation?!?

And, as these thoughts raced through his mind, the message came: “Your daughter is dead” (5:35). The sting of these words was and is profound. It’s a feeling some of you have experienced, and the pain that comes from losing a child cannot be overstated. As Jairus processed the news of his daughter’s death, somewhere in the mix he must have wondered why Jesus had waited, and he probably questioned the assumptions he had made about this Teacher, and he may have doubted the power of this Man who had healed so many others. He may have thought all of these things, but he didn’t say anything. And then, into the silence of his grief, Jesus spoke: “Do not fear, only believe” (5:36).

Jesus continued on with the grieving father and, when they arrived at the house, the reaction to the child’s death was overwhelming. Mourners wept openly. There was no mistaking the solemn truth behind their wailing, yet, when Jesus appeared in the midst of this commotion, He calmly announced, “The child is not dead but sleeping” (5:39). His statement seemed ridiculous and insensitive, and, when the mourners began to mock him, Jesus put them out of the house. He then took Jairus and his wife, along with Peter, James, and John, into the room where the little girl’s body lay. Jesus then reached down, took the little girl by the hand, and said to her, “*Talitha cumi,*” which is Aramaic for “Little girl, I say to you, arise” (5:41). And, Mark writes, “Immediately the girl got up and began walking” (5:42).

The day will come when we will all be in this place of desperate need, when every other need fades into the background. Maybe it will be when a daughter or son becomes ill, or when a loved one dies. Maybe it will be a chronic illness, like we saw in the woman from our text, or maybe it will be a broken relationship that leaves a deep hole in your life. Regardless of the particular circumstance, we will all be there...in a place of need...waiting on the Lord. And that is why God speaks to us today.

Today, in our readings, God tells us important things about Himself as He promises, “The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord...Though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love” (Lamentations 3:25-26, 32). These promises of God from the Old Testament are the very same promises that drove the synagogue ruler to Jesus and led the suffering woman to reach out for His garment. You see, in Jesus, they had seen the steadfast love of the Lord, in Jesus they had heard the words of life and the promise of salvation and, in Jesus, they would not be disappointed...and neither will we!

The needs that overwhelmed them and us were the very needs that He carried to cross, and the griefs that burdened them and us, were the very griefs He bore in His body, and sin that cursed them and us, is the very same sin for which He died. Because of these truths, we can seek the Lord and we can wait for Him knowing that our wounds have been healed and our salvation has been secured, and, while we wait for these realities to be fully revealed on the Last Day, we have been given faith so that we will not fear, but believe what God has promised and He will not let us down. “Great is His faithfulness.” Believe these words of God. Amen. “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning” (Lamentations 3:22-23). Amen.

Pastor Thomas A. Eggold