

Tuesday, February 28, 2023
Season of Lent
Day 6

Matthew 9:18–26

¹⁸ While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.” ¹⁹ Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

²⁰ Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. ²¹ She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.”

²² Jesus turned and saw her. “**Take heart, daughter,**” he said, “**your faith has healed you.**” And the woman was healed at that moment.

²³ When Jesus entered the synagogue leader’s house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes, ²⁴ he said, “**Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep.**” But they laughed at him. ²⁵ After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. ²⁶ News of this spread through all that region.

Reflection

In the Western church tradition we count 40 days of Lent, excluding Sundays. Sundays are resurrection days, so it would be inappropriate to fast and mourn—it’s always a feast day. Something similar is happening in our passage today. Directly before this section, in verse 14, Jesus is asked why he and his disciples don’t fast like John’s or the Pharisee’s disciples. Fasting was and is a sign of repentance that goes along with prayer to earnestly move God to act for the salvation of Israel (read Esther!).

Jesus’s answer is that the kingdom has come! The long awaited wedding and banquet is NOW happening. God (YHWH) is taking his bride (Israel). So, it is inappropriate when the wedding is on to mourn. Weddings are feasts/festivals of celebration, not a funeral. It doesn’t make sense to fast, asking for God to act in the future when that action is happening at the present moment!

Then comes our passage. It begins with a man’s daughter who has died and it is followed by a woman who has suffered long. Because she believes in the one who has come—Jesus—her long suffering is ended. And, finally, mourning is put to an end, because the child is woken up from her deep sleep. Do you see? Festal time; the kingdom has come and it is ours if we will only believe. Join in the feast!

Then, why do we fast in Lent? Verse 15 answers that “**The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.**” Of course Jesus is speaking about his crucifixion. But more generally, he points to the “already” but “not yet” dynamic of the kingdom. Yes the kingdom has come in the person of Jesus, but it is just begun right now. It is advancing and expanding, and one day there will only be the kingdom. But, right now we are in the in-between time. New new age is growing and displacing the old age, but the old age remains. We fast in Lent because we continue to belong in part to the old age ruled by sin, but we more properly belong to the new age so we know what we are meant to be and are in fact will be. Fasting in this time becomes one of the means of our transformation from the old to the new (age and self). This is what John Wesley calls a means of grace.

Lent points us to the future kingdom and reminds us to become what God has made us to be: sons and daughters of God. Sundays, resurrection days, remind us that Jesus has come and in him he has moved us from the rule of Sin to the rule of the Spirit, enabling us to be members of God’s family. Already and not yet. Feast and fast. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Prayer

Lord, we are grateful that your kingdom has come, raising us to new life with Jesus. Strengthen us as we engage in Lent to now walk by the Spirit, reflecting our new status as children of God. Amen.