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Text: Mark 5:21 – 43
Title: Slim Hope Is Still Hope

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The man's name was Jairus, and he held a position of high status in his town. A ruler of the local synagogue, Jairus would have had a tremendous amount of influence and respect in that region. He also would have likely sided with the Pharisees against Jesus because of their influence over the synagogue and the people.

But this is not the Jairus that we are seeing in the fifth chapter of Mark. Instead of a man of prestige, rank and authority approaching the Lord, we see instead a man who is humbled, fearful and desperate. Jairus has reached the end of his rope, and he has approached Jesus because he believes that the Lord is his last glimmer of hope. Without any greetings or preliminaries, this honorable and prestigious man actually falls to his knees at the feet of this rabbi from the lowly town of Nazareth! His words show us just how desperate he is, "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."

Now it makes some sense to us. The true love of a parent for a child doesn't know pride. This is a love that won't be set aside for the sake of power and position and authority. It is a love that will lead to incredibly unbelievable acts when the life of a child is threatened, even when it is threatened by forces that can't be seen. Jairus realized that he had no other hope to save his daughter. He knew that he was at the end of his rope, and that is how he has come to the desperate act of kneeling before this rabbi whom he has heard so much about. If this Jesus has really done the miraculous healings that Jairus has heard of, then there is hope for his little girl.

The depth of his desperation to save his daughter is something that any of us can understand, but the humbleness of his action doesn't come to us through the text that Mark has written. Falling at the knees of a rabbi from a religiously insignificant town like Nazareth just wasn't done by the ruler of a synagogue in Capernaum. The social order of the day revolved around the relationship of underclass

individuals having patrons who assisted them with their needs. If you needed help with something, you went to your patron to ask for his assistance, and once you got the help that you needed then you were indebted to him. And you could be sure that he would collect on that debt over and over again, unless you found a patron with more prestige than your current one had.

For this man of influence and prestige to lower himself so far in front of Jesus and a crowd of witnesses was most unusual. For him to go to someone who was as low as Jesus in the social rankings – a rabbi who didn't even have a synagogue of his own – was even more unusual. Things just weren't done this way, ever.

Today, this desperate act of Jairus would be the equivalent of you having a serious financial problem, but instead of going to the bank, a family member or even a rich friend to get a loan you go to the poorest person in town, and you ask that person to help you out. There's no real possibility that they will be able to help you, but you go to them anyway.

Given his social standing and prestige in the community, you can be sure that Jairus had exhausted every possibility to help his daughter before he went to Jesus. He literally waited until he was desperate before approaching the Lord for help, just like we do. It's not unusual for us to be at the end of our own rope before the thought of approaching the Lord God even enters into our mind. We would much rather try and handle whatever the problem is by ourselves, at least until we realize the hard way that we're in over our heads. Only then do we come to the harsh realization that we are helpless on our own, and by that point we have typically made the problem worse than it would have been if we'd just accepted God's invitation of prayer and protection in the first place.

You can imagine how anxious and hopeful Jairus must have been as he led Jesus to his home. He finally had a chance to help his little girl! Everything was going to be okay if he could just get the rabbi to his home in time. You can almost see the frustration on his face when Jesus suddenly stopped and turned around to look at the crowd. Inside he must have been screaming in his own mind, "NOOO!!! We're so close! What's he doing!? Why is he stopping now!?"

“Who touched my garments?” Jesus asked the crowd pressing in around him. Even His own disciples couldn’t believe that Jesus would bother asking that question given the number of people crowding around them! Finally, an unidentified woman came forward and admitted that she had done it, and then she took the time to tell Him why. She had been suffering from a disease that involved a discharge of blood for about twelve years, ironically that was also the age of Jairus’s daughter. She had seen a number of different doctors in hopes of being cured, but they weren’t able to do anything for her. And although she had spent everything that she had, the only result was that she kept getting worse. She was at the end of her rope until she saw Jesus.

She had heard of the miraculous healings that He had done, and she just knew that He was her only hope. The woman moved up behind Jesus in the crowd, and knew that even a touch of His garment would help her. She was right, a single touch of the Lord’s robe, and she was immediately cured of the disease that every medical treatment had only made worse.

What she didn’t count on was Jesus knowing that someone had touched His robe. She must have been terrified when He turned around and asked who did it. She was sure that she would just be able to slip away, a pretty foolish thought when you consider that she was healed from a twelve year disease with the power that came from just a touch of a robe. But she needn’t have feared, “Daughter,” Jesus said, “Your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

Poor Jairus must have been beside himself at this point. Why is Jesus wasting time with this lowly woman when his own daughter is dying!? Jesus needs to get there soon or all hope will be lost! He needs the Lord to act, and he needs it to happen right now! But the Lord only acts where and when He chooses because His will and His timing are perfect.

Before Jesus even finishes talking to the newly-healed woman, Jairus’s worst fears come true. He receives the word that his daughter has died. With incredible words, “Do not fear, only believe,” Jesus continues to follow Jairus home, and when they finally arrive Mark says they find the mourners weeping and wailing loudly. These are professional mourners who would have been hired to assist a

high official's house at such a time because the more important a person is the more people he needs to mourn for a loss in his family. Jesus looks at them, and says, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." They respond to His Words with laughter. They know death. They have seen it before, but what they don't know is that Jesus is the very author of life.

We join in with the laughter of the mourners, because, like them, we think that we know better than the Lord. We fail to take the Word of God seriously, and tell ourselves that it's not really all that important. Anytime we question or contradict the Lord's Word, we join with the people who laughed at the Words of Jesus. That's what they were doing when they laughed at what Jesus said about the little girl sleeping, they were contradicting and questioning the Word of God. It's the way that any of us sinners react to the Lord's works and Word, either we laugh at it or ignore it until we reach the point of desperation.

But in spite of our faithless reactions to Him, the Lord continues to do His work among us. When Jairus came before Jesus, there was no hesitation on the Lord's part. No, Jesus simply heard the plea from a desperate father who was at the end of his rope, and He went with Him to see the little girl and the Lord did His merciful work for His people.

As they traveled to the house the woman in the crowd touched the robe of Jesus to be healed. The faith that she had led to her healing, and Jesus stopped long enough to identify her and tell her so. The Lord did His healing work for His people.

When the news reached Jairus and Jesus that the girl had died, that could have been the end of it. He could have just left Jairus to his grief, but Jesus instead spoke to him these beautiful words, "Do not fear, only believe." And with His Word, the Lord comforted His people.

When the mourners laughed at Jesus inside the house, He could have rebuked them for their ridicule and lack of faith, but the Lord had other work to do in that place. He would not let His Word be ignored or ridiculed in that way. He went about His business in spite of their disrespect and unbelief because Jesus knows life. He went into the room with the parents and three disciples, He took

the little girl's hand in His and spoke His Word to her, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." And this twelve year old girl immediately got up and began walking around, and Jesus told them to give her something to eat. The Lord saved, healed and provided for His people and He did it all with His Holy Word.

All of these things and more Jesus continues to do for His people today. His love and forgiveness wash away the sins that we commit against Him, and He showers us with His gifts through His Word and Sacraments. He shows us mercy and love as He provides for daily needs and saves us from eternal death. He strengthens and comforts us with the promises of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion even as He abundantly pours out His blessings to us at the same time. He knows exactly what we need and when we need it, and then He provides it for us as well. Finally, He has control over life and death, and because of His death, He has won eternal life for all of us.

The time will soon arrive when Jesus will return to raise our bodies from the grave. The signs that He told us to look for are all around us, including wars and rumors of wars. But until that time does arrive, there are also desperate people all around us who are at the end of their rope, and they need to hear from you about everything that Jesus has done for them. Pray continually that the Lord would use you as His instrument to do His work. But be assured that even though we may find it easier at times to join with those who laugh, He will continue to do His work among us and for us, and that includes showing His great love and mercy for all of us who need it. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

