

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes
for Sunday, 7 January

Children's Talk: All Things New

It's nice to get new things: new clothes, new toys, a new bed, and so on. It's not as nice sometimes to get something that has been used: your older brother or sister's old clothes or toys or bed. Why is that? Why do we like new things so much? Things that are brand new seem perfect in a way. They have no flaws, nothing wrong with them. But once something has been used, it can never get back to being perfect.

Another way of thinking of this is that it is easy to break something but much harder to put it back together again. I can tear this piece of paper with hardly any effort at all. But to get it back to being whole again would be hard, and even then you'd still see the tear. Or tin foil: I can easily put marks in it; but even when I smooth them out there are still signs of the creases.

It seems like the same is true of us: it is easy to make mistakes, but much harder to make up for them. When someone does something bad, it feels like it makes them a bad person. But can they ever stop being bad? Or will they have to be bad forever? Even if they do something good? Well the Lord says something very interesting about that.

“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.”
(Revelation 21:4-5)

The Lord can wipe away all the bad things and make someone brand new. That's good news for you! Even if you have done something bad, with the Lord's help you can become better and do good and you don't have to be bad.

This is good news for other people too. When someone has done a lot of bad things we start to think of them as a bad kid. And it may even be months later and we still think of them as bad or naughty. But that's not true at all! They may have done bad things in the past. But the Lord can make them good. That means we have to learn to forgive people and think of the good things they do now, and forget about the bad things that did a long time ago.

The Lord can make people brand new, so that we can move on from bad things. *Amen.*

Renewed Life

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn

7 January, 2024

It's easy to break something, much harder to put it back together again. This is generally the case with physical objects but we often apply the same principle to our spiritual lives. It is easy to mess up, it is difficult to make up for our mistakes. If the mistakes are grave enough then we might even describe ourselves as broken, usually with the implication of being broken beyond repair. Yet that is not the case. As long as we live on this Earth we have the opportunity to flourish spiritually and to overcome whatever it may be we face. This truth is illustrated in a story of the Lord healing a little child.

This story begins with a man named Jairus approaching Jesus. Jairus was a man of authority: he was the ruler or head of a synagogue. He would be the one to oversee that everything happening in the synagogue would be done properly and according to order. As the story opens he comes to Jesus in despair:

Now when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea. And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet and begged Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live." So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him. (Mark 5:21-24)

In spite of his exalted position Jairus was reduced to desperation by the condition of his little daughter. None of his learning or expertise could save her, and so he threw himself at Jesus' feet and begged that he might come save her.

In the Word little children stand for innocence and charity (*Secrets of Heaven* §430). In contrast Jairus stands for intellectual understanding and teaching. His name even means "he enlightens." We have here in this story then a picture of our conscience mind recognizing that innocence is on the verge of death and yet powerless to turn back the clock to save that innocence. There are a few scenarios that result in this death of innocence. I think the past couple of years in particular has shown us some of them. When we are innocent and trusting we can retain hope and optimism even when bad things happen. But when hardship after hardship piles up, and every time we seem to be about to turn a corner something new goes wrong, we are robbed of hope and retreat into pessimism. Even good things become questionable because we "know" that there must be a catch, or that good things are only fleeting. We may intellectually know that the Lord may be able to turn things around; but the feeling is that we are on the verge of a permanent state of losing innocence.

In the next part of the story we see a representation of the conflict between faith that hope can be restored and cynicism that it is forever lost. On the way to the house Jesus was slightly delayed, and the message came that the daughter had died:

While He was still speaking, some came from the ruler of the synagogue's house who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?"

As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not be afraid; only believe." And He permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly. When He came in, He said to them, "Why make this commotion and weep? The little child is not dead, but sleeping."

And they ridiculed Him. (Mark 5:35-40)

On the one side we see cynicism: those who bring the message don't just inform Jairus that his daughter has died, they specifically ask why should he keep bothering Jesus to do something? When Jesus suggested that the girl was not dead but sleeping, they laughed at Him.

We all have a cynical side that hell wants to inflate. Like the people in the story it says to us, "Why trouble the Lord any further?" It laughs at the notion that we could possibly return to real innocent trust and joy in the Lord, that that part of us is not dead, but rather simply dormant. Based on the bad choices we have made or the people we have become we can stop believing in the Lord's ability to save us. I know that at times in my life I have been on the verge of praying for help in overcoming some flaw, but am brought up short because I "know" that I'm just going to mess up again. Why bother the Lord, knowing that it's too late for me? The die is cast, I am who I am, and nothing can change that now.

To some extent this mentality is a protection. If we do not expect good things then we cannot be disappointed when they don't happen. If we don't believe in our ability to recover innocent trust in the Lord then we don't have to bear the responsibility of working to get there. Nor do we have to confront the possibility of trying and failing, and perhaps trying and failing again and again and again.

The Lord stands in direct opposition to this mentality. The Lord stands for the possibility that no matter how far you have fallen you can still be restored and revived. In the story Jesus commanded that those present should not be afraid but have faith. He declared that the little child, in spite of all appearances, was not dead but sleeping. If we are to escape the cynicism of hell we must begin with a faith in the Lord, the faith that He can in fact save us in spite of the appearance that we are beyond saving. If we do not have faith in that single truth then we will not be able to progress further. The Teachings of the New Church describe this faith as the very beginning of spiritual healing and salvation:

...the very first thing a person needs to do is to acknowledge that the Lord is the Saviour of the world; for unless he acknowledges this no one can receive any truth or good at all from heaven, or therefore receive faith from there. And since it was the very first and most essential thing, therefore in order that He might be acknowledged when He came into the world the Lord questioned the sick, when He healed them, about their faith; and those who had faith were healed. This faith was that He was the Son of God who was to come into the world, and that He had power to heal and save. Furthermore every healing of sickness by the Lord when He was in the world served to mean a healing of spiritual life, thus served to mean the things that belong to salvation. (*Secrets of Heaven* §10083:5)

This is backward from what our cynical side wants. The cynic wants to say, "heal me first, and then I will believe." But if we do not have any faith in the Lord's ability to

heal our lives, then we will never receive that healing. We must hold fast to the simple yet profound truth that the Lord is bigger than all that is awful and depressing in the world at large; and the truth that the Lord is also bigger than our own mistakes, even our worst mistakes.

But this does not just mean that we should have blind faith and do nothing. There is deep meaning in the fact that He brought only three of his disciples with Him, namely Peter, James, and John. All twelve of the disciples together stand for all the many ways that people of the church have faith or do good; but these Peter, James, and John stand for the core of everything that makes someone a Christian: faith, charity, and good works (*Secrets of Heaven* 2135). It is when all three of these qualities are present that the Lord can restore and save a person. The previous passage I quoted about the crucial role of faith in the Lord qualifies that faith by tying it to charity:

But at the same time He also teaches that they have faith in Him who live according to His commandments, so that the life which results from doing so goes to compose their faith. (*Secrets of Heaven* §10083:6)

So if you are in a position of having lost hope either in the world around you or in your own internal world, begin first and foremost by holding tightly to the truth that the Lord can make things better; and then from that faith reach for something worth loving and putting into practice.

In time the Lord will restore the innocence and trust that feels lost. This is of course shown in the story by raising the girl from death:

But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the little child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying. Then He took the little child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." Immediately the little girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement. But He commanded them strictly that no one should know it, and said that something should be given her to eat. (Mark 5:40-43)

What exactly is it within us that can be restored to life in this way? It is powerful to reflect on the language that is used to describe the individual in the story. She is referred to variously as a little daughter, a little child, and a little girl. Clearly the focus is on her tenderness and innocence. Then there are the words Jesus uses to address her directly, "*Talitha cumi*." This is Aramaic, the language most likely spoken as their first language by Jesus and his followers. There is a personal touch in quoting the exact words, rather than the more formal Greek of the rest of the text. On top of that the word *talitha*, meaning little girl, may be related to a word for "lamb." In short, we have here an intense picture of profound innocence.

This quality is what the Lord is saying is possible for you to have within yourself. You may be bitter and weathered by the cares of the world. You may feel disdain or self-loathing for yourself. You may have learned to put up a veneer of tough manhood, with no cracks to let anyone in or any vulnerability to show. You may numb yourself against all pain and sorrow. And yet, even for you, this deep, tender, loving, pure, innocent life from the Lord can be restored into your life. The worst cynic and the most committed pessimist can be transformed into one who trusts the Lord again as a little child.

This transformation happens by the Lord bringing His almighty Divine power into our lives. This is the symbolism of Jesus reaching out His hand to heal, especially in the case of children:

This laying of His hand on children and on young children likewise means the transmission and reception of Divine power, enabling a person's interiors to be healed, which is salvation. (*Secrets of Heaven* §10023:8)

It's quite astounding when you think of it, that for all our many flaws and limitations the God of the universe wants to reach out to us, to be part of us, and to lend us His aid. The Lord desires to reach out to every single person, even down to the worst sinner, and to give to that sinner the power to be healed of sin. Nothing we can do in this lifetime can permanently render us incapable of receiving this power. No one is so unworthy as to be beyond its reach.

It is easy to break something, difficult to fix it. We live in a broken world and we are broken people. Yet the Lord has the power to fix what is broken and heal what is injured. Neither the world nor we ourselves are beyond His saving power. As He says, "Do not be afraid; only believe." There is hope beyond imagining for what is to come. *Amen.*