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St. Stephen's Church (Sewickley, PA)

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2 Cor 8.1-9, 13-15; Mark 5.22-24, 35b-43

Title: "Recipe for a Successful Life: "Diversions, Denial, and Hiding"

**Mark 5:22-43** <sup>22</sup> Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and seeing him, he fell at his feet, <sup>23</sup> and besought him, saying, "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." <sup>24</sup> And he went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. ...there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" <sup>36</sup> But ignoring what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." <sup>37</sup> And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. <sup>38</sup> When they came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, he saw a tumult, and people weeping and wailing loudly. <sup>39</sup> And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a tumult and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." <sup>40</sup> And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. <sup>41</sup> Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi"; which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." <sup>42</sup> And immediately the girl got up and walked (she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. <sup>43</sup> And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

## 1. Intro

- a. **Warning:** This is a "come to Jesus" sermon.
  - i. So you might want to leave. You could pretend you just remembered a call you have to make. Or you could text someone and ask them to call you and leave like you have to take a really important call.
  - ii. Or if you can't leave: don't worry—there'll always be more stuff to watch on TV when you get home. And it will just push all this out of your head.
- b. This morning, we're going to look at Mark 5—this story about Jairus and his dead daughter—but before we get to that, I'd like to talk a little about life. I'd like to be your motivational speaker, if you will.
- c. Thinker and writer Os Guinness has said that the human condition—that is, our life—is characterized by "hiding, diversion, and denial." We do these things because they are super effective at dealing with your issues—and you can have a pretty successful life, humanly speaking, with these three little tools.
- d. Let me explain:

- e. **Diversion:** this is knowing you have a problem but using some activity, some fun pastime to avoid dealing with it.
  - i. Diversion: this is Las Vegas and Video Games (Plug: see the amazing documentary about 1980s-era arcade games and the weirdos who play them obsessively, *King of Kong*). But it can be more subtle.
  - ii. Michael Jackson's whole life was a diversion to not deal with the pain of his early childhood. Bubbles the Chimp!
  - iii. The extent to which someone seeks diversion is an indication of how much pain is there. If you go to Vegas once a year, that's moderate. If you move to Vegas, please, find a therapist.
  - iv. Can be simple things: Yardwork becomes so consuming that you never have to talk to your wife.
  - v. Children! (for some)
  
- f. **Denial:** This is simply denying you have a problem.
  - i. Everything's OK. I drink a little, but I'm not an alcoholic.
  - ii. I know I have food issues, but I ate something 2 days ago!
  - iii. I know I speak a little sharply to my husband, but he knows that deep down I love him.
  - iv. Willy Lomann (*Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, who knew a little something about denial): failed as a husband, father, and in his career, but he repeats throughout the play, "I'm very well liked."
  - v. Girl in ABC's teen soap drama, *Secret Life of the American Teenager*. "I've prayed about it and I think it's OK."
  
- g. **Hiding:** This is where you know you have a problem, but you hide from it.
  - i. You have such a strained relationship with your parents, who live in Erie, so you move to Marin County, CA, or to Eugene, OR. Or maybe you can only get as far as Pittsburgh, but it's far enough. You hide from your parents.
  - ii. A demanding job is another great way to hide.
  - iii. Another great way to hide: Young Americans working overseas in Missionary work of Relief and Development work are often hiding from some personal failure or breakdown in their family.

iv. Churches are full of people in hiding. Religion can be a great way to hide.

## 2. Segue

- a. I bring this up because it shows us the kind of people (us!) that God has to deal with. See God wants to love you. He wants you. But we put up these walls of diversion, denial, and hiding.
- b. See, God (in Jesus) comes to people and says, “Let me be in control; let me love you, let me guide you, let me order your life, let me bring you into a place of rest.”
- c. But this is hugely threatening, because it’s a loss of control.
- d. Because all our denial, diversion, and hiding are all ways of taking back control, or the idea of control, when we feel life begins to take it away.
- e. I mean, we don’t like our problems—but we really do like the ways we cope with them.
  - i. We kind of like our diversions, our denials, our hiding.
  - ii. In the mind-blowing little memoir, *The Useful Sinner*, a man talks about a huge moral failure—adultery—but that even after coming clean, he was still wearing “my Brooks Brothers clothes [and] clinging to my ego and forty-plus years of self-delusion.”
- f. Our reading today beginning in Mark 5.22 shows us how Jesus gets through to people like you and me, people who love diversions, delusion, and hiding.
- g. Tonight we meet a man who was hiding in his religion. And not until his life fell apart did he come to Jesus.
- h. **And we might find something here that connects with our own lives.**

## 3. The passage

- a. We begin with a man approaching Jesus:
- b. **Mark 5:** <sup>22</sup> Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and seeing him, he fell at his feet, <sup>23</sup> and besought him, saying, "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."
- c. What do we know about Jesus? And what do we know about Jairus?
  - i. Jesus:
    - 1. Early in his ministry.

2. Done amazing stuff: He's cast out demons, healed a paralytic, and forgiven sins.
3. But he's already made some enemies. Just two chapters back, he was in the synagogue and he healed a man on the Sabbath. So the Jewish leaders don't like his disregard for God's Law. They would have seen Jesus' act as a blatant act of disobedience of God's Law.
4. To give you an idea, imagine if St. Stephen's got a new pastor who decided he wanted to preach standing on the altar. Or poured the communion wine on his head during the service. Or celebrated communion with a cigarette in my mouth. Or used cuss words in a sermon—just a deep offense to their strongest religious sensibilities.
5. So Jesus has made his power clear, but has also offended those in the synagogue.

ii. Jairus

1. Synagogue Leader. So he's a man who has been standing back, critical, suspicious, offended at Jesus. He's Jesus' enemy.
2. But he's coming asking for help because his sick daughter is dying.
3. This shows us one really important thing: He's totally Desperate
  - a. Look at what he does: He falls at Jesus' feet and begs him. This is a broken man. His theological disagreements with Jesus are, apparently, out the window. Evangelical, Anglo-Catholic, Liberal Protestant—whatever. He just wants someone to save his daughter. And he knows Jesus can do it.

d. What next:

- i. Jesus agrees to help. He doesn't lay a guilt trip on him, or force him to sign an acknowledgement of Jesus' identity.
- ii. On the way, they are stopped by a sick woman, and Jesus spends a lot of time with her.
- iii. When they arrive, the daughter is dead. The last shred of hope is lost. The mourners are already there.
- iv. But! Ultimately, in very interesting, secretive way, Jesus by simply speaking a word to the dead girl, raises her to life.

#### 4. Main Point: What can we take from this passage?

##### a. Desperate is good:

- i. Our times of desperation, our brokenness, our times of failure, abandonment, and suffering—this is where God begins to break down our love for hiding, diversion, and denial.
- ii. We finally have our “Come to Jesus” moment.

##### b. Jesus is Lord, Not Your Personal Assistant:

- i. He works in your life on his schedule, not yours. And it might not look the way you want.
- ii. Can you imagine Jairus’ frustration as they were on their way, but Jesus stopped to help this sick woman?
- iii. Can you imagine his despair when they arrived and his daughter had already died?
- iv. So Jesus is not offering a magic bullet to fix your problems according to your schedule. Once you’ve invited Jesus into your problems—you may have to wait, and things might get worse. He knows what you need and when you need it!

##### c. The Good News: Jesus specializes not in fixing merely broken situations, but in raising that which has totally died to new life.

- i. **Your marriage**, emotionally speaking, might have to die. Maybe twice.
- ii. **Your kids** might have to move away for 10 years, you both do some growing up, and a new relationship is born.
- iii. **You** might have to fail in a big way—lose your business, lose your house, lose your dreams—before Jesus can raise you to the new life he always wanted for you.
- iv. **But Jesus comes in the room—sends the people outside, and says, “Little Girl, I say to you, arise.”**

#### 5. Final Word:

##### a. Sum up: What have we said:

- i. **Desperate is Good**
- ii. **Jesus is Lord, Not Your Personal Assistant**

### iii. The Good News: Jesus Raises the Dead

#### b. Illustration/Implication.

- i. If you're desperate:
  1. come to Jesus
  2. Put aside your theological quibbles, your 12-year-old atheism
- ii. If you've invited him into your problems but are still waiting:
  1. Take heart in knowing that Jesus hasn't forgotten. You're on the way. You're on the path. You're headed there. But it might take a while.
  2. And resign as quickly as possible to the idea that the thing might have to die.
  3. We try to artificially resuscitate these sick situations and relationships—but this just drags out the inevitable. It's our game of denial, trying to take control, instead of letting the thing die.
- iii. If (and once) you're in the place where the thing has died:
  1. You're in the darkest place before the dawn.
  2. Wait for the new creative words that Jesus speaks, bringing to life that which was dead.
  3. Can you see God reaching out to you when you feel farthest away from him? That's the promise here.

#### 6. Conclusion:

- a. Let us pray.