

We are used to the idea of death; it makes life precious. It causes us to ask “What am I here for? How can I best spend this day knowing that I cannot be certain of any others? And the Bible is full of this sweet antagonism between life and death – asking those fundamental questions in many different ways. Wisdom will say death was never intended in its desire to show God as good – in its desire to stay true to that original perception that it was Adam and Eve, and more obviously perhaps, Cain’s murder of Abel, that brought death into the world. So death, in this view, is the result of sin, of not doing God’s will wherever in its turn that original impulse came from, ourselves or the devil. So very quickly the reality of death becomes a metaphor for how we are with God, and life becomes a metaphor for how God is with us – choose life not death becomes the Bible’s leitmotif. But we find we cannot choose life unless God gives even this impulse – our call is to respond to that gift of life always on offer from God, made manifest most obviously now in Jesus, the goodness of God recapitulated in a human being – to invert the perception of Irenaeus that Jesus recapitulates, or relives, our life in everything but sin in order to save it, to make it good again. Or to say it in that other famous phrase “Jesus becomes human that we might become divine”. So in the same way that today’s gospel passage has a story within a story so both stories are contained within an even larger story: God’s desire to honour the original making of us in God’s image; to restore us to everlasting life, to be as Adam and Eve were before the fall – one like God.

In our own daily lives we tend to lose sight of this larger vision; our concern is to get the next thing done that presents itself to us, to survive the day in all its ups and downs. Death then becomes a useful corrective, our reaction to it a litmus test of where we are with God, or better perhaps, where we think God is with us. It spurs both the unnamed woman and Jairus to seek out this source of life which has come among them: for the woman because in her pain and isolation, unclean to all, she might just as well be dead, and for Jairus because death threatens the one he loves. They are drawn to the one who gives life, and he knows this, he knows their need and has compassion; they touch him both literally and metaphorically – they step into the flow of grace, the flow of God’s love and are restored to life - Jairus as much as his daughter. And we needn’t worry about other people’s demands getting in the way of our own. God has time for all. The only judgement that’s going on here is our desire for that original unity with God, for our desire, in other terms, to turn away from sin, to trust in the goodness of God. It’s a sort of death in a way, born perhaps of desperation, but good nonetheless. With this mix of literal and metaphorical meaning in mind Jesus could just as well be saying “Talitha kum ” to each one of us.

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