

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH
NOVEMBER 6, 2022**

LUKE 8: 41-56

“DO NOT FEAR----ONLY BELIEVE”

Have you ever had a bad day? One of those days where everything goes wrong? A man named Ben Carpenter had a real bad day a few years back. He has muscular dystrophy and needs to use a wheelchair to get around. One day, things didn't go well. He was crossing a city street in his wheelchair and the light turned before he got to the other side. He was right in front of a semi truck when the light changed to green and the truck driver didn't see him there. So he drove forward and ran right into Mr. Carpenter and his wheel chair. The truck was still barely moving when this happened, but somehow the handles on the wheelchair got hooked into the grill on the front of the truck. And Ben Carpenter was about to have the ride of his life. The truck headed for the freeway on-ramp with the man in his wheel chair, stuck to the front of the truck, leading the way. The truck then tore down the freeway at high speed with Ben Carpenter hanging on in his chair, facing frontwards with the truck, seeing the world coming at him very fast indeed! The rubber tires on the chair quickly disintegrated but other than that the chair held together. Other drivers saw what was going on as the trucker was oblivious to it all. They called 9-1-1 and within minutes the police pulled the truck over. Ben Carpenter was very shook up but not seriously hurt. A bad day indeed! Although he did live to tell about it..... (“Our Daily Bread”, 7/08)

And there are other kinds of bad days..... Most of you are Browns fans; you've had plenty of bad football days. But there have been worse teams.... Back in the early days of football there was a college game down south in 1916. Cumberland College played Georgia Tech. The final score: Georgia Tech., 222; Cumberland College, 0. A very bad day for Cumberland players and fans!

But, of course, there are lots worse things that can happen than trivial things like football scores. Lots worse. In today's gospel lesson from Luke 8, we heard about a very bad day experienced by a man named Jairus. He only had one child, a 12 year old daughter. Think of how much he must loved her! And in today's gospel reading, Jairus' little girl gets sick and dies. What could possibly be worse than that----to have a young child die!

And it was on that day that Jesus came to Jairus' house. And he told the poor fellow in Luke 8:50---"Do not fear, only believe."

We all experience bad days, too. Perhaps, like Jairus, the death of a loved one. Or such things as money problems, job problems, family stress, sickness. And, of course, the problem of knowing our own deaths are always getting closer.... And perhaps in some ways, what makes for a really hard day is when we're depressed, worried, anxious for no particular reason at all!

Yes, we all have bad days, tough times. And as happened for Jairus, on those days the Lord comes to us and says to us what he said to Jairus----"Do not fear, only believe."

What is it Christ wants us to believe when we are in the midst of problems? That He will fix them right away? Sometimes He does do that, even sometimes in a miraculous way. That's what He did for Jairus by raising His daughter from the dead.

But more often, He doesn't bring us a quick fix. Instead, He walks through our problems with us. He told Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe." When He tells us that, what should we believe? *That we are not alone in our hard situations. That He is at our side all the way, from now to the next life.* If we believe that, then we can calm ourselves and trust in Him.

But why doesn't Christ just always fix our problems quickly, like He did for Jairus? Even some little miracles would be great! Or even better, how about if He just kept us from having problems to start with? Just gave us a smooth and easy life----

Because sometimes the hard times are actually best for us. Going through hard times can help us to mature in our faith, to grow, to become spiritually stronger, to grow closer to God.

St. John the Almsgiver was the Patriarch of Alexandria, Egypt about 1400 years ago. A very holy man whose years as patriarch were focused on caring for the poor of the city and who walked so closely with Christ.... One day he was concluding services in the cathedral and getting ready to go out when he heard a woman crying loudly in the back of the church. He walked over to her and asked her what was wrong, why was her heart so broken? He said to her, "Has your husband died, do you have a sick child, are you ill yourself, is your family running out of food?" The woman answered, "No, Your Holiness, all is well regarding all those kinds of things. Very well, indeed! But God has forgotten my family!" "How do you know that?", asked the

Saint. “I know it because all is going well. Before we had all kinds of problems----and when that was the case we prayed more, we depended on divine help, we grew closer to God. But now that all our circumstances are good, we are neglecting God. We are drifting away from Him! If God keeps making our life so easy, we will neglect Him more and more.....and we will lose our souls. I am fearful that God has forgotten us because He no longer sends us problems!” St. John gave praise to God for the woman’s wisdom—because she was wise enough to know that a life of ease was not a blessing, but a very dangerous thing! (The Meaning of Suffering, Aleksiev, St. Herman Brotherhood Press, p. 49)

Perhaps we will never become as wise as that woman, so wise as to weep when all goes well. But hopefully we can become wise enough to realize that when bad days come, those days are an opportunity for us to draw closer to the Lord.

Is all going well for you? Be cautious---you are in spiritual danger.

Yes, God uses our hard times to mature us, strengthen us, and draw us to Him. That can be hard to remember on those bad days! But we should try to remember--- and we should remember also the words the Lord said to Jairus on his most bad day in today’s gospel story----“Do not fear, only believe!”. Believe that God is in control, believe He will stay with you.

Hard times do come to us. Bad days always arrive eventually. When that happens, do not fear, but believe---- Believe that God is good. Believe that God is powerful enough to work in our hard times for our own good----if we will just keep our faith in Him.

Keep on believing that your life, even when things are tough, is in the hands of God.....some very good hands to be in!