

Among us Christians, it's a bit of a trope to say that the answer is always "Jesus." If in doubt, go with the Sunday School answer: Jesus. The thing is, though, it's true. Jesus was the answer for the desperate father's plea. Jesus was the answer to the woman's years and years of suffering. Jesus is the answer still today, for in Him is manifest the love of God and the power of God, which are the remedies for all the world's needs.

In today's Gospel reading, we see much of the suffering and sadness we endure in this life, pictured in two individuals. The first is that of the ruler seeking out Jesus. He is seeking Jesus because, as he tells Him, "My daughter has just died."

We aren't told specifically, but from the context it seems like this was a sudden, unexpected tragedy. After all, most twelve-year-olds don't usually have chronic conditions that lead to death, and if she did, her father probably would've gone looking for Jesus sooner. But as it is, we have a father kneeling before Christ, begging, likely through tears, for the life of his precious little girl.

In this father's situation, we have pictured those tragedies that come from nowhere. Workers who have been faithful employees but suddenly find themselves let go. Farmers and ranchers putting in months of hard labor only to have a hailstorm or blizzard devastate their crops or herds. People told by friends that they just don't want to be around them anymore, or by spouses that the spark is just gone and there's no desire to rekindle it.

And all this to speak nothing of the sudden events that affect our bodies: diagnoses that come out of nowhere, accidents that no one could've foreseen. The effects of sin – sadness, pain, death – often come when we're least expecting it.

Other times, the effects of sin aren't a surprise, but rather something that we're all too aware of. This is seen in the woman suffering from the hemorrhage. Perhaps it started suddenly, or just seemed like a typical occurrence. Surely it would go away soon.

But it doesn't. No worries, she'll just go to the doctor and he'll get it straightened out. Many doctors later, all she has to show for it is an empty money box.

At least her friends will stick with her. Perhaps many do, though once the initial urgency dies off, and the constant cleansing sacrifices required after visiting her get tiresome and expensive, you have to wonder how many dropped off. On and on it goes, for twelve years, never getting any better, with seemingly no hope in sight.

In this woman, we have pictured those effects of sin that are not a surprise, but instead ones that are ongoing, frustrating, tiring realities. This could be things like chronic medical conditions that, while not immediately life-threatening, nevertheless become exhausting to deal with.

Or perhaps pictured here are situations in life that you seem to be stuck in – a job that is a constant grind but is the only one you can find, or perhaps someone in your life who just tends to wear

you down in one way or another, or maybe wishing that there were more people in your life to break up the loneliness.

Maybe, in this constant hemorrhage, we can see having to deal with a constant state of anxiety, or concern, or even outrage, that comes to you nonstop through your TV or smartphone, one problem or disaster after another after another, so that you feel numbed and empty, wearily wondering, “What’s next?”

Sudden or slow, sin brings much suffering to our lives. But as Christians, we’re blessed to have the answer to all of it in Jesus. Our Lord reveals this to us in the same way that the father of the dead girl and the bleeding woman would’ve had it revealed to them: namely, by His word.

As Jesus went about His earthly ministry, He performed many great miracles. Lepers were cleansed. The lame walked. The mute spoke. The deaf heard. The blind saw. These miracles not only showed Jesus’ divine power to heal and restore, they also showed the love of God, who had come to bring life to people trapped in death.

And as Jesus did these things and taught about the Kingdom of God, the word spread. The word came to desperate fathers and exhausted women. God the Holy Spirit, working through that word, as well as the word of what we call the Old Testament, stirred up faith in the two individuals. The Spirit used the word to let them see in Jesus the power and love of God, that He both had the power to help them and also the love that would cause Him to want to help them.

Faith, brought through the word, led the father to kneel before Christ in worship. Faith, brought through the word, led the woman to cling to Christ, trusting that even in the tassels of His garment, there was healing. The words they had heard led them to believe that, as Jesus had helped others, He would help them too.

That is what the word of God does for us still today. The Bible is not a collection of myths or legends. It’s not a bunch of stories made up to teach good morals or provide a coping mechanism for the weak-minded. In the pages of the Bible we see how God has spoken and acted toward man in history.

As with the words about Jesus heard by the father and the woman, revealing God’s power and love, the pages of Holy Scripture reveal that power and love to us, showing us that God can and does save from all manner of trial and suffering, both those that come suddenly and those that last for long periods.

When sudden disaster strikes, the word shows us how our Lord is in control. Consider the trials of Job, where multiple tragedies suddenly befall him, yet the Lord protects him and grants even greater blessings when they’re all through.

Or recall the disciples caught in the sudden storm on the Sea of Galilee. These experienced fishermen all think they’re going to die, yet Jesus, even sleeping on the cushion, was protecting them, and when He wakes up He calms the storm even faster than when it arose. No disaster comes that the Lord is not aware of, and before it begins He already has determined when and how it will end.

The word also shows us that long periods of trial are likewise in the Lord's hand. Think of the man born blind, who spent decades unable to see, until at the moment set by God, Jesus grants Him sight, bringing glory to God both then and now. Or remember St. Paul, who for a long time endured what he described as a "thorn in the flesh." Three times he cried out to God to take it away, yet the Lord used it to strengthen Paul's faith and increase his reliance on the grace and strength of God.

The Lord even guides whole periods of history to bring people through suffering to blessing. Consider when the Israelites were in slavery in Egypt. In grace, God was giving the peoples of Canaan centuries to repent – though they chose not to. And when the time came, God brought the people out of Egypt with His mighty hand, granting His people the treasures of Egypt and then destroying the Egyptian army in the Red Sea.

God guided the rise and fall of empires for His purposes, such as using Babylonians to drive idolatry from His people, the Persians to let them return to their land, the Greeks to give a common language throughout the Mediterranean world, the Romans to allow safe travel that the Gospel might be spread. Each of these kingdoms caused hardship for God's people, but God always preserved His people and turned their sufferings to good.

The God who did that is still God today, and His power and love shown in the Scriptures are also still the same. Whatever might cause worry or suffering, we can hear in the word how the Lord has dealt with it before.

Sickness and infirmity? Cured countless times. Foolish or wicked rulers? Guided to bring about God's will, often without knowing it. Periods of want and scarcity? Those times are when God rained bread from heaven and fed thousands with a single lunch. Wars and rumors of wars? Only as God's allows, and stopped at His will. Hypocrites and false believers within His Church? He has always preserved a faithful remnant.

Even death itself is undone by His love and power, seen especially in His own Resurrection. Whatever may trouble us, the Lord can deliver us. Whatever the problem may be, the answer is Jesus.

This is the wonderful news that the Church has been given to proclaim. Our world is full of the effects of sin – countless people lost in sin's darkness, and we have the wonderful name of Jesus to bring restoration and light.

How does the world receive this wonderful news? Often the same way it received it in our Gospel reading. Jesus follows the father back to his house where a whole crowd has assembled to mourn the death of this little girl. They are wailing and playing funeral music, seeking to comfort the family in their loss. They're there to help, they'd say.

To the scene comes Jesus, who declares, "the girl is not dead but sleeping." This is incredible news! Surely those who gathered to share in the family's sorrow will now be glad to share in their joy! But what happens? "And they laughed at Him." Their sorrow turns to jeering and ridicule, and does so so fast that you certainly wouldn't be amiss to question their sincerity. Given wonderful news, news of hope, they laugh, they mock.

How often this happens today. Where the Good News is proclaimed, that Jesus has died to save men from sin and has risen to give them hope for eternity, it is often met with ridicule as well. The Bible tells us that this will be the case, saying, “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing.”

But why? Why would a world trapped in death reject the word that gives life? I would suggest two reasons. First, our sinful flesh desires to be in control. We want to determine the when and the where and the how. We want to determine the course of our lives. When we hear that we must submit to God and confess that all things are in His power – not ours – we are greatly provoked.

Joined to this is a second reason, namely, that we want to understand. We want to know the ‘why’ behind everything. That there would be knowledge beyond us, things we cannot grasp, this rankles our sinful flesh as well.

Look at the crowd outside the father’s house. They ridicule Jesus because they “know” the girl is dead, not sleeping, and there’s no way they’re all wrong and Jesus is right. And further, if it was really so simple as waking up a sleeping child, well, they could’ve done that. How dare this fellow from Nazareth think He could do what they could not!

As Scripture says, there’s nothing new under the sun. The world mocks Christ and His word still today for those same reasons. How could there be one God in control of all things? What gives Him the “right” to tell me what to do and how to live? To say that there’s a God who is beyond our ability to control, that we aren’t the highest beings in existence, and someone outside of us sets limits to us, this infuriates our sinful pride.

And again, joined to that is our longing to understand. When things happen that we don’t understand, especially tragedies, we are immediately tempted to use them to question God’s power, love, or even existence. “How could God allow _____?” Now, it’s not wrong to mourn when bad things happen, or even to cry out “Why?” to God. Even Jesus – God in the flesh – did these things.

Where sin takes over is when we think, “Because I can’t understand why something happened, therefore there is no good reason why it happened.” Or we think, “If I can’t see anyway that this could be turned to good, therefore there isn’t any way it could be.” Satisfying our reason, our understanding, becomes the requirement, and if something doesn’t – such as a God who declares, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways” – then such a God, such a reason, must not exist.

This becomes a path toward even more despair when tragedy strikes. If we reject that God is in control and working all things for the good of His people, then either no one is in control – which is a terrifying thought – or we’re in control – which means that everything is our fault.

Sure, we can try to blame others, but all this does is create a festering sore of resentment in our souls, which are already hurting from whatever tragedy has come. Denying that Jesus is the answer finally leaves you with no answer, just another hole in your heart.

But Jesus has come that you need not suffer that. When the woman comes and touches Jesus’ cloak, He answers that humble act with restoration, doing what no physician had been able to do for

over a decade. Though the crowd laughs at and mocks Jesus, He still goes into the house in answer to the father's plea. His power will restore what has been lost; His love will bring joy to their sadness.

The power and love are beautifully seen in Jesus' raising of the dead girl. In love, He comes to her bedside and gently takes her by the hand, like a loving father rousing his drowsy daughter. But behind that tender love is the awesome power of God Almighty, hidden from mortal eyes but there all the same. That word which our translation renders "took," when Jesus takes the girl's hand, comes from the Greek word for strength or might. It has the idea of taking under one's control, placing in one's grasp.

Though not visible, this is conveyed if we just think about what happens when Jesus does this. Jesus is reaching out and gently taking her hand, but at the same time, by power that goes far beyond our comprehension, the mighty hand of God is reaching out and grasping her very soul, rejoining it to her body, which is also instantly restored.

To physical eyes, it looks like an ordinary man waking up a sleepy little girl. But at the same time, the Lord and Giver of Life is bringing life back to one of His beloved daughters, whose life He first gave before anyone knew she existed. Warmest love and infinite might, all in getting a little girl out of bed.

That's how God works still today. We're especially blessed this morning to witness it in Holy Baptism. To our eyes and human reason, Tom had water poured on his head and some words spoken over him. About as impressive as waking up a sleeping child.

But what actually happened? Here, in your presence, the Lord Most High added another son to His people. Tom has been sealed with the seal we heard about last week in Revelation 7. His old, sinful flesh was nailed to the cross, mortally wounded, and new and eternal life was given to him. Today, Tom died and was raised, such that, whenever his body falls asleep, his soul will not die as well, but instead be brought into the glorious presence of God in heaven. Unless he rejects these gifts, his eyes will never see death, only the splendor of the Kingdom of God.

Did we physically see any of this glory today? No. Does that mean it didn't happen? Certainly not! God's love and power are not limited by our understanding!

This is true, not just for Tom, but for all who believe and are baptized. Although you weren't outside Jerusalem on that Friday two millennia ago, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took your sins upon Himself and asked His Father to forgive you.

Although you weren't with the disciples in the locked room on Easter evening, Jesus' words – "Peace be with you" – are spoken to you as well.

Although you cannot always see the end of your trials or understand why they've been sent to you, the Lord, the Alpha and Omega, is in control and will not permit them to overcome you, but even now has already set the moment they will end and the means by which you will be delivered.

All things, from the beating of your heart and the breathing of your lungs to the political and economic forces of all the nations around the globe, are in His hand – the hand that gently brought the little girl back to life.

That hand, the nail-scarred hand of Jesus, is the answer. He is our comfort in sorrow, our strength in weakness, our life in death. In love, He reached out His hands upon the cross, and in love, He still reaches out, gathering in young and old, men and women, those near and those afar off. His strength and His love are the answer, for us, and for all.

In His holy name, amen.