

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

JESUS TIME

Mark 10:13-16; Kara Closs Funeral; February 4, 2025

About 19 years ago, Kara collapsed while she was at a ball game; her heart stopped, and she probably would have died then if a doctor hadn't been on the scene already. That incident came out of the blue. By all appearances, Kara was a healthy adult. After she was revived and taken to the hospital, she underwent many tests to determine what had happened. A diagnosis was offered, but no one was completely sure why this had happened. God brought her back from the brink of death then; why did He not spare her again? What we know is that God carried out His plan for her life until He called her to heaven.

In chapter eleven of John's Gospel, we hear Jesus told that His friend Lazarus was very sick. Jesus waited to go to his aid and Lazarus died before Jesus arrived. Martha and Mary, Lazarus' sisters, both told Jesus when He did arrive that, if He had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Jesus went on to raise Lazarus from the dead. Something that we are not told in the Bible but surely happened eventually was that Lazarus died and was buried again; his remains remain in the ground to this day somewhere outside of the town of Bethany. His first resurrection did not cure him of what ultimately leads to all our deaths: sin.

If Jesus had chosen, He could have saved Kara from death a week ago Saturday evening, but He didn't. And even if He had, Kara would have died eventually – unless Jesus returned in glory first – because, like Lazarus, she was sinner, just like all of us are sinners.

I won't presuppose to know why God chose to spare Kara's life the one time but not the next. We humbly believe in Jesus and trust that God is good and gracious in Him. God is working together for our good despite sin in us, in the world, and the many losses we suffer because of that. What I do know is that God was working in Kara's life up to the day she died, and that God has still more in store for her.

I saw God at work through Kara every time I visited her three-year-old preschool classroom. Over the years, she invited me to stop in during "Jesus Time." "Jesus Time" was when she taught the little ones a Bible story. Not everyone is able to teach three-year-olds. I tried to

do that when asked but usually felt totally inadequate to the task. When I floundered, Kara would step in and bail me out, pulling things together so a three-year-old child could grasp God's Word. She had a gift for doing that in "Jesus Time."

The Gospel Reading Kara chose for her funeral tells us about the very first "Jesus Time." **And they were bringing children to [Jesus] that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, He was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to Me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands on them.**

The purpose of "Jesus Time" is to bring children to Jesus so that He can receive them into His kingdom of faith. In Kara's class, this was 3-4 year-olds, but the Church has recognized that "Jesus Time" is not just for little kids. This text from Mark 10 is read at all our baptisms, for the youngest infant just days old to the oldest adult. All of us have to **receive the kingdom of God like a child**, Jesus says.

All of us are like helpless children, sinners in need of saving. We have nothing to boast in ourselves or offer to God as of value. We can only come before God as a humble, needy child, and God has mercy on us in Christ and saves us from our sin and unbelief. In Baptism, Jesus takes us out of the dominion of the devil where we would be lost forever and into the arms of our loving heavenly Father.

Many of the children in Kara's classes had not heard the Good News of Jesus before she shared Him with them. Their families did not go to church. They had never heard the name of Jesus spoken, except maybe as a curse word. Other children in her class were baptized Christians already and their parents wanted their children in a Christian preschool to help them raise their children in the true faith.

Every day in "Jesus Time," Kara brought them into Jesus' loving arms. They heard Bible stories of how God made them and saved them. They heard how faith in Jesus makes them God's children. They heard how Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead to

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forgive their sins. They heard how when a Christian dies, he or she goes to be with Jesus in heaven. I'm sure that if I asked any one of Kara's students where she is right now, they would all say, "She is with Jesus in heaven." Do you know where you will go when you die?

Psalm 139, which Kara chose for her Funeral Old Testament Reading, describes how God knows us even before we are born and is with us throughout every moment of our lives. We sang a portion of Psalm 139 in our school chapel every day during the month of January, ending with verse 16, where we confess of God:

**Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in Your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.**

Our school children are taught that God gives us life at conception, forms us in our mothers' wombs, brings us into this world, and knows all the days of our lives. Nothing is hidden from God's eyes, even the moment of our deaths. God spares our lives in one instance and, when He wants our lives to end on this earth, we die. It won't help trying to plumb the depths of God's hidden wisdom for us in this; we must stick to what God has revealed to us in His Word.

From Scripture, we know that Lazarus will end up having two resurrections. First, Jesus raised him after he died and was buried four days. Then Lazarus died a second time, and Jesus will raise him from the dead on the last day. Two deaths and two resurrections.

Kara almost died once, and now she has died, but her death is not the most important thing we consider today. As an infant, on May 23, 1965, her parents brought her to Jesus in Holy Baptism where she experienced her first death and resurrection, a spiritual one. She died to sin and rose in faith as a child of God. She lived in that baptismal grace throughout her life. As a pre-school teacher, she used her "Jesus Time" to bring little children to Jesus that He might hold them in His arms and bless them. Now, Kara has suffered a second death, a physical one this time, but it is not final. Her soul has been brought into the arms of her heavenly Father as her body waits for its resurrection. She has begun to enjoy "Jesus Time" in her Savior's arms. Amen.