

Sunday, March 19
9:00 & 11:00am



Pixie Dust

Rev. Chelsea
Cornelius

“Pixie Dust”
March 19, 2023 | Fourth Sunday in Lent
Rev. Chelsea Cornelius | John 4:46-54

*“To die will be an awfully big adventure.” -J.M. Barrie, **Peter Pan***

John 4:46-54

Jesus Heals an Official's Son

⁴⁶ Then he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Ca-per-naum. ⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” ⁴⁹ The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my little boy dies.” ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. ⁵¹ As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. ⁵² So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, “Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.” ⁵³ The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he himself believed, along with his whole household. ⁵⁴ Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.¹

“All it takes is faith, and trust, and a little bit of pixie dust!”²

These are the instructions given to three children in the opening scene of Peter Pan. They're instructions for flying: Faith, and trust, and pixie dust. In the scene, Peter Pan, the trouble-making, silly, brave, flying boy and his sidekick, Tinkerbell, have just arrived in the

¹ New Revised Standard Version

² Peter Pan, J.M. Barrie (first produced in 1904, quote taken from Disney adaption).

bedroom of children Wendy, John, and Michael. And to convince the kids to come to Neverland, Peter first teaches them to fly.

After initially watching Peter Pan fly, out of sheer willpower the kids desperately try to lift their way into the air, the way Peter can with ease. But they drop, landing back on their bedroom floor. But then Peter remembers: Dust. He snags Tinkerbell and, using her almost like a salt shaker, sprinkles her gold, glittering, pixie dust onto the three children. Immediately, they start to rise from the floor – floating, fluttering, *flying*.

“*We can fly!*” “*We can fly!*” they yell, as the glow of pixie dust keeps them afloat, and they drift out the window toward the stars.

It’d be wonderful, wouldn’t it? To have this kind of magical visitor, or a big adventure on the horizon. It’d be wonderful, to be sprinkled with the same little glitter when we needed it most.

Our scripture today tells the story of another boy and a very different miraculous circumstance: A boy at home and near death, and his dad’s desperate attempts to save him. The man leaves his child’s side, travels far from home to approach Jesus, begging him to heal his young son. And without much extravagance or even going to the boy’s bedside, Jesus provides this sign that reveals his power and his compassion—just like water into wine, he turns death into life.

It’d be wonderful, wouldn’t it? For this to always happen—what happens in this story of a desperate father and a dying boy.

I know this desperation. I have witnessed this kind of deep, daring desperation for survival again and again – of parents searching for anyone, anything that might help their child live too.

I am the Pediatric Chaplain at the UW Children’s Hospital. We are a Pediatric Trauma Center, which means that regionally, any major or life-threatening injury or accident comes to our emergency rooms; we have a level 4 NICU, where the most complex newborns come for treatment, testing, and surgery. We have a Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, an Oncology unit, a Cardiology and Cardiothoracic surgery program, a burn unit, brain surgery and organ transplant programs all in the service of healing infants, toddlers, children, and teenagers. We can do so much; most children get better and go home. There’s parades, and dance parties, and Lego towers, and even two golden retrievers.

And despite expertise and the best, most skilled efforts, despite the incredible advancements in medicine, science, and public health, despite the desperation of parents and all the prayer and hope and research in the world, some children die.

It is maybe the most profound grief, to lose a child.

There is no dark night of the soul quite like a parent, a sibling, or a family saying goodbye to a little life, a life that just got started, or barely got to be.

My job in these moments is to help. Mostly, I'm a steady, calm presence, who can listen to a family's grief and a child's story; I can help parents think about what most makes them feel like parents and their kids feel like kids, like affirming that it's not silly or unimportant to read Harry Potter to your child whether they can hear you or not; or to make sure your child is wearing their favorite pajamas, even if they might not make it through the day—it's actually exactly what's important. I help parents make major decisions about what paths forward make sense, and when the only thing left to do is hold their baby. I help by finding glimmers of hope and connection.

I was supporting a family whose newborn had died unexpectedly, and the baby's only sister, who was about 7, came to visit in the NICU to say goodbye. After her visit, the girl and her grandma took a break and sat in one of our family lounges, where the girl was coloring. I sat down with them, introduced myself as someone who helps in the hospital when things feel scary or sad. I asked the young girl if anything was on her mind, or if she had any questions. She said no, and continued coloring. But in a moment of quiet, she looked up at me and asked, "I'm still a big sister, right?"

In an emergency, sometimes we only have moments. And my role then is to make sure a child's family is there, so that in those final moments of life, a child hears the voices of their parents saying the only thing they know with complete certainty: "I love you, I love you, I love you."

I recently worked closely with a family whose little boy, after his death, became an organ donor, giving other children a chance at life again. We spent many days in conversation together in our ICU as we awaited testing, placement, and next steps. These are agonizing days for a family as they wait --their little one on life support, but who will never wake up. And this agony included this boy's young brother, who was a visitor at his bedside every day, sitting, waiting, watching, even playing his brother's favorite song over and over. The days were long for them, and one afternoon the brother looked over at the nurse who

had been there each day too, and said to her: “Hey lady! I bet you’re getting kinda sick of this.” The boy was “sick of this.”³

Wouldn’t it be wonderful to stop all of this? To work hard enough, or believe strongly enough, or pray or hope or beg or plead or just be so *sick of it* that time might stop, that dying didn’t happen, that like in the story of the dying boy and his dad begging Jesus, “help me,” – it happens the way we want it to. But we can’t demand miracles. This story is not a guidebook for how to get the same outcome.

From no fault of our own and no flaw of God, sometimes death comes, even for the youngest among us.

Facing it will break your heart. Many of us know this all too well. And, in Lent, and always, we remember that we are people whose hearts are tender enough to break.

In Lent, we face our own mortality and the mortality of those we love. We meditate on the words of Genesis: “From dust you came, and to dust you will return.”⁴

Dust.

Ash.

Speckles.

“From dust you came, and to dust you will return.”

But dust isn’t debris, or waste, or leftovers. Dust is not meant to be trampled on, or left behind, or blown away.

What if that dust – the dust of us – is pixie dust? A little glitter, a little glow, a little mystery and miracle too.

Pixie dust is the stuff that’s made when the mundane meets the miraculous, where heaven and earth touch, when all things human and all things holy mix.

Our dust is the stuff of God. Glitter and gold, ember and ethereal, mystery and miracle –

³ All descriptions of patients are generalized from many experiences to protect patient privacy.

⁴ Genesis 3:19

we're marked with it, and we return to it – every one of us.

And so like every child who has completed that journey from life to death, like the sparkling children of Peter Pan soaring through the night sky –

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, we land, we rise, *we can fly*.

Amen.