

Give her something to eat

Mark 5:21-43

June 28, 2015

Matthew, Henry, and Louisa ... These are my children, children to Lynne and myself.

Kaylee, Tristan, Japhy ... These are children to Greg and Michelle.

Brad, Cole, and Emily ... These are children to Cliff and Diane.

Jill and Joel and Jake ... These are children to Craig and Karen.

Brooke and Beth and Ben and Amy ... These are children to Tim and Vicki.

Jack and Natalie and Lucy and Amari and Prince and Callie and Zoe and Jayden and Gavin and Nevaeh ... These are our children, children in whom we are deeply invested, children whom we dearly love.

What do we want for our children?

We want them to thrive. We want them to be physically strong and fit and healthy. We want them to be emotionally steady and happy and confident. We want them to be spiritually attuned, aware of God's love for them and loving God back. We want them to experience fulfillment in their work and joy in their relationships, and we want them to be a source of joy for other people in their lives. We want them to be good.

We don't want them to be like us. Really, we don't! In our most lucid moments, in our most generous moments, we know it would be cruel and unfair to expect them to be just like us. We want them to live good and magnanimous lives in their own distinctive ways, not growing up to be like us, but growing up to be like Jesus. We don't want them to be like us, but we do hope they will carry forward something of what is best in us. We want the satisfaction of passing on to them, of seeing blossom in them, something of especial value we have given them: a curious mind, a sensitive heart, a compassionate spirit, a faithful soul.

What we don't want, what we dare not even imagine, is what happened to the daughter of Jairus.

Jairus and his wife, whose name we do not know, had a daughter. She may have been their only child -- no other children are mentioned -- but we don't know. Their daughter was twelve years old, on the cusp of adulthood, on the cusp of becoming a woman, of unveiling who she would become as her own person, of beginning to realize their dreams not for themselves, but for her. But she was ill, gravely ill. Her father didn't know if she would live. So he went looking for Jesus.

Jairus found Jesus on the lakeshore. There was a large crowd gathered around Jesus, but Jairus made his way through the crowd and threw his body down to the ground at Jesus' feet. There were no salutations, no official welcome from this leader of the local synagogue, just the cries of a distraught father begging for help:

My little daughter is very sick. Please come and place your hands on her, so that she will get well and live!

And Jesus went with him as he asked.

Jesus went with him, but there were many others there, too, seeking Jesus for their own reasons. One was a woman, a woman ravaged and impoverished by a chronic bleeding disease. She reached out and touched Jesus' cloak and was healed, and Jesus stopped. He stopped and turned around and spoke to her: "My daughter, your faith has made you well."

"My daughter." That's what Jairus was thinking about -- "my daughter!" Jesus healed this woman. Can he heal my daughter, too?

But it was too late. Word came to Jairus that his daughter had died. The delay to address the needs of the one Jesus called "daughter" had cost him his daughter. If there had been no delay? If Jesus had reached his home just minutes earlier, would she have lived? He doesn't know, and it doesn't matter.

He doesn't harbor any bitterness. He can't begrudge this woman her joy. He is not angry or jealous or resentful. Just empty. It doesn't matter now. Nothing matters now. It is too late. His daughter is gone.

But Jesus is determined to go on, and there will be no more delays. Jesus tells the crowd to stay put and he walks on with only Jairus and Peter and James and John, no other supplicants or observers or curiosity seekers.

It is a very private moment. When Jesus reaches Jairus' house, he sends away all the relatives and neighbors gathered there to mourn and enters the girl's room with just his three disciples and her mother and father.

Her father. When he left her, she was pale and cold to the touch, but still breathing, still alive, still with him, but now here before his eyes lays the body of his little girl -- inanimate, unmoving, lifeless. His hand goes to his mouth, his body slumps, he buries his face into his wife's shoulder, and they stand there together in their grief, desolated, inconsolable, helpless, utterly helpless.

Jesus crosses the room to the bed alone. He lifts her limp hand in his own and speaks to her: *Talitha koum* ... "Little girl, get up!"

And she did.

Jairus and his wife? They were astonished, completely amazed. They didn't know what to think, didn't know what to say, didn't know what to do.

Give her something to eat.

Of course! This is what they can do! This is what parents do -- give their children something to eat! It is time now not for wonder, but to get back to business, the joyful and privileged business, of being parents to their little girl. This they can do. They can give her something to eat ... but only Jesus could save her.

Andrew, Laura, Leah, Sam, Arlo, Garrett, Trevor, Grace, Jessica, Emily, Corina, Mackenzie, Tate ... What can we do for our children?

We can give them something to eat. We can give them the best of the food we have, the best of the wisdom we have, the best of the love we have, the best of the faith we have.

But we cannot save them. We cannot make their bodies whole. We cannot make their spirits whole. We cannot give them life and we cannot make the life they have good. Only God can. And that is why the best thing we can do for our children is to pray for them, to entrust them body and soul to God, to let God make of their lives what God will.

And give them something to eat ...