

**October 22, 2017 – Journey (Children’s Sabbath)**

**THEME: Tolerance**

**TEXT: Mark 5:21–24, 35–43**

*By the Rev. Heather Schoenewolf*

You may have noticed that the story of Jairus’ daughter is not told straight through in Mark’s Gospel. Much like the stories of our lives, this pivotal story includes interruption, confusion, and delayed resolution.

In our text for today, we first get the beginning of the story, in which we hear that Jairus’ daughter is ill and Jesus is summoned to her home. But Jesus’ journey comes to a halt when he realizes that power has left him, and an unnamed woman has been healed. He stops and acknowledges her healing, and in doing so restores her to community. Then he gets back on track to Jairus’ house. As the story picks up again, Jesus is en route once more to help, but soon learns that he is running too late. The little girl has died and her family and community are mourning—until Jesus calls her back to life.

I have found myself wondering about this interruption. Why does Jesus stop? He doesn’t really *need* to, after all. The woman has already been healed—her healing took place the instant she touched the hem of his garment. Does he stick around because the need to restore the woman to community is too great in the moment? Does he sense that her life would be on the line too if he only did things halfway? Does he linger to prove a point, as he did when he was summoned to heal Lazarus—that God’s time is greater than our time; that in the face of devastation God will breathe in new life, that our expected grief will not be the end of the story? Or is he just busy—caught up in the commotion of the crowd, torn between the real needs of multiple people, trying to do his best?

Yet even as we can relate to the pulls on Jesus’ time and attention, we can, perhaps, relate even more to Jairus. He is a desperate parent trying to do his best.

We can almost picture it—can’t we? A leader from the synagogue comes to Jesus, and we can guess that he is moving quickly. It doesn’t matter that he is in charge, and that usually his servants do his legwork. This is his *daughter* he is talking about—his beloved child. *He* needed to take matters into his own hands. *He* needed to find an answer. *He* needed to make sure that things were done right for his child. He asks Jesus to come and save his little girl’s life, and they head out for his home.

He does what any of us would do, right? He drops everything for his child. He pleads that she might get the care she needs as soon as she needs it. He goes out of his way. He breaks with social norms. He acts according to the urgency of the situation.

And then there is Jesus—quick to respond, and just as quick to get sidetracked. And Jairus’ worst fears were confirmed. In spite of his best efforts—his longest strides and his most heartfelt appeal—it wasn’t enough. His daughter has died, he has learned. Hope fades to mourning and he heads home to grieve.

But Jesus reminds the family that their grief is not the end of the story. He tells them that they have, in fact, gotten it wrong. They have misunderstood the circumstances. Their daughter is simply sleeping, he assures them, and he continues his journey that he might lay his hands upon her and call her back to life. And she lived again, and ate some food.

Jesus rewrites the circumstances of the little girl's life. He changes the rules of the game. Where there wasn't enough time, he brings eternity; where there was despair, he generates hope. Where there was mourning he invites rejoicing. Where death had won, he brings life. He defies expectation. He makes all things right.

How desperately we need for Jesus to set things right for us and for the children of the world today!

Like Jairus we come to Jesus begging for the well-being of our kids—whether the kids we have birthed or adopted, or the kids in our world to whom we plan to entrust our future—and we pray: “Come, Lord Jesus!” We see legislation trying to defund the Affordable Care Act and we know that there will be children whose ability to get a life-saving nebulizer treatment for an asthma attack will be cut off. We hear morning news stories about overnight gunshot victims and learn that they are all under 18. We know that there is enough food in this world to feed everyone, but know that there are still kids who don't have enough food to eat unless they have a free-lunch at school. And we look around and wonder why we still have these issues in our country—where we have so much of everything.

We know that children are not immune to the inequities that plague adult society—to racism, sexism, heterosexism, xenophobia. As much as we try to shield them these societal sins impact them too, as we note that the dynamic that yields a disproportionate amount of African American men in jail is called a *school* to prison pipeline, after all. And we read on Facebook that many of the “me too” stories posted by women acknowledging that they have been sexually harassed or assaulted began before they were even teenage girls.

And then we stop and see that these are the problems kids face in OUR country—that no matter how hard we have it here, kids in developing countries have it so much worse.

Like Jairus, we need to put our energy and attention into making sure that our kids are ok—not just because they are the future, but because they are the present. We need to step out of our same-old-same-old position and pursue the help that will change the game altogether, breathing new life into the lives of children in our neighborhoods and in our world. We need to make a commitment to our kids—not just the ones in our families, but to all children, everywhere. We need to claim that that they deserve better than they have received, and that we will vigilantly work for a world in which all children are safe, valued, loved, and free to praise God.

Marian Wright Eddelman writes:

We know that children don't come in pieces, and that we must work together to ensure every child has the comprehensive support they need to thrive. There are many ways that children's well-being is jeopardized. Children need a Healthy Start, but threatened repeal of the Affordable Care Act and destruction of Medicaid will make the number of uninsured children soar. Children need a Head Start, but it will require our loud, persistent voices to ensure our nation makes needed investments in Head Start, Early Head Start, and affordable, accessible child care when parents are employed. Children need a Fair Start, so we must be vigilant to guard against tax cuts that advantage the wealthy and give crumbs to low- and middle-income families, and protect important safety net programs while also advocating for needed increases in the living wage. Children need a Safe Start that includes curtailing the proliferation of guns with common sense gun safety measures, and dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline® crisis that criminalizes Black and Brown children at alarming rates through zero tolerance discipline policies, racial profiling, mass incarceration, and more. And now more than ever, our children need a Moral Start which begins with seeing the adults in their homes, communities and places of worship living out the values of our great religious traditions including love, justice, respect, and welcome—most especially for those who are young, impoverished and marginalized.<sup>1</sup>

May we come to Christ with our concern, and look to him for our example, knowing that Jesus was the one who welcomed little children to himself when others tried to shoo them away. May we be willing to go the extra mile so that all kids might know the wholeness desired for them by God and may we partner with Christ to work for justice and minister to their needs so that all children may know a vibrant life and a fullness of love. May it be so.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.childrensdefense.org/library/2017-sabbath-manual/2017-childrens-sabbaths-welcome.pdf>