

“Jairus's Daughter”

Luke 8:40-56

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The Canadian poet Beatrice Redpath is an imaginative artist whose poetry is inspired by episodes from life that she wants to explore from her own empathy. The lines of her poem titled “The Daughter of Jairus” are an example of her thoughtfulness. They give a voice to Jairus's daughter's mother who is not mentioned by any of the gospel writers other than collectively in the word “parents” in the scripture. But also she creates the thoughts of Jairus's daughter who is not named nor did she speak in the biblical account. To the poet Jairus's daughter is a mystery of life to be contemplated. The six-verse poem begins . . .

*I have fashioned soft raiment for her to wear  
And have laid her embroidered sandals in her room,  
I have said I would braid and bind her heavy hair  
But she has gone out to the orchard to gather bloom.*

*Last night she lay in the dusk with her eyes adream,  
And I questioned of what were her dreams as I touched her hand,  
But she looked at me with a smile in her eyes' dark gleam,  
What word might she use to make me understand?*

So, as we begin this story of the youth, we just call the daughter of Jairus. But other narratives more specifically give us her age and status in her family. She is twelve and Jairus's only daughter. Jairus's urgency to take advantage of Jesus's recent arrival near his village is framed by a family whose lives had to fit the rules, roles, and rituals of his culture. Not just another member of the synagogue, he was the leader of the synagogue. He was known by everyone in the village as the one who took care of the synagogue, arranged for meetings, celebrations, and funerals.

Luke tells us that a crowd was waiting for Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and gathered to greet him on his arrival. Jairus does not appear to have been among them at first but came soon thereafter. His emotional plea to Jesus at the landing included his passionate urgency about the daughter's illness, and even his bowing down is reminiscent of others in the gospel stories where someone has bowed down to Jesus: The Wise Men, the rich young ruler, the father of a deranged son, and others. Luke adds the phrase “at Jesus' feet.” We sense the fear, the grief, but also the hope and situation in the voice of the father for his little girl. She will soon die if there was no intervention.

In our day, we would think of a child “about twelve years old” as merely a child, though in the first century culture of Palestine, she was nearly an adult. Being about 12 years old, as Mark adds, suggests that she was coming of age and that her next important life event would have been marriage. Beyond that we can only speculate about her life. Was she already promised to be married to someone in the village? Had she been ill since she was born? Did she contract some illness that was working through the village? Were others in the village aware of the seriousness of her condition? Did she have brothers? We just don't know.

1. What we do know is that this story is one of many healing stories that Luke has put together for his readers. From Luke 4:14 where Jesus begins his ministry up to the resurrection of Jairus's daughter there have been nine miracles told, among them one other resurrection narrative of a widow's son. With that miracle Luke said, “this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.” (7:17). There were many others that fit the time frame though Luke just groups them together: “and also [there were with him] women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities [namely] Mary Magdalene who had seven demons, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's household manager. (8:1-2) That's the reason the crowd was waiting for him that day. That's the reason Jairus came running. That's the reason the crowd pressed around Jesus. And, that's the reason the ill woman, who interrupted the trip to Jairus's house, just had to get to Jesus. She had spent all the money she had on physicians of the day she had not been healed.

2. We also know that this story represents the list of four stories in what is called the “Master” narratives. The section in Luke in which the story of Jairus's daughter is resurrected begins in verse twenty-two of chapter eight. The section also precedes Jesus's sending out of the twelve. So, in this section there are four narratives that essentially outline the ministry of Jesus. The first is in the calming of a storm. The disciples do not plead with him as Rabbi in their fear but as Master, arguing that they were about to die. The disciples have a discuss upon the calming of sea, “Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and water, and that they obey him?” (8:25).

**Jesus established himself as one who had power of creation.**

The second story is the healing of a man with a demon. The demoniac cried out, and said to Jesus with a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, son of the most high God?” Jesus proceeded to chase away the demons in the man such that he returned to his sanity. **Jesus established himself as one who had the power to confront demons in the spirit world that prey on human beings.**

The third story relates to the story we are looking at today. When Jairus had obtained Jesus's attention about his daughter, the urgency was compounded by the woman who needed to be healed by touching the hem of Jesus's clothing. Here you can see the title Master applied to Jesus by Peter. **Jesus established himself as the one who by his very presence had the power to heal lifelong sickness.** The final story in the

series is about Jairus's daughter, the 12 year old girl whom Jesus resurrected. **Jesus established himself as one who had the power over life and death.**

3. Finally, we know that this only child was at the point of death when the story begins, but during the time Jesus was detained by the crowd, she died. “She is only sleeping” is in all three gospels, but the observation is not there for the reader to have doubts about whether she had died but that from Jesus's point of view, hope and life are essential elements in the gospel story. Death is never the end. So, what can we learn from all this introduction?

Imagine, if you can, for a moment the emotional roller-coaster Jairus was on. First, his daughter is so ill he feared she would soon die. Then he heard about the miracles Jesus had performed throughout the country side, so he became optimistic when he knew Jesus was on the way. His hope grew as he finally saw Jesus. He could hardly contain himself when he first saw Jesus and collapses at Jesus's feet. His heart must have leaped when Jesus told him not to fear, only believe, and she would be well. Then he was leading the way with hurried steps to his house with Jesus, when suddenly Jesus and the crowd stopped in the middle of the street. How his heart must have dropped. It was the feeling you have when you must get to the emergency room but every stoplight in the city, and every car on the streets has conspired to impede your headway. Then, the news arrived no one wants to hear. Matthew and Mark tell us that a servant came to tell Jairus the daughter has died and to leave Jesus alone. His heart must have stopped with the news. More quickly now, he runs toward his home to console his wife and others of his household. But again, there is another crowd. Some are wailing, some are playing flutes, some are weeping. How can this be, he keeps asking? My daughter, my beautiful daughter has died! But, wait! Jesus continued to where the young girl was lying on a mat, something like what you see in the artwork on the cover of the bulletin.

At Jairus's lowest moment, when he first saw his little girl, motionless and her spirit departed, how broken he must have been! All hope was lost, though he had believed. Jesus said she would be well, but before him his daughter lay still. But, then Jesus risked toughing the dead. And, then, he heard Jesus say these words, “Child, arise.” Jairus watched as the daughter began to show signs of life. And then sat up. Then she got up. Then to prove she was not a ghost or spirit she ate a meal. The rollercoaster ride was finally over but the thrill of the ride must have been a lifelong memory for both mother and father. Luke tells us that they were simply amazed!

The poet Redpath says about Jairus's daughter,

*She has spoken no word about her curious sleep,  
And the light in her eyes we have vainly essayed to read,  
The secret of her dream she must hidden keep,  
For her lips are framed but to an earthly need.*

Indeed, there is so little we know about the little twelve-year-old girl we can only always refer to as Jairus's daughter. But the role she played in the unveiling of the gospel goes is undeniable. The poet is correct: we have no testimony from her about her curious sleep. If light is a metaphor for life in the poem, then it is true that we are left without so much more we will never know in this life. If her dream is in the realm of the mysteries of God, so is ours. We live for God's glory, and *who knows but God* what our mystical dreams will mean in time to come? If being framed for earthly need is about what the daughter might could tell, much would be lost to us in the framework of her culture. "*What word might she use to make me understand*" as the poet asked. There is no word of wisdom or interpretive thoughts from her that the scriptures allow us to hear. The poet could only say this, "She has gone out to the sun beyond the door  
To sit in the cool green gloom of the hanging vine." But, for us, we know, don't we? In the divine heat of the son's eternal life, we may not can fathom our human existence; yet we can live with assurance. Nothing can separate us from God's love, not even death itself.