

Justice for our children is next (Mark 5:21-43)

## **Jairus knows the weight of justice delayed as justice denied. But he keeps moving.**

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After the mass shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in February, the March for our Lives demonstrations reignited a movement that values the sacredness of human life—especially the lives of children. With convicting signage, stirring oratory, and clear policy demands, students called for a political check on the reach of the National Rifle Association, and for commonsense policies that protect people instead of profits.

This pericope centers on a child's future and her father's advocacy. The Jesus-Jairus interaction pivots on the disease, death, and resuscitation of a 12-year-old girl. While watching Jesus release a woman from a decade-plus prison of bodily dysfunction and social stigma, Jairus receives the death notice of his beloved daughter.

Scores of forces, seen and unseen, shape the material lives of children and compromise their possibilities of tomorrow. More than 208 school shootings have occurred in the U.S. since 1999. According to a 2009 study in *Pediatrics*, more than 60 percent of children experience some form of victimization, and 38 percent witness violence during their childhood. From underfunded schools to rigged economies, from racist policing to exorbitantly priced higher education, children face hazards on their journey to adulthood. Justice for our children is next.

Jairus approaches Jesus expecting a direct route to the site of his problem, but Jesus delays while he speaks to an unnamed woman's invisible wounds. The unnamed girl dies—but Jesus says to Jairus, the ruler of a synagogue, “Do not be afraid. Only believe.” Nonwhite and poor Americans know the weight of justice delayed as justice denied. But like this father, these communities keep moving. This agile posture of faith sparks a rebellious, gritty hope even when justice delayed does mean justice denied. When the future of children appears threatened, life-affirming people of God make peace neither with the stubbornness of justice delayed nor with the finality of justice denied. Our faith for the future and fight for our children depends on a renewable, impatient expectancy. This holy impatience resists the logic of gradualism and combats the assumption of defeat.

While Jesus is speaking emancipatory life over the woman with a resilient reach, he is interrupted by reports of the child's expiration. Posed with mental signposts of rage or resilience after the delay, Jairus observes the healing of the woman, hearkens to the words of Jesus, and leads him to his home. He rejects the commentary of the imagination-deficient folk behind him.

This desperate and daring father goes against his fellow religious elites by journeying with Jesus, risking social capital and political clout. Jairus leads Jesus—accompanied by Peter, James, and John—toward a supposed death zone, a site defiled by the lifeless body of his daughter. In an era of juvenile vulnerability and crises of education quality and safety, sexual violence, gun terror, and poverty, we hear the words of Jesus beckoning us to believe in life and lead life to death-marked places. Faith for a free, safe, and just tomorrow requires we lead life toward our dying children.

We have a different diagnosis for our children. The power of faith affronts the institutionalization and enmeshment of unassailable white power, capitalism, and male privilege—the errant doctrines of Americanism. When Jesus reimagines the daughter's condition with unexpected language—“The child is not dead but sleeping”—the customary commercial grievors begin to laugh at his words. Jesus-people, people with moral imagination, look beyond the imposition of the apathetic and cynical. People script the futility of our efforts and mock the novelty of our courage. We must dismiss pundits who pathologize and criminalize children of color, who deny equality for all children.

Jesus represents the equity of grace and the egalitarianism of divine power, giving us a reason to believe that the long arc of the moral universe bends toward justice. After delay and toxic commentary, Jesus arrives and calls a man's daughter back to life. Justice for Jairus's daughter is next.

When we practice the impatient faith to be next, we allow the progress and movement of others to inspire us as we continue. Holy impatience recalls that justice is indivisible and that God's agenda involves us too. There was no justice for Emmet Till, age 14; no justice for Trayvon Martin, 17; no justice for Rakia Boyd, 22; no justice for Tamir Rice, 12; no justice for Aiyana Jones, 9. We need a sturdy faith to believe that if we keep moving there will one day be justice for our children. We can do no less than fight for their lives.