

***Sermon for Proper 8, Year B***  
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***Holy Nativity, Plano***  
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Our gospel reading begins with a distraught father. Jairus is a “ruler of the synagogue”, presumably the same synagogue in which Jesus got in trouble for healing someone on the Sabbath a couple chapters ago. At least some of the leaders of this synagogue are plotting to kill Jesus. By social and political constraints, Jairus is Jesus’ natural enemy. At the very least, it is politically foolhardy for him to appeal to Jesus. But his daughter is dying. And he loves her.

So Jairus lays down his own pride. He lays down political expediency. He lays down the respect of at least some of his acquaintances and colleagues. He lays down, perhaps, his social position and prerogatives in the synagogue. He gives it all up to throw himself at Jesus’ feet and beg. He wasn’t begging for himself. He wasn’t even begging for the continuation of his patrimony. He was simply begging for his daughter’s life, because he loved her.

We can get just a glimpse of the conflict in this family and community in the way the other people respond to Jesus. First, we get the messengers from the house: “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” This is a strange greeting. It seems that the purpose of the message is less to inform Jairus of his daughter’s death than it is to keep Jesus away from the house. It is an attempt to avoid the embarrassing consequences of Jesus having been invited by the head of the household. Not everyone at home agrees with the choices made by Jairus.

When Jesus gets to the house, the formal mourning is already in full swing. It was customary to put on a great show of weeping and wailing when someone died. If the household was wealthy enough, professional mourners would be hired to carry out this duty. In any case, when Jesus tells them to stop because the girl is not dead, they don’t just politely tell him he’s deranged and escort him to the door. They *laugh* at him. They jeer at him. Again, a strange reaction, and one that indicates they are more interested in him (or perhaps his departure) than they let on.

They are obviously more interested in the dignified observances of formal mourning than they are saddened by the death of the little girl. But the more chilling thing is that they are even more interested in rejecting Jesus. They interrupt the mourning not simply to remove him and get back to the important business of being respectable. They interrupt the mourning to jeer at Jesus. And the result of their rejection is that they are put out of the house.

But Jairus gets to run this entire gauntlet with Jesus. It is more difficult for him. All of these people are his family, his social set, his colleagues. They are all more or less explicitly rejecting Jesus, whom Jairus has invited. And Jairus must choose at every juncture whether he will trust Jesus or whether he will fall back into his normal social position. At any moment, he could simply turn and say, "I'm sorry, Jesus. This has all been most unfortunate. But since my daughter is dead, I suppose there is nothing you can do for me anymore. Thank you so much for coming. Under the circumstances, I'm sure you won't mind seeing yourself out." But the only instructions Jesus has given him the entire time have been these words: "Do not fear, only trust." And Jairus does.

The question is: Do we? There doesn't seem to be any trouble for the little girl. Jesus simply commands her to get up. And she does. That's all quite simple and straightforward, even pedestrian. But this story is not just about a little girl who is raised from the dead. It is about different responses to Jesus.

Few of us are as simple and obedient as the little girl. Most of us have built a place for ourselves in the society around us, a society that rejects Jesus. We have friends, family, colleagues, and associates who do not accept Jesus. Some of these people are even plotting to eliminate him completely from the society in which we live. Some of you may actually agree with them up to a point. You have to admit, it's a bit unseemly to fall down and cling to Jesus' feet, begging.

But say that you are walking with Jesus toward Resurrection, like Jairus. How do you respond to the people who try to politely turn Jesus away? "Why bother Jesus anymore? He's really not needed here. You don't really want to invite him any further into your life, do you? He might make a mess of everything you've put together for yourself." And Jesus says to you, "Do not fear, just trust." Do you?

Or how do you respond to those people who try to laugh him out of town? “You don’t really believe in all that mumbo jumbo, do you? Miracles and all that? Come on! You’re smarter than that, aren’t you?” And what happens when everything you love is dead, and you’ve given up everything you thought you were, and there has been no miracle? And Jesus says to you, “Do not fear, just trust.” Do you?

When Jesus finally arrives at the place of Resurrection, when the miracle is upon you, when he’s going to make sense of your life once again, all those people who succumb to the lies will be put outside. The rejecters and the scoffers. Those who think that a little bit of Jesus is just fine for people with the taste for it, but he shouldn’t be allowed to disrupt the socially acceptable mourning. Those who think that walking with Jesus is a sure sign that you shouldn’t have been entrusted with children in any case. Those who are intent on silencing Jesus forever. All of them will be shut out, and if I agree with them and turn against Jesus, I will be too.

But inside the house, people are given life. Families are made whole. There is fellowship and love and joy. Inside the house is where the Peter and James and John are. Inside the house is where all of us are who trust Jesus. And to get there, we all had to walk with Jesus even when it cost us everything we thought we were, even when it cost us our friends, our relations, our dignity, our lives. But inside the house everything is given back that was important.