

## **The Import of Faith in the Context of New Evangelisation (Luke 8:40-56)**

Victor Onwukeme

### **Introduction**

Luke 8:40-56 deals with the healing of Jairus' daughter, who is twelve years old. This is combined with another miracle—the healing of a woman suffering from a haemorrhage for twelve years. The parallel passages are Mark 5,21-43 and Matt 9,18-26. Jairus, a name which means *he will give light* or *may he enlighten* was the patron of the synagogue, who asked Jesus to heal his dying daughter. As they travelled to Jairus' house, a sick woman in the crowd touched Jesus' cloak and was healed of her sickness. Meanwhile Jairus' daughter died, but Jesus continued to the house and brought her back to life. This paper examines the two miracles through some analysis and interpretation and applies the text to evangelization in today's context.

### **Exegetical Analysis**

The two stories betray different compositional styles. In the story of Jairus' daughter, we have the historical present, short sentences and few participles whereas in the healing of the woman with a haemorrhage the story has the more usual aorist and imperfect tenses, participles and longer sentences. Scholars generally agree on Luke's indebtedness to Mark. Luke took the two miracles from Mark and modified them to suit his audience. Mark sandwiched the story of the woman with a haemorrhage into that of raising of Jairus' daughter,<sup>1</sup> a style which is common in Mark. For instance, in 11:12-24, the cleansing of the temple is sandwiched within the story of the barren fig tree. Luke simply followed this pattern of intercalation equally inserting the healing of the woman with a haemorrhage within the story of Jairus' daughter.

As soon as Jesus set foot on the shore, a prominent person of the city of Capernaum, the president of the synagogue (equivalent to a mayor of a city today) came up to him with the terrible news that his twelve year-old daughter lay dying at that very moment. Jesus immediately set off to his house with him. Along the way, however, something extraordinary happened. A woman with an abnormally long period of menstrual flow touched the fringe of Jesus' cloak and was instantly healed.

The combined stories have been used as an example of intercalation in Luke's Gospel. Jairus' daughter is twelve years and the woman has been suffering from a haemorrhage for twelve years. Twelve is one of the perfect numbers in the Bible. The woman having suffered from haemorrhage for twelve years indicates that she has been in this condition for quite a long time. The daughter of Jairus is twelve and this signifies she was reaching fullness of age, a marriageable age.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel of According to Luke I-IX* (New York, London, Doubleday, 1981) 743.

As a result of the encounter along the way between Jesus and the woman suffering from a haemorrhage, there is a delay in the healing of Jairus's daughter. What appears to be a disastrous delay in the healing of Jairus' daughter actually assures the restoration of the daughter. The delay is providential since it is ordered to test and strengthen Jairus' faith.<sup>2</sup>

This woman has consulted so many physicians but to no avail and so she is desperate to touch Jesus. This is the reason she is so courageous in coming to Jesus even with such a huge crowd. Jesus does not reprimand her; rather he utters words of absolution.<sup>3</sup> Luke omits the haemorrhaging woman's interior dialogue (If I touch even his garment . . .), which is found in Mark 5:28, and notes that Jesus perceived in himself that power had gone out of him, heightening the narrative emphasis on Jesus' prophetic knowledge.

As Jesus was still involved in the healing of the haemorrhaging woman, a servant comes from the synagogue telling Jesus not to bother since the child is already dead. Jesus asks the people to look with the eyes of faith since many walk by sight and not by faith. This is the reason they laugh when Jesus says that she is sleeping. The parents were prepared to begin the funeral. Professional mourners would have been invited. Relatives and friends would have formed part of the crying crowd. The house would have been chaotic, filled with commotion since the news of the death of a young person causes loud wailing, weeping and beating of heart.<sup>4</sup> Jesus calmed all down and brought order out of chaos; joy out of sadness and life out of death.

After healing the twelve year old girl, Jesus told the parents not to tell anyone because he does not want to be sought for, for miracles, even though the power of God is in him to perform them. Instead he keeps telling everyone to have faith in God and to live according to God's word. Jesus knows that if people have faith all other things will be taken care of. Faith is putting one's trust in God. It is believing in God and having confidence in his everlasting goodness. Heb 11:1 says that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Cynicism and fear freeze life but faith gives life its warmth. Do we have faith to be healed?

Only Luke indicates that she is the only child of Jairus. This is why Jairus is desperate to have her live. Jesus takes very little time to restore the child. He reaches out and takes her hand as he addresses her. Such a move would render Jesus unclean by OT standards. However, to restore the girl is more important than ritual purity (Num 19:11). Of course, Jesus does not have to touch the girl; all the same he does so in order to communicate compassion (Isa 41:13; 42:6). The miracle resembles the raising of the son of a widow at Nain (Luke 7:14; cf. 1 Kings 17:21). In this passage of Luke 7:14, Jesus raised the son of a widow using aorist passive imperative *egerthēti* (be raised). In Luke 8:54, the present imperative of the same verb, *egeire* (get up), is used in the form derived from Mark 5:41. The same verb is used of Jesus to denote the resurrection of Christ *egerthē*, he has been raised (Luke 24:5). According to Kramer, resurrection is action *Fahig*. Thus at the resurrection what was powerless is revived and receives new energy and power. This is what Jesus accomplishes here as he restores Jairus' daughter to life. Giving the girl something to eat drives home the message that the girl has been fully and physically restored. Death has been overcome. The reason the resurrection act is meant to be concealed is because miracles are not supposed to be the focus of Jesus' work (Luke 7:22).

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<sup>2</sup> en.wikipedia.org/wiki/daughter\_of\_Jairus consulted on 26/08/13.

<sup>3</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 747.

<sup>4</sup> S. O. Abogurin, 'Luke' in *The International Bible Commentary* (Collegeville Minnesota, Liturgical Press Book, 1998) 1399.

Some people say that the girl was in coma. However, one would not call for mourners until death took place. Thus the presence of mourners (Luke 8:52) testified to the tragic situation and drew the attention of neighbours to the death that had occurred. The miracle here indicates Jesus' power to overcome death. Where God is active, death needs not be the end of existence nor need it nullify the reality of a future. The raising of Jairus' daughter is a sign of God's power to resurrect; and it indicates that death is not the end of existence for humans. The sleep of the girl is not a permanent death but rather a temporary rest that allows Jesus to show his power. The idiom is also used of Lazarus in John 11:11 and of Jacob in Genesis. When Jesus said that the child was not dead but asleep, people laughed. Laughter at surprise announcements by God is not unusual in the scriptures (Gen 18:12). But God's power is capable of surprises. The absence of faith at such moments can bring about laughter, but amusement is not the end of the story.<sup>5</sup>

### Interpretation

In the first section of our pericopé (8:40-48), we have the woman with the flow of blood and in the second section (Luke 8:49-56) there is the healing of the daughter of Jairus. The two miracles take place one after the other. These two miracles illustrate very different aspects of Jesus' power to heal and to raise the dead. The two stories present Jesus as Lord of history. He is Lord over sickness and death. Jesus is lord not only of the sick, but even of life and death. Death is not the end of humans because God overpowers and conquers death.<sup>6</sup> The haemorrhaging woman's infirmity was one that caused her to be unclean. Jewish laws pertaining to defilement caused by chronic drainage from the body's private parts male or female rendered a person unclean.

The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When any man has a discharge from his member, his discharge makes him ceremonially unclean. The uncleanness of his discharge is this; whether his member flows with his discharge or his member is stopped from discharging, it is uncleanness for him. Every bed on which the one with the discharge lies shall be unclean and everything on which he sits shall be unclean. Anyone who touches his bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until the evening. All who sit on anything on which the one with the discharge has sat shall wash their clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until the evening. All who touch the body of the one with the discharge shall wash their clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until the evening (cf. Lev 15:1-7).

Even when the one with the discharge is cleansed of one's discharge, s/he shall count seven days for one's cleansing and one shall wash one's clothes and bathe one's body in fresh water before one becomes clean. This applies to a man whenever there is emission of semen (Lev 15:16) and it applies to a woman whenever there is discharge of blood (Lev 15:19). These laws had a very important role in preserving community sanitation so they were strictly enforced by powerful taboos.

For this woman even to be out of her house meant that she was doing something extremely dangerous since her condition was similar to one with a contagious disease. In any case she had no business being in a packed crowd around Jesus. It was bad enough for her to intentionally

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<sup>5</sup> D. L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Luke 1,1-9,50* (Michigan, Baker Books, 2002) 803.

<sup>6</sup> Bock, *Luke 1,1-9,50*, 806.

touch someone, let alone a male person who was not even a relative. Her act was simultaneously shocking and forbidden. She was certainly desperate and this was why she did not mind the law; she did not mind the crowd.

This explains why the woman was afraid to touch Jesus, given the fact that uterine haemorrhage was a condition, which rendered a woman unclean, and this was a source of continual embarrassment for her. To touch such a woman would make one unclean (Lev 15:25-31; Ezek 36:17). The woman was shut out from fellowship and religious life. This explains her fright and trembling before Jesus. Bock<sup>7</sup> lists some traditional remedies usually applied for this type of sickness—a glass of wine mixed with rubber, alum and garden crocuses or a glass of wine mixed with onions. The woman has tried all these to no avail. Her sensitive condition explains her hesitancy in asking Jesus publicly for help and why she sought help secretly. Efforts had been made in the past to treat the problem but in vain. In fact she was getting worse.

In fear and trembling but resolute and determined, the woman approaches Jesus from behind, since she is trying to avoid any public notice and to be as inconspicuous as possible. Perhaps she is afraid that Jesus may refuse to touch an unclean woman and thus will not heal her. However, there is no condemnation of her action in the text. Some describe her belief as superstitious in that she thinks that she must touch Jesus or something of him. Some see magical flavour. Others see her action as motivated by her strong faith in that she realizes that Jesus has the power to cure her. I strongly agree that the woman's faith is what brings about her healing. Faith can exist in seemingly hopeless situations.

### **Why Did this Woman Defy Mosaic Law?**

Having spent all she had on doctors and traditional remedies, one can understand her desperate situation. But there was something more than despair, her faith in Jesus. She strongly believed that any slightest touch with Jesus would heal her. Faith is the confidence of the individual in the supreme power; in this case it is the confidence this woman has in Jesus. She was filled with the faith that Jesus could make her well again. Thus her faith was more important than her timidity. Her faith was stronger than her fear because she knew that Jesus had the power to reverse her situation. God's power is absolute.

A mere touch of the fringe of Jesus' garment restores her to health (Matt 9:20). According to Luke, the woman reached out and touched the *kraspedos* of Jesus' *himation* (the fringe of his garment). The *kraspedoi* were the four short tassels religious Jewish men wore, then as today, at the four corners of the *himation*, an outer garment or cloak (Num 15:38-39; Deut 22:12; Matt 23:5). So the fringe refers to any of the four tassels that hung from the edge of the garments, two in front and two behind, as a reminder of God's command (Num 15:37-40; Deut 22:12). To touch Jesus' garment was to have access to his power. However, this is not magical. The point is that contact with this special person healed. There were no incantations and there was no intention of drawing attention to the healer. This detail tells us one very important fact about the woman. She was so painfully aware of her unhealthy condition that she did not attempt to touch any part of Jesus' skin or his sleeve, or even any part of his outer cloak. She touched the end of one of the tassels hanging off the bottom of the cloak, where she would make the least possible contact with him and still touch something of him. Instantly, Jesus felt that someone had touched him. Turning around, Jesus asks: Who touched me? Peter tries to object to Jesus' question but

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<sup>7</sup> Bock, *Luke 1,1-9,50*, 793.

Jesus will not listen to him. *I notice that power has gone out from me.* Trembling from head to toe, the woman steps forth and admits that she was the one. The woman was probably expecting a rebuke from Jesus. However, Jesus did not reproach her for breaking the purity law. She got no censure for endangering all the people in the crowd? Not at all! She received rather blessing and healing.<sup>8</sup>

Here we find the amazing lesson in the story. Jesus did not mean to heal this woman and still she was healed. Jesus was not angry; he just wanted to know who it was who had tapped into his power to save.

### **Relevance to New Evangelisation**

Jesus handed over the power to heal to the apostles. This is the reason people carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by. A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits and they were all cured (Acts 5:15-16). In Acts 19:11-12, God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them.

Today many are hungry spiritually; and faith will go a long way towards satisfying this hunger. Faith is God's supernatural gift and within this year of faith, everyone should pray for this gift. One may be trapped in a crowd. One may be in a filthy, disgusting stage of sickness. One may feel that Jesus has gone by and left one behind, but one must reach out to Jesus anyway, run after him in desperation and God's power will come back to such a person. Even if one feels that Jesus is looking the other way, Christ remains our touchstone of God's healing power. In Christ, we have a God who saves us and never ignores us. As noted above, this woman was healed and Jesus did not even intend to do it! It was her strong and deep faith which brought about her healing.

Today people often have faith in the so-called healers and not in Jesus. People follow signs and not Jesus and some ministers encourage this because it gives them cheap popularity. Healers need to realize the words of St Paul, who said that we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that it may be made clear that the extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us (2 Cor 4:7). Ministers of God are unworthy instruments in His hands. It is Jesus who heals and not any so-called healer. Jesus heals through the minister's unworthy instruments. Psalm 115:1 says: *Not to us Lord not to us but to your name give the glory.* Along the same line, in Acts 3:12-13, Peter healed the crippled at the gate and people were trying to attribute the glory to him, but he did not waste time in letting the people know that it was Jesus, who carried out the healing. In Acts 14:13-14, the priest of Zeus and his people brought oxen and garland to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, but the apostles stopped them immediately. They tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd shouting: "Friends, why are you doing this? We are mortals like you." Can today's ministers, gospel preachers, pastors and the like rush out and stop the people from sacrificing to them and worshipping them? Evangelizers of our time need to direct people to Jesus and not to themselves.

As Jesus wanted to carry out the healing little girl, he took with him Peter, James and John and the child's parents. He went in with a select few. After the healing, Jesus told the parents not tell

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<sup>8</sup> Abogurin, 'Luke,' 1398.

anyone. However, today if you visit any of the so-called healing centres, there are testimonies upon testimonies. The so-called healers want you to say it aloud. A student was commending one lecturer in my Seminary once and the lecturer responded: *You are saying such nice things about me and you are whispering it. Please say it loud so that they hear.* Many of today's so-called healers have this tendency. They want you to shout it aloud so that people will know that they are powerful. This was not the attitude of Jesus. Jesus did not want miracles to be a distraction to the main purpose of his coming. He did not come simply to carry out physical healing. He came to heal the whole person. Often after healing, he did not want people to make it known. Many of the today's healers prefer it the other way round. They want people to recognise them as healers, miracle workers and wonder workers. The so-called healers need to pray for faith in Jesus. They need to see Jesus as the one who is performing the miracles and the healed need to ask for faith too in Jesus. When this happens people will not be exchanging water blessed by their parish priest for one blessed by a healer.

### **Conclusion**

We have done some exegetical analysis of Luke 8:40-56 noting that it was originally a Marcan text, which Luke took over and used to communicate his strong message of Jesus compassion and miraculous healing. In exercising his act of compassion, Jesus is able to heal the sick and even raise the dead. But the underlying factor is the faith of the woman, who is healed, as well as the faith of Jairus, whose daughter is raised. Paschal said: In every person, there is a God shaped hollow and until it is filled with God we will not find peace. St Augustine put it in his own way: O God, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Everyone needs to pray for the gift of faith. True faith rests in Jesus and never in the signs. Jesus is the only true healer since the power to heal comes from him.