



Face to Face

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Jesus said...“she is not dead, she is only sleeping.” But they laughed at him. Mark 5:39-40

A sentence in the book I was reading jumped out at me: *The girl’s eyes were closed but she looked anything but asleep. Where had that myth come from, that the dead looked as if they were sleeping?* The story in Mark has it the other way around—where had this idea come from, the idea that this sleeping girl was dead?

We are often unable to tell the difference. We write people off as though they are dead, as though they have no rights, no needs, no possibilities, no desires, no will, no autonomy, no future, no plans, no being. They can be written off. But our Lord knows they are in need of a special touch that reveals they are sleeping, not dead.

Holding her hand, Jesus said “Little girl, get up.” This little girl had a being, a will, a future into which he was leading her. In response to his touch, she got up. In the same way, we see the Lord awakening the girls with whom CRWRC is working



in Senegal and Sierra Leone; awakening them to their worth, their dignity and grace, their rights as human beings whom He created and loves beyond measure. Many of them are the same age as the little girl in Mark’s story—12 years old. And

they have already been written off by their societies, but not by God.

In Sierra Leone, the lifetime risk of a woman for dying in childbirth is one in eight. And a quarter of those women are teenagers. For a woman in Western or northern countries, the chance is one in 8,000. This gulf, this disparity is a consequence of very specific ways that societies and cultures attribute worth and value to their members. Girls die in childbirth because they are subjected to marriage with much older partners when they are only in their early teens. Before that, they are subjected to female genital cutting; they are denied health care, education, legal rights, protection from abuse. Their fathers and brothers have complete rights over their beings and bodies; and when they are married, their husbands have complete rights over their beings and bodies. At no time in their lives are their opinions, thoughts, or wishes consulted.

But this is changing—and the change is being led by the girls themselves. In 2009, more than any other development issue, the “girl effect” suddenly hit center stage. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, this year, for the first time ever, girls were all over the meeting, and the usual quota of world leaders suddenly understood why investing in adolescent girls is central to building a sustainable future. “You can trust girls”, said Mark Parker, president and CEO of Nike, Inc., at the forum. “When you invest in



them, they will take that investment and run with it, more so than any other investment you can make.”

It’s as though Mary, a teenage unwed mother, whose song talked about all these things, is suddenly being listened to 2000 years later. She had been selected by God to advocate for amazing changes in her society, changes that her Son would confirm and make possible. Mary noted that God has a different set of values than those generally widespread in her community: “God took one good look at me, and see what happened...” (Luke 1:48, *The Message*). She recognized that she was seen as a person of worth, regardless of the low estate assigned to her by a male-dominated culture. And, as God intended, she also saw herself as God sees her—an exceptional person with an exceptional life to live.

We are so blessed in our churches and communities to have so many opportunities to work alongside our Lord of the awakening. As you celebrate this season of awakening to His grace and purpose in your lives, may you also be filled with joy and anticipation. Merry, merry Christmas!

Wyva