



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE
in the City of New York
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

June 27, 2021
The Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

Festal Eucharist
11am

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Matthew Moretz, *Associate Rector*
on
Mark 5:21-43
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Divine Interruptions

Jesus used to tell a story about a man on the path between Jerusalem and Jericho who was mugged, beaten, and left for dead. What happens to this desperate man in the desert? People pass by, but they don't stop. A priest passes by. A Levite passes by. Both were headed to Temple business. If they were to assist the man, they would've been not only made *late*, but more importantly made *unclean*. But according to the listeners of the tale, the despised and unholy Samaritan is the one who doesn't pass by in holy haste, but shows tender mercy. He allows his life to be interrupted. He bandages the man's bleeding wounds. He cleans him with his stock of oil and wine. He takes him on his donkey to an inn, and pays for his care. Everyone who listened to this parable begrudgingly had to admit that the hated Samaritan was the truly righteous one, compared to the clergy focused on the temple and their worship of God and their cleanliness.

This was a parable of Jesus'. A dynamic story told to draw us into a deeper awareness of God and the virtues of God. But there is a real life demonstration of this parable in the gospel today. Christ is on a very important mission for a very important person. One of the leaders of the synagogue, Jarius, has summoned him, with great urgency. His daughter is dying. And he needs Jesus to help. His request is all the more impressive given Jesus' message of reform to religious authorities like him. But this mission is all the more impressive to readers these days, more than religious duty, because it is the duty to save a child from death. What could be more important than this? What more holy of a task could you imagine?

And so Jesus is on his way to save this little girl, when on the way he meets a woman, in her own place of desolation. She has used up all of her money, only to have been made worse by the doctors. She has this chronic hemorrhage, now a victim several times over. Suffering from the disease, from the community's aversive reaction to her, and from her poverty. By the religious community's definition of cleanliness, she is perpetually unclean. She shouldn't even be in the crowd. At first, Jesus doesn't stop to heal her; she takes the initiative to be healed by pushing her way through the throng to touch the hem of his garment. You can imagine the crowd taking notice, maybe even recoiling in shock.

She is immediately healed. And rather than hurry to his urgent appointment, Jesus nevertheless stops everything to look back and notice her, and he then takes the time to listen to her whole story. She is no longer a lost bystander, she becomes part of God's story. Even more important, Jesus stops on the road to specifically name her inclusion into God's family. "Daughter," he says to her, "thy faith hath made thee whole."

"Daughter."

Meanwhile, Jairus' daughter has died. While Jesus paused to listen to this nameless, penniless, unclean woman, the daughter of this prominent leader of the synagogue has died. Isn't there a scandal here? In a society like this, Jairus' daughter clearly should have come first, and this woman second. But Jesus lets her interrupt his mission of healing. She is not just some outcast by comparison, but in fact is every bit as much of a "daughter" as is the daughter of this leader of the faith.

Behold. Christ will bring life and healing wherever he goes. But not on the world's terms. And not on the world's timetable. Like the Samaritan, he was willing to risk scandal, uncleanness, and unlike the priest and the Levite, willing to have very important missions from God sidelined for the sake of the person who is right in front of him, in need, at that particular moment.

A good spiritual principle is, in prayer, to get one's priorities straight and act accordingly. First things first, so to speak. But this is only one part of the spiritual scheme of things. You must be prepared for interruptions, divine interruptions, and you must be prepared to deal with the risks that come with being interrupted.

The world is bigger than you and your priorities. The world and its priorities. God's priorities, scandalously, demand service to the person that is right in front of us.

You could look at Jesus' life as one big interruption. Sell everything you own and follow me. Leave your nets and follow me. Find that lost coin. Seek that lost sheep. Take up your cross and follow me. This Temple should be a house of prayer. Stop everything and repent for the kingdom of God is so very near. And how did we respond to that interruption? With brutality to silence him so that we could keep going on our way. And he wouldn't keep quiet, even from the cross, and to make things worse he wouldn't stay dead.

Some of us don't have our priorities straight, just yet. And it can be a pity, for without priorities, we drift in the mist. But for those of you who do have your priorities straight, or who are at least seeking to have your act together: we must not be surprised by the deeper spiritual call that is ever ready to override our planned pathways. Do we make room for interruptions? Is there any room left? Is our life so busy that we can't improvise on the fly, whether it is God himself, or even just a regular old curveball of life? If we are spending everything that we make, buying the best of everything that we can, if we fill our calendars, if we fill our lives with things to do, schemes of progress, if, in all that, we have no time to stop and listen, will we ever hear God clearing his throat to get our attention? "Ahem? Hello? Down here, climber!"

At the Resurrection, after we failed to interrupt God with the Crucifixion, Jesus spoke a potent image to Peter.

“When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.”

We’re meant to think of ourselves unseeing, likely unknowing, being pulled by the belt. This vision of the future is precisely the opposite of independence, structure, and control. Maturity looks like a kind of blindness, a kind of late-life dementia, where we must be responsive to the pull of our caretaker, the pull of God, at every moment!

Every prior commitment you have is derailed by this. Every institution with your allegiance is usurped by this. Because God is bigger than all of it. If we know that this is the character of God to care for us in a world beyond our ken, to interrupt us in the midst of that care, I believe we will be more prepared and responsive to the calls that look like disasters. God brings life and healing wherever God goes. But God also clears God’s throat, punctuating our lives into new sentences that write us into God’s story as daughters and sons.

And, as many here could testify, God will interrupt you and me. Those divine interruptions will be plain as day, if you dare to see them. You will miss appointments, life will take a hard turn, best laid plans will fall apart, old dreams die, but with courage, they are succeeded by new dreams, and the broken pieces will fit together with the golden threads of life lived day by day under God’s care and guidance down a path we could never predict. May God’s way be our way.