

Holy Interruptions | Mark 5:21-43

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On Tuesday the 18th, I packed my (many) bags
And drove here for my first official day back from parental leave.
As anyone who's been in similar shoes knows,
My brain was a scattered mess,
I was unsure I had brought everything I needed
for the hours away from the baby
And my to-do list was long.
As I drove here,
I thought about what my priorities
should be for this first week back.
I thought about replying to emails, attending planning meetings,
And preaching this morning.
Since life is very full right now,
I decided that sermon prep was the most important thing,
that I would start a week early,
That first thing that morning,
I would jot down some ideas and potential directions.
This was a good and reasonable priority.
After all,
We know that preaching - for better or worse! -
can make or break folks' experience of worship.

When I pulled into the parking lot Tuesday morning,
There was only one other vehicle there.
A white van, unfamiliar to me,
With a woman walking around it,
Pacing on a cell phone.
I got out of my car and walked towards her,
And her eyes went to my collar
As I introduced myself and asked if she needed any help.
"Yes!" she blurted out.
"I work at a nearby shelter.
I have a woman who was supposed to have a WIC appointment here
Fifteen minutes ago,
But the doors are locked and no one's here and no one is picking up
The phone in the office.
She - let's call her Grace - is living at the shelter,
With her 12 day old newborn,

And she was supposed to get help with formula access today.

I don't know what to do."

For those of you who aren't familiar,

WIC stands for the Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition program.

It provides nutrition education and access to good food

For pregnant people, new mothers, infants, and preschoolers.

Christ Church provides meeting space to WIC regularly throughout the year,

But I knew that WIC wouldn't be there today.

And there I was,

Having just left my house,

And my newborn,

Holding my pumping supplies,

Secure in my ability to feed

and care for my own baby.

And suddenly,

My morning ministry plan

was interrupted.

"I don't know what's going on, but why don't all three of you come in?

Get out of the heat where it's comfortable while we try to figure this out."

Holy interruptions.

Our gospel this morning showcases one such holy interruption.

This example of a story with an interruption -

called an intercalation in Mark's gospel -

Contains two healing stories.

Healing stories of Jesus loving women.

Seeing them,

pausing for them,

listening to them,

believing them,

affirming the dignity of their lives.

And they are different kinds of healings

That show the whole spectrum

of how we approach and are approached by God.

Of how we experience God's healing.

Jesus is first approached by the girl's father,

Who has deep conviction about Jesus' power.

Jairus has high social standing in the community,

And he addresses Jesus in an accepted, established way.

The 12 year old girl needs her community, her family, those she loves to intervene for her, to seek out and beg for that healing.

She can't ask herself.

She leans on the faith of those around her, maybe even unknowingly.

Sometimes God comes and finds us,

when we don't even expect or ask for it,

sometimes through the lives, love, and faith of the people around us.

The woman with a hemorrhage, on the other hand, doesn't even ask.

She interrupts.

As a woman, and a woman with unexplained bleeding,

She has a pretty low social standing.

She doesn't come to Jesus in an accepted, established way,

But in secret and with great determination,

For herself.

She seems to know, or suspect,

that any contact with Jesus will heal her -

even if it's without his knowledge.

Without his words or his intentional touch.

Like Jairus,

She's also deeply convicted about Jesus' power.

Jesus is on his way to cure Jairus' daughter -

A worthy action, without a doubt

When he is interrupted by the woman's touch,

And he immediately feels power go out from him.

Simply touching his cloak heals her.

He could have ignored it and kept moving towards his destination -

After all, she was already well.

He could have rebuked her for transgressing,

For failing to ask,

For standing in the way of a critically ill child.

But instead,

Jesus pauses.

He embraces the interruption

of this impoverished outcast.

He makes her the center of his attention

and delays his first mission.

Sometimes we go after that healing,

like Jacob wrestling with the angel,

undeterred,

knowing that blessing is there for us if we reach for it.

After the interaction, Jesus continues on to Jairus' house
And brings the little girl back to life from her illness,
despite the doubt and the ridicule of those who surround her.
And by the end of the story,
Both are called "daughter" by Jesus,
Restored to life in several different ways.

In my own experience of being called to interruption last week,
I can't claim that I was able to heal
any of the pain, challenge, or trauma
That led Grace and her baby
into that set of heartbreaking circumstances.
After I welcomed Grace, her newborn, and their advocate inside,
I did some research, made some phone calls, and checked in with colleagues
To try and figure out what was going on.
It was clear that there had been some sort of scheduling mixup.
After almost an hour of trying to figure it out at church,
They decided to go back to the shelter.
My heart ached as I said goodbye.
Wishing I could have done more,
contributed something else
towards wholeness, health, and relationship.

Healing stories in scripture can be hard.
Because for every story this church could lift up right now
about healing, restoration, newfound wholeness,
There is a story of loss, death, and brokenness.
I can't explain or justify this anymore than the next person.

But what I do hear in our gospel is the conviction
that Jesus desires our healing.
Jesus wants to be with us in being healed,
in being brought back to life and relationship.
That Jesus embraces the interruption
to really see and hear this woman,
and name what has happened to her.
To seek out relationship with her.
To pronounce her healing out loud
And declare her faith in public.
I hope that this is the kind of presence I was able to offer

To Grace.

To act in a very small way towards bringing her and her baby
into health and relationship,
To see and name her struggle,
To regard this encounter as the holy interruption that it was.

Standing in the place of the little girl and the woman,
When have we been the person in need of healing?
When have we been the little girl,
advocated for and held by our communities and sought out by God?
When have we been the woman,
ostracized and outcast,
boldly reaching out in faith for God's power?
And standing in the place of Jesus,
When have we allowed ourselves to be interrupted?

God,
In our walk of discipleship,
Show us how to embrace holy interruptions.
Show us where to focus our attention.
Give us the grace to redirect,
To seek relationship,
To bring your healing deeper into the world.