

Mark 5:21-43 “Interrupted By Faith” Rev. Susan Schubert June 27, 2021

Now that we are able to go out more and socialize once again, I’m guessing that you are finding yourself busier than you have been in the last year and a half. It’s likely as well, that your plans for a given day are becoming more frequently interrupted. You are probably familiar with the old saying, “The best laid plans of mice and men do often go awry.” It’s true that our world with its electronic and digital devices including rings, buzzers and beepers provides us with more interruptions than our grandparents could ever have imagined. We generally don’t like interruptions. We lose our train of thought and may even forget what it was we were doing. School teachers have learned to treat interruptions as teachable moments. How do you treat them? What has interrupted you during the last week?

Jim and I were taking care of our two young grandchildren recently—playing Pictionary, when the doorbell rang. It was two young men from “Teen Challenge,” a Christian residential organization that offers young people with addictions a chance to get sober while learning about Jesus. They transform lives, as these two young men readily testified to us. Jim gave them a glass of water and invited them in. After listening to them witness to their faith and how it had changed their lives, all of us—kids included, held hands and prayed for them. Would you call that an interruption—or something else?

I have had the privilege to be the recipient of many, many such “interruptions” in my lifetime. The most profound and memorable ones happened during the years when I was developing mission churches. I remember one day when I left my home office for supplies and was standing in line in a Walmart in Gilbert. The line was long and the woman behind me began to talk to me. She just opened up her heart and told me about the recent death of her husband. I listened and responded and then the woman in front of me joined our conversation, sharing the pain she had experienced at the loss of a family member. Just then I arrived at the register and it was the clerk, who apparently had been listening to us; who stopped checking my items to share with all three of us how she was so devastated at the loss of her husband three years earlier that she thought she could not go on living. “But something wonderful happened,” she said, “I was sitting on the bed, sobbing, when all of a sudden I felt hands on my shoulders, HIS hands,,, and I knew he was alright. And since then, I have had peace with his passing.” The whole line was stopped. It was an interruption all right, but to the four of us women, it was an encounter with faith.

Today’s Gospel from Mark provides us with a unique view of what certainly was an interruption, but also something much more. We encounter Jesus, who had just crossed the sea again in a boat. He was by the sea when a great crowd gathered around him. It was then that one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came by, and seeing Jesus, he began to beg him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.” So, he went with them. Would you call that an interruption? It must have seemed so to the disciples and the great crowd of people gathered around him.

They obviously did not want to let him go because we are told that they not only followed him, but they pressed in on him. Jairus was, for them, an interruption. We learn that among them was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. Despite spending all she had on many physicians and enduring much, she was not only not better, but had grown worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd, and touched his cloak, saying, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Immediately her hemorrhage stopped and she felt in her body that she had been healed of her disease.”

At that same moment, Jesus was aware that power had gone out from him! This is where we have to marvel. He did not see the woman or know about her condition, yet because she believed and he had this healing power, it was granted to her! Jesus turned around and asked the crowd, “Who touched my clothes?”

His disciples, incredulous, and not knowing what had just happened, said, “You see the crowd, how can you ask this?” (In other words, how could you ever know who it was?) Jesus looked around, “but the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him and told him the whole truth.” He said, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.”

We keep hearing this phrase from Mark, “in fear and trembling;” remember that fear also means awe. Just as the disciples had been in terror when he slept in the stern of their small boat during a raging storm, so had they been in awe when with a word, he silenced the storm and all was still. It is in the stillness that we are invited to recognize that Jesus is God. He tells the woman, “Go in peace.” Can you imagine the peace she had after suffering for twelve years? She was at the end of her ability to pay for more physicians—she had peace at last. This miracle certainly had to be for her “the peace that passes understanding.”

Suddenly there is yet another interruption! While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any longer?” Can you imagine how that woman must have felt? I wonder if she felt guilt at having been the reason Jesus delayed his arrival. And Jairus, how his heart must have sunk at that moment!

Then, Jesus, overhearing them, said, “Do not fear, only believe.” He allowed only Peter, James and John to follow him. When he arrived at Jairus’ house, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. He entered and asked them, why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” They laughed at him! Imagine that. They were weeping and wailing one minute and now they were laughing! This was scornful laughter and Jesus would have none of it! He put them all outside. Just as he had limited those in the crowd to a few of his disciples; he now excludes those who do not believe. He went into where the child was and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” And she got up and began to walk around,

They were filled with amazement. The disciples and Jairus, the woman and the crowds in both places had witnessed miracles. Both were granted because the people in need had faith in Jesus’ healing power. That’s all that was needed: faith. Jesus was interrupted twice and twice he stopped and listened to those in need. Both Jairus and the woman with the hemorrhage believed Jesus could heal and both sought him out. Their faith was strong enough to cause them to seek Jesus. Jairus went right up to him, asking for him to lay hands on his daughter. The woman was less bold, yet her faith led her to believe that simply touching his garment would heal her.

We can learn from these “interruptions” in Jesus’ life. When we are interrupted in any way; we can practice doing what Jesus did—be fully present and open to the people in front of us, or around us. We can listen with the ears of our faith. We can re-frame an interruption as a possible God-given opportunity. Receive what comes to you as a moment in which you may be required to minister in some way. You can be certain that Jesus was using these miracles as teaching moments for his disciples.

You and I are also his disciples. Miracles of healing continue to be granted by faith every day to people in our time. You may be offered the privilege of being interrupted by someone in need. When that happens—and it will, if you are paying attention, may you see it as much more than an interruption. May it be for you a gift. Amen.