



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

A Stephen Ministry Congregation

www.goodshepherdwi.org

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

June 28, 2015

“Holy Interruptions”

(Mark 5:21-43)

Rev. David K. Groth

COLLECT: Heavenly Father, during His earthly ministry Your Son Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. By the healing medicine of the Word and Sacraments pour into our hearts such love toward You that we may live eternally; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

I was talking to my brother Paul the other day, the naughty one, the one who, when I'm not looking, plants zucchini seeds in my flower beds and bottle caps in my ice cream and makes one strand of my Christmas lights in the tree blink on an off.

In any event Paul designs office space for corporations and universities. And he said the big push now is the open office concept, to encourage co-workers to interact more and collaborate. Cubicle walls are getting lower, office doors are no more and snack bars abound. It does promote more interaction and information sharing, but what some call collaboration others call interruption. And knowledge workers, when interrupted, tend to make a whole lot more errors. Researchers say it takes on average 15 minutes to regain the same intense focus or "flow" as before the interruption. The consequences can be serious. Many hospitals, for example, are building "no-interruption zones", particularly where medications are being prepared for distribution. And some employees are pushing back against interruptions. Nothing says "Don't bother me" quite like wearing ear buds or head phones. Some are placing LED lights on top of their computer screens that shine red, yellow or green. Some have even stretched yellow barricade tape around their cubicles, or hang a sign on the back of their chair that says, "If it's not an emergency, e-mail me."

I don't know what Jesus had planned for the day, but he certainly had not planned on these interruptions. Our text is, at least in part, about how Jesus handled interruptions.

He has crossed back over to the west bank of the Sea of Galilee, near Capernaum. A great crowd has gathered about him and is listening to him, when a man named Jairus

enters the scene and interrupts Jesus. He's an important man, a man of consequence in Capernaum society. He's a leader of the synagogue. And he's desperate. You see, his twelve year old daughter is dying. He has, no doubt, tried everything; nothing has worked. Jairus is ready to move heaven and earth for his daughter, but all this dignified, highly respected man can think to do now is throw himself at the feet of Jesus and beg for help. Martin Luther wrote, "Before the Lord, wir sind alle Bettler . . . we're all beggars." Whether looking for healing or forgiveness or salvation, we're all panhandlers before the Lord. "My little daughter is dying" Jairus says. "Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."

Without a word, Jesus sets off for Jairus's house—a great crowd of the curious, "pressing around him" Mark says, to see what happens next. What happens next is another interruption – an interruption of an interruption. A sick woman sneaks up from behind. Whereas Jairus's appeal was very public, this woman is intent on being secretive.

It probably has something to do with her illness. She has some kind of menstrual disorder. For twelve years she's been hemorrhaging. For twelve years she's been fatigued, maybe light headed and anemic. But there's another problem. This woman's illness has earned her the religious designation "unclean." Because her bleeding has not stopped, she is unable to participate in the monthly purification rites required of all Jewish women. She's therefore permanently "unclean." Provided that she follows the law, she's not allowed to be in the synagogue, to participate in any religious rituals. According to Jewish law, anyone she touches will be polluted.

Mark says, "She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse." Modern physicians flinch at that, though some of their patients might identify with it. In any case, it provides a sharp, and perhaps deliberately humorous contrast to the care she receives from the doctors verses the care she receives from the Good Physician.

Picture the scene. Jesus is making his way toward Jairus's home. A crowd is pressing in on him. To be bumped and jostled in a crowd in the Middle East is not an uncommon experience. But this woman uses it to mask her secretive approach to Jesus. She's convinced if she can just touch his garments, she will be made well. She thinks touching Jesus will convey the same effect as being touched by him. It's a more primitive, even magical understanding of miraculous healing, and curiously Jesus doesn't deny or repudiate it, but rewards as sure sign of faith.

In any event she wedges her way in and secretly touches his cloak. Immediately she feels in her body that she is healed of her disease. But the healer also feels the cure, as if it has taken something out of Jesus. It seems almost a physical exchange: of strength for weakness.

Jesus turns and asks, "Who touched my clothes?" The disciples can't figure it out; there are all kinds of people pressing in on him. But the woman, knowing she's been found out, falls at his feet, and trembling with fear, tells him everything.

The truth, which everyone now knows, is that he's been touched by a hemorrhaging woman. The law in Leviticus 15 is absolutely clear. He must stop whatever he's doing, take off his clothes, wash them, then bathe and withdraw from all human contact until sundown. Jesus is officially unclean. Now *he's* not supposed to touch anyone.

We've almost forgotten that Jesus had been hurrying to the house of Jairus to lay his hands on a dying girl. But he's unclean now. He's not supposed to do that. Jairus is probably pulling his hair out, yet Jesus lingers. "Daughter," he says "your faith has made you well; go in peace."

We never do learn her name. *Jairus* has a name and position, but this woman does not . . . not until Jesus calls her "Daughter" which is better by far.

Some men from Jairus's house interrupt the scene yet again, and confirm Jairus's worst fear: his daughter has died. Jairus wasn't there. The delay has proven fatal. The assumption is Jesus no longer needs to come. He has

nothing more to contribute.

Jesus looks at the dead girl's dad and says, "Don't be afraid. Just believe." Did you hear it? He expects faith even in the face of death. They just witnessed what faith can do for one who is ill. "Your faith has made you well." Now Jesus wants them to know what faith can do for one who has died.

Once again, they set out for Jairus's house. Remember, Jesus hasn't washed yet. He is unclean, and yet he's ignoring all that and going to the house of the synagogue ruler. An unclean man sets out to the most ritually fastidious, religiously correct household in town, the house of Jairus, the leader of the synagogue.

Upon arriving, there's already a commotion. Family and friends are weeping and wailing-- it's loud and chaotic. Jesus asks, "Why all this commotion and wailing? This child is not dead but asleep." They laugh at him derisively. "Does he take us for fools? We know what death looks like." Jesus knows what it looks like too, but by calling it "sleep", he's saying this is real, but temporary.

Clearly, the weepers and wailers are not going to be helpful so he puts them out of the house, all but Jairus and his wife, and the three disciples. They go back to where the child lying. He takes hold of the girl's hand. (By the way, that too is against the law. Because she's dead, she's as unclean as the bleeding woman back there.) Ignoring all that, he takes her by the hand, and says something affectionate- intimate even. Mark is so struck with it that he gives it to us in the Aramaic that Jesus spoke, so that we would know exactly what Jesus has said. He addresses her as a father would. He says to her, "Talitha koum!" which means, "Little one, (little lamb also works) get up." Immediately she stands up and begins to walk. "Give her something to eat" Jesus says.

It was all so clean and simple and tender, performed with a minimum of fuss. No incantations or screaming prayers. No ritual or ceremony. He simply took her by the hand and softly said two words, "Talitha koum." But the

power and authority and love of God is behind those two quiet words.

As you know, things like this don't usually happen. It's not the way the world usually works. So if this doesn't submit to understanding or experience don't be surprised. But to believe in God is to believe in the possibility of the unusual, the extraordinary, the miraculous. To believe in God is to believe that it doesn't all have to make sense or work like we think it should. It doesn't have to follow all the usual rules because as second person of the Trinity Jesus can do what he wants, and what he wants is to make a sick woman well and a dead girl alive. But the real question is not *how* it happened, but what is God telling us today with this story?

Clearly the point here is there's no human condition so bad, so awful that hope is absent. There is no human condition (even that of death) that is outside the reach of God's love and authority and grace. There is no illness so repugnant, no sin so grievous, no addiction so strong that God cannot make things right again.

That's the first point of this lesson, that no matter what your situation or station in life, there is hope because of the presence and power and love and grace of Jesus Christ. When you lose your job, when someone you love no longer loves you, when you have no energy to carry on, when you know you are unclean, unworthy, unfit, even at the bedside of a dear child who has died, Jesus is there. You are never outside the reach of God's holy love. For us as for that little girl death is real, but temporary because of Jesus. That's the first point.

But let's go back and also talk about interruptions. Most of us do not like interruptions. Theologian Henri Nouwen told a story about one of his professors from Notre Dame, who said to him, "You know, all my life I've been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I discovered that interruptions are my work."

Please remember that. Serving others isn't convenient, never has been, never will be. If you want to

serve as Jesus served, you have to get used to the idea of it being untimely, awkward and messy. The deep needs of people are not clean and simple, and they will not wait until the slow parts of your day.

Moreover, C.S. Lewis wrote we should “stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions of real life. The truth is of course that what one calls interruptions *are* one’s real life—the life God is sending [us] day by day.” So when you serve at Bread and Roses, or when you give ear and time to the lonely widow, that is not an interruption to your real life. That is real life. What is not real life is doing what you otherwise might be doing . . . sitting at home killing time in front of the screen. It makes me think of Ephesians 2, “We are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan? The hero was the one who allowed that massive interruption. Surely he had his own agenda, until he came across a man lying in the road with deep and messy needs. Then nothing else in the world was more important.

Interruptions are often worth paying attention to. God keeps showing up in our lives, in the hurting eyes of the lonely, the pained eyes of the sick, the searching eyes of the lost. We can think of them as bothersome and messy, or we can see the face of Jesus in face of those in need of our help. Be open to interruptions.

Especially in the Gospel of Mark, the ministry of Jesus seems composed of just one big chain of interruptions. And yet, not once does Jesus complain about them, even when it means going without food or sleep. Jesus gives himself over to the interruptions. Most of his teaching and miracles were responsive, not planned. Be open to interruptions.

And finally, there is at least one more miracle in this lesson . . . the miracle of God coming to us in Jesus, this healer, who reaches across all the barriers to touch us. And in so doing, the spotless Lamb becomes polluted and unclean with our sin. He took on your messiness and mine, and became contaminated by them. Then to the cross he went, where a

great exchange took place. He takes on our sin and pollution, but gives us his holiness and righteousness. He dies our death and gives us his life. As Isaiah wrote, “By his wounds we are healed.”

In the end, then, this passage isn't about a couple of miracles 2000 years ago. This is about the miracle of God's love for you today, a love stronger than your sin, stronger than any illness, a love stronger than death. Thanks be to God. Amen.