

“Interruption or Opportunity”
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Mark 5:21-43

Jesus had just come by boat from across the Sea of Galilee where He had healed a demon-possessed man. As soon as He landed, crowds began to gather around Him yearning to hear his teachings or see his miracles. Then Jairus, a synagogue ruler arrived and immediately fell on his knees to plead with Jesus to come to his house to heal his daughter who was dying. Jesus was moved by compassion so out went whatever plan He may have had for the day as he turned to face the **interruption**, putting the need and prayers of Jairus first.

Have you ever noticed that most of the stories of Jesus - parables and miracles and encounters that we read about in the New Testament occur in the interruptions? **They are spontaneous responses to the needs placed in front of Him**, never just part of his “plan for the day”, his “agenda”.

When He was teaching the crowds, or on his way somewhere – he was interrupted by lepers on the road, or a blind man, or the men carrying their paralyzed friend, or a widow about to bury her only son, or the centurion whose servant was sick, or a crowd of people hungering for the word and power of God, and so on. Or when he was in the midst of teaching the people and was interrupted with trick questions from the religious leaders he often responded with a parable or teaching that got recorded in the Gospel. Always Jesus pointed people to the Kingdom of God and faith.

In today’s Scripture lesson Jesus begins to go with Jairus when he is faced with another **interruption** - an unclean woman makes her way through the crowd to secretly touch the hem of Jesus’ garment so she could be healed from hemorrhaging that had lasted 12 years. She probably didn’t want anyone to know what she was doing because her condition had rendered her ritually unclean and made her an outcast. She touched him and was healed instantly.

But it **was** an interruption for Jesus because he perceived the power going out from him. How did he respond? He was already in the middle of something important and a little girl's life was at stake.

But still He stopped, turned around, and asked who touched him, giving the woman a chance to come forward, admit it was her and why she did it. He could have ignored what had happened and allowed her to go unnoticed and physically healed – so that he could hurry to Jairus' house. But he had compassion on the woman and knew that the healing she needed was much deeper than physical. In the short encounter that followed the woman was not only healed physically but also spiritually, emotionally and socially. He called her daughter and brought her back into society – and he told her that it was because of her faith that she was healed.

Then He resumed his mission with Jairus to heal his little daughter. We don't know what Jairus may have thought or felt when Jesus stopped to help the woman, especially when he was told that his daughter had already died. We can only imagine.

But **what we do know** is that whatever he thought or felt, when Jesus told him to have faith, he **chose** to hold onto that and let Jesus continue on that journey to his daughter. As we read, Jesus ended up raising her from the dead, but not for public knowledge because it was not his time yet. He told the people she was only sleeping.

We make our own plans for the day and try to accomplish everything that is on our to do list – and we **often become annoyed or upset when we are interrupted** (except when we are looking for interruptions to justify procrastinating). **But Jesus saw everything as part of God's plan for his day.** The interruptions were always from God and for the glory of God. If we get annoyed or frustrated by the interruptions, maybe we need to look at them differently – as if sent by God for a purpose. Maybe the point of our ministry that day **IS IN the interruption**, not our planned schedule. In fact, through the interruptions we are given the opportunity to respond spontaneously to the needs of others, revealing our true heart and character.

Years ago, I lived and worked for the Presbyterian Church in Nigeria. One year, on my way back to Canada I stopped in Scotland to visit some former missionaries who had worked in the village where I was living. One of these people was Rev. Mincher. When I visited him in a senior's residence, I gave him all the messages and greetings the people had sent through me, and we had a great visit.

Before I left, he said, "Arlene I want to ask you one question – what was my job in Arochukwu when I was there?". I told him "I don't know. People told me lots of stories about you, and how you loved the children and played with them, and how you spoke to them in their own language and dialect, but nobody ever told me what your job was."

He smiled and said, "Remember that! Your job is not your ministry. Your ministry is not tied to the job, but to your life, wherever you are and in whatever circumstances. Your job is only the setting for your ministry at a particular time. Your job can change, or you can lose it – but your ministry continues all your life."

When I reflect on my life and on the lives of many Christians I know, I see that God uses us not just in the official planned ministry or mission activities or in the profession or work we do. In fact, most of the great moments, the "stories" of how God led or used us to spread God's Word and love, to make a difference in someone's life, were not the "jobs" we were doing, but the lives lived, even in the interruptions – when we responded to the needs set before us.

I once saw a short video about two young men preparing for a particular job interview. They didn't know each other but you see them both heading for the same office building and coming in the door about the same time. They both look at the clock and then head for the elevator. As one of them rushes he accidentally bumps into an older man knocking him down. He turns to the man as if wanting to help him when he hears the elevator ping, looks at the clock and rushes to the elevator, leaving the man on the floor.

The second young man looks at the man on the floor, hears the elevator but instead of heading for it turns to help the older man up, brushes off the man's

clothes and asks if he is okay. The older man thanks him and says he is okay and they both head in different directions. The young man takes the next elevator. He arrives at the office reception area where a number of applicants are waiting to be interviewed. The receptionist apologizes for the delay saying the interviewer will be there momentarily. She looks at the door and welcomes "Mr. Smith", saying here are the candidates waiting for you. The camera turns to show that he is the man who had been knocked down. Sometimes a moment can make a big difference.

As Christians we all have a ministry – but that ministry is not tied to a job, or program or the work we do – it is our lives – every moment, even in the in between times, in the interruptions.

When we become Christians, God equips us with all we need to do, what is right in any circumstance, even when it seems difficult or confusing. If we are in tune with God – and have faith, we will be able to see interruptions as opportunities for God to work through us.

We should plan and do intentional ministry but not limit ourselves to that, whatever our profession may be. Our ministry is wherever we happen to be at every moment, letting God open our eyes, minds and hearts at all times and circumstances, using us for Christ's glory any time and anywhere.

When we are faced with interruptions and in between times we too can hold on to our faith like Jairus and this woman in our Scripture reading, knowing and believing that God is in control, even when the way it is unfolding is different from what we had expected or thought it should be.

May God open our eyes and hearts to all the opportunities that come before us in our lives. May God help us to see our interruptions as God-sent opportunities to be reflections of Christ's love and compassion to those we encounter.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit – as it was in the beginning, is now, and forever shall be, world without end. Amen.