

Advent Lutheran Church
Intention or Interruption
Mark 5:21-43
June 30, 2024

Introduction

I stand before you this morning as a newcomer. Your knowledge of who I am may be limited to the contents of a one-page bio that introduces me as your Interim Pastor. So I'll begin with a confession and a personal story.

Good morning, my name is Pastor Greg and I am a planner. I like to know where I'm going and how I'm going to get there. I not only have a schedule, but expect to follow it. I enter each new day with a plan and with intention.

Knowing this, I invite you to travel back in time with me across several decades back to the time when we didn't carry phones in our pockets – when we navigated by memory or map not GPS. One ordinary morning in that world I was planning to drive from Arlington to Fort Worth to lead an all-day training session. And everything went according to plan until it didn't.

Due to my proximity to a major wreck on the highway, I ended up stuck on the road for several hours in 100-degree Texas heat. It was an interruption I'll never forget.

First people sat in their vehicles politely and even somewhat patiently. Then people became grouchy and mean. Eventually everyone turned off their vehicles and many stepped out to stretch their legs, chat, or try to learn more.

Finally, the miracles started. People who normally never notice each other chatted and truly listened. Limited resources of food and water were distributed to those in need. And many began to care more about one another and those who had been in the wreck than their original planned destination.

When I think of all of the ways my plans for the day have been interrupted this one stands out.

Story 1: Jesus' Intention

In this morning's Gospel lesson we find Jesus doing a very Jesus' thing: agreeing to heal someone.

Jairus – an important religious figure – seeks Jesus out. He wants Jesus to come to his home and heal his daughter. And, Jesus – I assume only after reviewing his schedule for the day – agrees.

And, off they go to bring healing and hope to this young girl.

Story 2: Jesus' Interruption

Except that they are interrupted. Jesus has once again drawn a crowd. This time the crowd does more than slow him down; it shifts his forward progress to a near standstill

In the midst of his efforts to recalculate his travel, he feels something. Someone has touched him. It was more than a touch. It was a transfer of some of his healing power. Someone had pressed in on him, reached out, and found their way to healing.

Siblings in Christ, I don't know about you but this story of interruption disturbs me and draws me in. It doesn't go as I expect. Nothing seems to follow the normal religious protocol of the day. And, everything seems to go beyond the normal rule bending we experience in Jesus's liberative ministry.

We all know that Jesus heals and can recall a few Bible stories that tell us how he heals. People come to him or are brought to him. Jesus speaks to them and then lays hands on them as a means of imparting healing.

That is how it normally works but this isn't a normal encounter.

After suffering for so long this woman is desperate. She is determined. She believes in Jesus and has faith that if she can reach him her life will be changed. And, she's right.

Her bold action changes her life forever. She leaves this experience healed with Jesus commending her for her faith.

Story 2: Our Interruptions

Did you happen to catch how long the unnamed woman had been suffering with her medical condition? 12 years.

12 is an important number in the Bible denoting God's authority and reign. It appears again and again - around 200 times across the pages of Scripture, including the 12 tribes of Israel, Jesus first appearing at age 12 in the temple, and Jesus calling 12 disciples.

And 12 even plays a norming role in our contemporary life. Our calendar comes with 12 months.

And today we finish the month of June – a month with many built in interruptions also known as holidays. I'll name just two.

First, our newest federal holiday: Juneteenth. It reminds us that in this country all people have not always been free. And, Juneteenth invites us to think more deeply about our role in the work of protecting and advancing freedom and justice.

Second, another newer holiday: Pride. It reminds us that in this country LGBTQIA+ people have not always had equal rights. And, Pride invites us to continue protecting those rights and to intentionally welcoming and celebrating LGBTQIA+ folks here in the church.

And then there is the bigger and less expected interruption that has arrived here at Advent. Your last settled minister, Pastor Joel, finished his good and faithful work in your midst and transitioned to retirement. This is an interruption that will last much longer than a month but one that is beginning now.

The interim will offer us a time to look back to better understand and more fully appreciate the rich history of Advent.

The interim will also provide us an opportunity to look toward the future: to welcome new ideas, to dream new dreams, and to prepare for new leadership.

Story 1, Part 2: The Conclusion

By now, you are probably challenged enough or more than enough by these interruptions. So, let's return to the Gospel.

Once Jesus finished healing the unnamed woman the group receives bad news: Jairus' daughter has passed away.

Jesus, recalling his earlier agreement with Jairus, dismisses that report and presses on to Jairus' home.

Then, when he arrives, we learn some additional details, including his daughter's age. She's 12 years old.

You heard that right. She was born just as the unnamed woman had begun suffering. And, miraculously, on the same day, each received new life.

Story 1, Part 2: My Conclusion

Some of you are wondering how my story ended. Eventually I did get back in my car and was able to continue on to my destination in Fort Worth. When I arrived, the receptionist told me I was too late and that my group had already left for the day.

She was wrong. Someone had stepped in and given them a directive to pass their time by reviewing the content I'd taught them in prior days. They were grateful to see me and filled with questions – about my day and about the material they had been learning.

I'm not sure they still remember the content, but I expect they all remember the day their trainer arrived half a day late.

Conclusion

Our Gospel lesson teaches us the importance of interruptions and reminds us that they need not deter us from our original intention. God works in and through both.

Whether you view the interim time here at Advent as an intention, an interruption, or an intentional interruption, I hope you'll join me in praying that God will bless our journey together just as much as our destination. Amen.