

The Practices of Jesus: Interruptions

LaGrave Christian Reformed Church

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Reverend Peter Jonker

Luke 8:40-56

Let's start with some hypotheticals. If one of these happened to you, how would you react? It's Friday night and after a busy week, you've rented a movie on Netflix. You snuggle down on the couch under your favorite blanket. Your drink is poured. Your popcorn is popped. But just as you're about to start the phone rings. You look at the caller ID and see that it's your sister, your long-winded sister who's in the middle of another crisis. How do you feel about the call? Scenario two. You are 17 years old and you're about to head out the door with three of your friends. You're going to the football game but before that you are going out for a pizza. You're putting your shoes on when Mom says to you: "Honey...have you mowed grandma's lawn yet? You said you'd do that by the weekend? Is that done?" Do your Mother's words flood your heart with warm sunshine (thank you for reminding me Mom!) or is your heart flooded with different feelings? I think it's fair to say that, in both of these situations, most of us would not appreciate the interruption. Most of us would be annoyed.

So imagine how Jairus must have felt. There was much more than a football game at stake for Jairus. His 12-year-old daughter is critically ill. His beautiful brown-eyed girl. His only daughter. She's such a great kid. Even though she was 12, she still sometimes held his hand when they would go for walks beside the sea. A week ago her laugh still filled the house, but now all you could hear was her body struggling for breath. The doctors had all been round, but they all came out of her room with that 'there is nothing more we can do' look on their faces. That's why Jairus ran to Jesus. When he heard Jesus was in town, he ran as fast as his middle-aged feet could take him and threw himself at Jesus feet. "Please Jesus! Please Jesus! Please. Please. Please."

"Show me the way," says Jesus. Jairus leaps up and leads Him through the crowds "Come on Jesus! Just down the road here. No too far." Jairus' mouth is dry and his heart is pounding. He's moving as quickly as he dares. But suddenly, in the middle of this critical mission, Jesus stops. "Who touched me?" he says. He's not moving anymore. He's just standing there, scanning this enormous crowd to find someone who apparently jostled Him. The Bible doesn't tell us how Jairus reacted in that moment, but how do you think he felt when Jesus stopped? Peter was obviously annoyed. "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you. EVERYONE is touching you Jesus! Let's keep going. This is important!"

If the people were irritated when Jesus first stopped, imagine how they would have felt when they found the person who was actually responsible for the delay. Let's stop there for a moment and consider the difference between the two sick people in this passage. On the one hand you have Jairus' daughter. She is an extremely sympathetic figure. She's a sick child, a suffering innocent. Our hearts go out to sick children, and rightly so. She's also a person of some standing. Her dad is a ruler in the synagogue. People in the community would all have some personal connection to her. So Jairus' daughter was important, she was sympathetic and she was critically ill.

Now, let's look at the woman who touched Jesus. Is she important? Is she sympathetic? Is she critically ill? No. None of those. She was a social nobody with a chronic condition. The

passage calls her a woman suffering from a flow of blood, which is a nice way of saying she is a woman with a menstrual disorder. This chronic sickness would have made her a social outcast, because, according to Leviticus 15:25 she would be perpetually unclean. If someone with a condition like hers touched you, you would be unclean too. If she bumped into you in a crowd, you'd have to go home, wash your clothes and isolate yourself. You would be unclean until evening. So how do you think people would have treated this woman? They would have avoided her of course. People would steer away from her. She would be a social nobody.

I think it's pretty clear that this woman had internalized society's opinion of her. She sees herself as a nobody. Why do you think she sneaks up behind Jesus and touches Him in a crowd? She doesn't think she is worthy of Jesus' time. She thinks someone like Jesus couldn't possibly care about someone like her. Did you notice that she doesn't come forward when Jesus first asks who touched Him? Jesus has to ask twice and only when she knew she could not go unnoticed does she finally come trembling–trembling! into Jesus' presence. She obviously thinks Jesus will be angry at her, because everyone else is angry at her when she touches them. Jairus' daughter is important, sympathetic and critically ill. The woman with the flow of blood is nobody with a chronic condition.

And yet Jesus stops. And He doesn't just stop, He looks her in the eye. He listens to her whole story. Did you notice that? "In the presence of the people she tells them why she touched Him and how she had been instantly healed." Jesus gives this woman His full attention. And when she is done He blesses her: He calls this untouchable nobody "daughter" and He sends her off with His peace. There is something so lovely about this, so healing, so full of grace.

And it is so typical of Jesus. Jesus was interruptible. Jesus practiced interruptions. This incident is probably the most remarkable of the interruptions, but go through the gospels and there is story after story where Jesus is in the middle of something, He gets interrupted by a weak or a needy person, and in every case He responds with kindness. In Luke 4 He is preaching in Capernaum and a demon possessed man interrupts the middle of His sermon. He stops his message and casts out the demon. In Luke 5, He is preaching in a home, and in the middle of the sermon a paralyzed man is let down through the roof. He stops His sermon. He heals Him and offers Him forgiveness for His sins. In Luke 7 He's in the middle of dinner with some important Pharisees, when a forgiven prostitute interrupts the meal begins to bathe His feet with perfume. The people at the table want Jesus to send her away. But Jesus defends her and blesses her: "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." Another time some children interrupt Jesus. The disciples say, "Get out of here you kids! Can't you see Jesus is busy?!" But Jesus says 'No, no, no! Let the Children come to me.' And He blesses them. Later, Jesus is on a mission to Jerusalem when He travels through Jericho. On His way through, a blind beggar, starts howling for Jesus attention: "Son of David have mercy on me! Son of David have mercy on me!" The disciples tell him to be quiet, but Jesus stops him and heals him. In Matthew 14 Jesus and His disciples are on their way to a Spiritual retreat, only to find that there are 5000 people at the retreat site, and all of them looking for Him. All of them saying, "Please Jesus! Please! Please!" Jesus doesn't turn around. You know what He does? He spends the day healing them, and then He feeds them. All these interruptions. All of them coming, from little people, outsiders, needy, desperate, clingy people. And always, always, always, Jesus stops what He is doing, and takes the time to bless them.

We began this sermon with those hypothetical situations, and we agreed that we hate to be interrupted. Why do we hate interruptions? Because we like to be masters of our time. Either by writing a to-do list, or else by making plans in our head, we schedule out our days. Some

people do this more intentionally than others. Goal oriented Type A people do this a lot. They're really focused on their plans. Any goal-oriented type A people here? That's what I thought. So we set out our priorities, we set out our goals. We also attach times to those goals. At 8 I'll be here, at 9 I have this meeting. From 10 to 12 I'm going to clean the house. Our culture trains us this way. Blessed are the punctual for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the efficient for they shall be called district managers and vice presidents. Interruptions are the enemy of efficiency! Interruptions threaten our plans; they mess with our to-do list!

But while efficiency is better than sloth and plans are better than chaos, watching Jesus reminds us that the great commandment, the one all the laws and the prophets are based on, doesn't call you to plan, it calls you to love. In the west, we're told that my time belongs to me. That is not the teaching of scripture. Our times are in the Lord's hands. "I am not my own, but belong body and soul, in life and in death to my faithful savior Jesus Christ." That ownership definitely includes our time and our to-do list.

So, by all means start your day off with a to do list. By all means make plans and schedule events, but as you go be ready for what God the Lord of your day might send you. Be ready for interruptions. Expect God to send them. Let's have our eyes open for the people and situations God sets in our path. Especially the small people, the marginal, the lonely. We always think that the thing we are planning is the most important thing. But maybe God has a different idea. Maybe the casual conversation with a stranger in the grocery store checkout line that turns into a 20-minute heart to heart will be the most significant thing you will do today.

Here's how Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it in Life Together. "We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and...it is a strange fact that Christians and even ministers frequently consider their work so important and urgent that they will allow nothing to disturb them. They think they are doing God a service in this, but actually they are disdainful of God's [path]."

There is one more thing that struck me this week. If you had quizzed me three weeks ago, if you'd have said, 'Bible trivia: why did Jesus stop on the way to Jairus' house?' I probably would have said: "He stopped to heal the woman with a flow of blood." Is that what you would have answered? Is that the right answer? No. that's wrong. That's not what happens in this story. Jesus doesn't stop to heal the woman; by the time Jesus stops the woman has already been healed! She touches the hem of His garment and power goes out of Him. She's already been cured. And Jesus knows it. He felt the power leave Him. He could have said, "Well, she's okay, I can just keep going."

Jesus didn't stop to heal this woman's flow of blood. Jesus stopped to heal her heart. Jesus stopped because He didn't just want to heal her body, He wanted to heal her heart. He wanted to look her in the eye, hear her story, and speak a word of healing peace. "My daughter, your faith has healed you." Read carefully and you see that Jesus stops because He has a deep desire to know this person, to have a relationship to this person. Did you notice how persistent He is? "Who touched me, who touched me!" "Master... c'mon there's a big crowd..." "Never mind that Peter. I need to find the person who touched me because I don't just want to heal her body I want to restore her lonely, shame-soaked heart."

When I saw the real reason Jesus stops, it made me realize that I am not all that different from the woman with the flow of blood. I come here week after week and I ask him to help me with my stuff. And I pray that He would help you with your stuff. I ask Him to take care of the sicknesses and the physical needs. Together we reach out to touch the hem of his robe so that he

can take care of our problems, our surface stuff. But what I really want, what I really need, is for Him to stop, for Him to see me, and for Him to speak healing words to my tired, lonely heart. That's why I'm here. What about you? That's why you're here too, isn't it?

And every week that's what He does. Jesus, who interrupted His stay in the heavenly places. Jesus, who left the security of his Father's throne room to walk with us and die for us, He comes to us. Week after week He turns his face towards us and He says what He said to that woman and what I declare to you now: "My sons, My daughters. You are God's beloved. Jesus died for you. He loves you. Go in peace."

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