

Lectionary 13B 2018, Mark 5:21-43, July 1, 2018, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Lancaster, PA, Kurt S. Strause

Yesterday Lois asked me if my sermon for today was finished. I told her it was just being finished up. Then she said, “you know, it’s going to be hot in church tomorrow, you should keep it short.” I’ve learned over the years she can be very astute and heeding her advice is always a wise decision. So, this morning you are going to hear a somewhat abbreviated version of the sermon I already prepared.

How do you feel when you are interrupted in an important task you are performing? Frustrated? Angry? And when you finally get back to the original task, not quite as motivated or enthusiastic as before?

Today we hear Jesus interrupted, not once but twice. First by a synagogue official named Jairus pleading for his dying daughter, and then by a woman who’s been hemorrhaging for 12 years. How does Jesus respond? He doesn’t get flustered. He’s not resentful of the intrusion. He doesn’t make the woman feel inferior for reaching out and touching his coat, hoping for a bit of healing power. And when despair comes over the man and his entourage when the daughter’s death is announced Jesus resumes his task, right where he left off, and goes to the man’s house.

Yes it’s true these are healing stories. But they could just as easily have been told one right after the other, and the point would be well taken; Jesus has the power to heal, even to raise from the dead. Mark, our gospel writer, reports these healing stories as signs of God’s kingdom breaking into a broken and diseased world. “See the sick are healed, the dead are raised, the poor have good news proclaimed to them,” Jesus will say. We rejoice this kingdom continues to break into our world, through the healing ministries of Jesus performed through his earthly hands and mouth, the church.

But sometimes a story is more than a story, and the way its told is just as important as the events contained within it. That’s the case with these stories. Mark “sandwiches” these two healing stories together. The outer story adds jest and body to the inner story; and the inner story permeates the outer with flavor.

We see Jesus pulled in different directions almost simultaneously. First the crowds want him. Then an important official needs Jesus to heal his daughter, a young girl, 12 years old, on the verge of adulthood. And then a woman who’s been hemorrhaging for 12 years. Notice how the girl’s age is identical to the length of time the woman has been suffering. It’s a detail that highlight how serious her condition is. Its serious physically yes, but serious emotionally and socially, for as long as she has been hemorrhaging she has been cut off from the community, shunned from society and those who can support her.

Jesus is willing to allow himself to be interrupted and meet their needs. He does so with grace, and acceptance and love. The late Henri Nouwen, a wonderful author of spiritual guides and meditations, once grew so frustrated with all the interruptions to his work that he contemplated leaving and taking up other tasks. He was a teacher at Notre Dame with a heavy agenda and didn’t like to be disturbed. Until one day he realized that his interruptions were his work. What were previously thought of as annoying distractions became opportunities for God to speak and act both to him and through him.

Interruptions can take many forms in our lives. There are the simple ones, like the phone call coming in the middle of a Saturday morning project you want to finish. But there are bigger

ones; a sudden change in health, a disruption in your family, or a change in your child's behavior. You may experience a change in your responsibilities at work or even the loss of a job. All of them interruptions to the carefully constructed world we occupy. Just about all of them have the potential to raise up frustrations and fears. Frustrations because interruptions show how much we aren't in control of events. Fears because our future is no longer predictable.

That's why these two healing stories, as they are told, are so important for us today. For here we see Jesus, willing to be interrupted, meeting the needs of both the woman and Jairus' daughter. He meets them where they were, at their most vulnerable, in the midst of their fears and their frustrations. And he addresses each of their concerns personally. He turns neither one aside. When he stops to heal the woman he does not forget Jairus. He returns to him as he had promised and raises his daughter from death.

To begin to see the presence of God even in the interruptions in our lives is an act of grace on God's behalf. For Jesus an interruption served to show the presence of God's kingdom breaking into the life of a woman kept apart from the community for twelve years. An interruption showed Jairus and his household the power of God even in the face of one of life's greatest tragedies, the death of a child. What God wants us to realize this morning is that he is there, even in the midst of the greatest interruptions and disruptions we might experience. When all the neat and tidy plans we make get interrupted, and we grow frustrated and fearful, God is there, right in the middle of it all, working his healing and grace and love.

Finally, this story teaches us that no person is so unimportant that Jesus would pass them by. Jesus never sees you as an interruption in his work in bringing in the kingdom of God. Indeed, you are the means Jesus shows the power of the kingdom at work. That's the power of the gospel at work, that God always takes the time and never passes by any of his children. Amen.