

**“Ministry of Interruptions”**  
**A Sermon by Rev. Victoria ByRode**  
**The Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**June 28, 2009**  
**Scripture: Mark 5:21-43**

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:** *Guide us, O God, by your Word and Spirit that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

A business executive became depressed. Things were not going well at work, and he was bringing his problems home with him every night. Every evening he would eat his dinner in silence, shutting out his wife and five-year-old daughter. Then he would go into the den and read the paper using the newspaper to wall his family out of his life.

After several nights of this, one evening his daughter took her little hand and pushed the newspaper down. She then jumped into her father’s lap, wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him with all her might. The father said abruptly, “Honey, stop! You’re hugging me to death!” “No, Daddy,” the little girl said, “I’m hugging you to life!”

This was the greatness of Jesus. He took people where they were and hugged them to life. That is precisely what we see Jesus doing here in our Gospel reading this morning. Mark tells us, not one, but two stories today about Jesus loving needy and hurting people and hugging them to life. Remember today’s reading with me.

Jesus and his disciples had been going from town to town. He had been preaching the gospel and healing people. Large crowds of people followed him wherever he went. They were clamoring to see Jesus and to hear him. As he and his disciples traveled along, their travel was interrupted as Jesus is confronted by a man named Jairus who begged him to come lay hands on his daughter and heal her. Now Jairus and his family represented the “upper crust” of society. Jairus was the ruler of the synagogue.

He was a man of substance – rich, powerful and religiously prominent. In the synagogue, he called the shots. He decided who would preach, what scripture would be read, and what hymns would be sung. He represented people in control. But this day Jairus was not in control. This day Jairus was afraid and sad, because this day his twelve-year-old daughter was dying.

Jairus had a reputation and position to uphold. It would have been much better for his reputation, if he had not been seen talking to Jesus, let alone invite him to his house. But Jairus stands in front of a crowd of onlookers and pleads with Jesus until he gets his way. As they are going, the crowd continued to press around Jesus. The New English Bible puts it dramatically: “He could hardly breathe for the crowds.” The people were so excited to be near him that they pushed and shoved and crowded close to him.

In the crowd that day was a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years and had, therefore, been ostracized by society and excluded from having contact with anyone. She was considered unclean – as one who was under the judgment of God and therefore not allowed to set foot in the synagogue. This woman had tried everything she knew to try but to no avail. No one had been able to cure her. Setting her fear of being seen aside, she slipped up behind Jesus, working her way through the crowd...and when no one seemed to be looking, she reached out tentatively, fearfully, and touched the hem of his robe. At once the hemorrhaging stopped. For the first time in twelve years, the flow of blood stopped.

Simultaneously, Jesus felt or sensed that something special had happened – it was a unique touch – and he felt strength go out of him. Immediately, Jesus stopped. He turned around and asked, “Who touched me?” The disciples were astonished by the question in the midst of all the pushing and shoving and they answered, “What do you mean, ‘who touched you?’ Everybody’s touching you!”

But, you see, they couldn’t tell a push from a touch. Jesus could! He knew that it was a

tender touch which had drawn strength from him. The woman had not expected to be detected, but when Jesus turned and asked that question, she knew that he knew, and she came forward trembling and she fell at his feet and confessed that she was the one who had touched him. She explained in a rush of words why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Graciously, Jesus lifted her up and said to her, “My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go now in peace.”

Notice how gentle and loving Jesus is with her as he gives her a new lease on life. He doesn’t chastise her for interrupting him. He doesn’t critique her theology or her superstitious expectations. He doesn’t rebuke her for seeing him as sort of a last resort. Rather, he gives her act the most gracious possible reception. And although we know the healing came from him, he humbly gives her the credit. “Your faith has made you well,” he says to her.

As Jesus and Jairus then resume their travel to see Jairus’ daughter, people come and tell Jairus that it was too late – his daughter has died. I’m sure at that moment Jairus was devastated. His only daughter had been snatched away. But again, Jesus is gracious and generous and loving. I can just imagine him touching Jairus’ shoulder and saying, “Don’t be afraid. Just believe, and she will be made well.”

So they continue on to the house. When they arrive, people are weeping and mourning. They scoff at Jesus for thinking he can do anything about this. But Jesus goes in to that little girl, and he resurrects her. He loves her into life and then (and I love this part) he tells them to give her something to eat.

Now, there are several reasons these two stories might have been combined. There are a couple of things which the two have in common. Both stories are concerned with the relationship of faith and healing. Both healings are affected by physical contact. And in the first story, there is Jairus’ daughter and in the second Jesus calls the woman who reached out to him “daughter”. There are also a couple of things that makes them

totally different. For one thing, we heard Jairus' name in his part of the story – the woman, though, remains nameless throughout. Also Mark is telling us about two vastly different people who were loved into life by Jesus.

Yes it could have been what the stories had in common or what made them so different which made Mark put them together. What comes to mind the most for me as I read Mark's words, though, is that in both of these stories, Jesus' ministry came in the form of interruptions.

It didn't seem to matter what plans Jesus had for his day – what important things were on his to-do list – or how many committee meetings he had to attend - or emails he had to answer – or how many times the disciples tapped their watches. I wonder if Jesus often went to bed with most of those things on his list undone. I wonder if he often had the feeling that he didn't get anything done.

Jesus could have told Jairus, I guess, "I'm sorry but I have places to go and people to see," but he didn't. Instead, he followed Jairus to see his daughter. And then, when that trip was interrupted by the touch of a woman who had lived on the fringes of society, to whom society gave absolutely no worth, Jesus stopped and loved her back to life and back into community. What we can see from our perspective – that Jesus and his disciples couldn't see, however, is that many of the stories of Jesus' interactions with people came in the form of interruptions.

And you know what? I think this is a helpful reminder for all of us who are in ministry. And if you check the backs of your bulletins, my friends, you will see that that means all of us. It was preacher who once reflected that he used to hate interruptions to his ministry until it dawned on him that the interruptions *were* his ministry. Interruptions are the stuff of professional ministry, but they are also the stuff of being a spouse, a parent, a child, or a neighbor. Interruptions are the ministry of Christ and of everyone who follows Christ. Interruptions, interference, and intrusions are the stuff of Christian discipleship.

If we want an organized, orderly life we can have it. We can turn people away until they know not to ask us. We can ignore people in need until we don't even see them. We can claim to be God's people without ever allowing God to interrupt. We can act as if God is in our plans and never in our interruptions, even though the opposite is more likely to be true.

You know, we all have agendas. We know what we will accomplish if no one gets in our way. But if you ask me, God doesn't seem to care much for our attempts to impose order on our lives. God seems to think that it's more important that we see that along our journey there are hurting friends, broken homes, and needy strangers for whom we cannot be too busy. And if we are at all fortunate, people will keep on interrupting.

When God interrupts our best laid plans and expectations, He has a far greater thing in mind for us. And who knows what he has in store through you in terms of impact in future generations when he rearranges your life? I can't always tell you what God is up to, but I can assure you that he uses interruptions to do things far beyond what we have ever dreamed.

I wonder how *your* week will be interrupted. I know it will be. I know mine will be, too. I wonder what those interruptions will teach you about faith. I wonder if you will be willing to allow God's plan to override your plan. And I wonder if you will allow our God - who not only welcomes interruptions, but works through them –to work through you. May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

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Thirteenth Sunday in  
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