



St Catherine's Capilano June 28, 2015

Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." He went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

What do we do with life's many interruptions? How do we view them? How do we decide how to respond to interruptions, especially when those interruptions cut across the path we are urgently following or the plans we have made?

Mark's Gospel for this morning is at its core a story about an interruption for it is the interruption of one story by another. This narrative technique of interrupting one story by another is, in fact, is one of Mark's favorite ways of telling stories; and, believe it or not, it has a name: "intercalation." An intercalation is the splitting of one story into two parts by putting another story right in the middle of it, all as a way to communicate to the reader or to the listener that the two stories together say more than the two do separately.

"Intercalation:" I heard this term for the very first time in a course I once had on Biblical narrative, and I feel in love with it. To my mind, it was not only elegant, it was somehow true on a human level. For interrupting stories or events do drop down into the middle of our carefully plotted lives, don't they? But what, I wondered, could we learn from Scripture about the meaning of these interrupting stories and where God might be moving within them?

And so let's take a look at our two stories in the Gospel of Mark. What does this one story interrupting the other story suggest to us that the two separately cannot? And what might these two be saying to us this morning here at St. Catherine's?

So just to remind us all, here are the two stories:

Story one: Fresh from crossing the Sea of Galilee, Jesus finds himself surrounded by a crowd of people. Into this crowd comes Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, that is, a powerful man. At this moment though, he comes to Jesus in a powerless state, for he falls before Jesus and begs him to come to his house to heal his twelve-year old daughter who is at the point of death. On hearing about this, Jesus goes with him.

But as Jesus follows Jairus (and here is the interruption), a woman who has been bleeding for twelve years, a powerless and untouchable person, comes up behind Jesus and secretly touches his cloak, believing that doing just this will heal her. And healed she is.

But sensing that someone has touched him, Jesus stops and asks who has done this. Terrified, the woman comes forward and falls down before him, telling him everything. Addressing her as "daughter" Jesus tells her that her own faith has made her well.

As Jesus is saying these things, (and now we return to the first story) people from Jairus' house come with the news that his daughter has died. Jesus goes to the house anyway, and there, surrounded by the wailing that has already begun, Jesus takes the 12-year old girl by the hand, telling her to get up. She rises and walks around as others look on amazed.

So do you hear it? The first story in this passage is the story of a powerful man openly coming forth to ask Jesus to heal his sick daughter who at the time is still alive, with Jesus responding by springing into action. In other words, this first story starts out as what I would call a "daylight" story—public, direct, and active, with both Jairus and Jesus taking

action, and by the way, with no one in the story as yet untouchable from a Jewish ritual understanding.

But then, this public, active “daylight” story is both interrupted and halted by a second story of a very kind—one initiated by someone who comes from what we might call a “twilight” world: an ostracized, untouchable, ailing woman who musters her courage and secretly touches Jesus in order to be healed of her illness and restored to her place in society. She touches his garment and in doing so stops him and ultimately receives a blessing from him in that he addresses her as “daughter” and gives her a healing word.

But this, of course, isn’t all, for after the “daylight” story of Jairus is stopped by the “twilight” story of the bleeding woman, everything changes. Jairus’ daughter dies. But this does not stop Jesus. Rather, it appears to set him up to do a greater deed. For after healing the woman who has been sick for 12 years, hastens toward the 12 year old girl who has just lost her life. Taking her by the hand, he leads her back into the light of life and community in much the same way that he restored the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years.

And so what might Mark be suggesting about these interruptions in Jesus’s life and about interrupting events in our lives? Is it this? That interruptions are not just as aggravations or distractions but are potentially gifts from God that touch us from a more hidden place and are meant to be connected to the larger “daylight” stories we are living?

And is it also this? That with God’s help, what Jesus was invited to do, what we are invited to do, is to turn toward these interruptions, to turn toward these seeming disruptions, to pause and name them as our own and to bless them as we receive what they may be saying to us, as they give us the opportunity to pronounce a word of healing.

And so this morning, where is something or someone interrupting your “daylight” story—that is, interrupting your day-to-day life that is public, planned and active? Who or what from a more hidden, “twilight” realm is touching you and in doing so, is inviting you to stop and to turn in its direction? What would it take for you to recognize this interruption as belonging to you and as worthy of your blessing?

Here in this parish, especially today, we are all too aware of what it means to live an interrupted life. Some weeks ago, your rector, Christine Rowe, resigned her position in order to do her own discernment about where her calling as a priest might next take her. And, of course, along with this the same question is and will be posed to all you. What will be the discernment of St. Catherine’s and its people as it enters a time of transition? How will this interruption in the normal “daylight” life of a parish be received and embraced?

As a part of this, of course, the parish has completed a broad scale listening process during which many people spoke to their experience of this parish: both its gifts and its challenges. How will you as a parish be touched by the insights and learnings from your listening process in a way that stops you and gets your attention? In what way will you recognize what it says as your own and, therefore, worthy to be acted on?

What I can tell you is this: just as sure as the identity and vocation of our Jesus is made clearer to us by his healing of the interrupting woman who touched his garment as he was

on his way to heal Jairus's daughter, just as sure as Jesus' interruption became connected to his holy destination, so it is with us and with the parish of St. Catherine's. For God interrupts us not to throw up a barrier to the life and vocation that God has in mind for us. God interrupts us to touch us. God interrupts us to heal us. God interrupts us to claim us as his own.