

## **“Life Happens in the Interruptions”**

**The Very Rev. Tracey Lind  
Chapel of St. James the Fisherman, Wellfleet, MA  
Sunday, July 1, 2018  
2 Corinthians 8:7-15 • Mark 5:21-43**

As I stood in the pulpit, a scruffy man walked up the center aisle. Who was he, what did he want, and why was he interrupting my Easter sermon?

He stood in front of the altar, looked up at me and said, “Hey Mama, what’s happening?” With a smile of recognition and relief, I replied, “Good morning Pop. It’s Easter, and I’m talking about Jesus. So have a seat.” Sensing the congregation’s curiosity, I introduced my friend Bacardi. Spontaneous applause greeted him as he took a seat in the front row.

I met Bacardi on my very first Sunday as rector of that inner city church. Finding myself in unfamiliar territory, I couldn’t help but notice a noisy group of men sitting on the litter strewn corner - drinking, laughing, and gesturing at me. Feeling both curious and out-of-place in my new suit and neatly pressed clergy shirt, I walked into a bodega and bought a few cups of coffee and a pack of cigarettes. I went back out on the corner and approached the men, offering each them a smoke and some coffee.

“Who are you?” they asked. “I’m the pastor of the church,” I responded. They laughed, and one said loudly, “A woman preacher in that church, no way.” But we kept talking, and I invited them to come and see for themselves.

Over the years, Bacardi and his friends hung around my church, watching over its buildings and its female pastor. Sometimes, one or more of them would come in for food, clothing or shelter; periodically one seek my counsel or ask for money; and once in a while, wander into the sanctuary to pray or make a confession.

So whether or not the Sunday congregation knew it, it made perfect sense that, in spite of his dirty clothes, scruffy beard and hangover, Bacardi came to church on Easter morning. What I didn’t quite understand was his unusual entrance.

In silence, Bacardi sat through the sermon, stayed for the prayers, and passed the peace. In silence, his listened to the choir anthem, witnessed the communion table being set, and watched the ushers bring up the offering. All’s well that ends well, I thought.

However, just as I was about to begin the Eucharistic prayer, Bacardi stood up. He walked to the altar, smiled at me, put a dollar on the Lord’s Table, wished me Happy Easter, and then left, this time by the side door. As he departed, I sensed a silent relief from the congregation, but I felt like It was a very holy moment. In an Easter morning interruption, the Risen Christ, disguised as a homeless drunk, had come among us and blessed us.

That’s how it is. Life happens, God acts, and Christ appears in the interruptions. Yet, we often experience interruptions as nuisances: a needy child intrudes into your conversation; an unexpected visitor disrupts your morning schedule; a cell phone rings during a concert; bad weather ruins your vacation; an emergency disrupts your weekend; or an illness, accident or death of a spouse interrupts your life.

Interruptions break into the normal state of affairs and stop the continuity of events. It is no wonder we’re taught as youngsters that it is not polite to interrupt others.

Though I don't always welcome them in the moment, I have come to see interruptions as opportunities of divine grace waiting to be recognized and received. In fact, I believe that the Risen Christ is always standing in the shadows of life, and every now and again, more often than not, makes God known to us through some action or event, an interruption into the ordinary realm of possibility. We never know when Christ is going to move from the shadows to center stage. It just happens, and when it does, the normalcy and complacency of our lives is interrupted.

In this morning's gospel, interruption was, without a doubt, a vehicle of divine grace. In the interruption, God acted and new life happened.

As Jesus was speaking to a crowd of folks, Jairus, a leader of the local synagogue, interrupted him. This very anxious father begged Jesus to drop what he was doing and heal his dying daughter. Without hesitation, Jesus agreed to go with him. One might argue that Jesus allowed himself to be interrupted by Jairus because he was important and influential. But the story continues.

Walking towards Jairus' house, Jesus was interrupted again: this time by a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. Though it was not customary for a woman to reach out and touch a man – much less a stranger – this nameless woman (who was probably not important or influential) was so desperate to be healed, and she had heard so much about the healing power of Jesus, that she took the risk to “be made well.” Without knowing how she was going to be received, this determined woman crashed through the crowd, reached out and touched Jesus.

When Jesus realized what had happened, instead of ignoring, scolding or dismissing her, he affirmed her faith, declared her healed, and sent her off in peace. He then went on to touch and heal the little girl - the daughter of the powerful man - who was thought to be dead.

So what happened in these two stories of interruption? In the first place, both the woman and the little girl were considered to be hopeless cause. Yet, in spite of their circumstances, both the nameless woman and the influential man came to Jesus in faith. They were willing to interrupt him, convinced that he had the power to restore them to health. And in both instances, the woman and the little girl were restored to health - how, I'm not certain, but I've witnessed similar healings in my life and ministry. Both events were interruptions, and in the interruptions, God acted and new life happened. Moreover, in responding, in allowing himself to be interrupted, Jesus did not discriminate. He had compassion for those in need, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, affluence, influence, or nationality.

Repeatedly in the gospels, especially Mark's account, Jesus is interrupted. A leper interrupted his preaching in the synagogue, and a paralytic barged into through the roof while he was speaking. The crowds interrupted his mealtime, and the frightened disciples disturbed his sleep in a storm. A foreign woman interrupted Jesus in a private home, and a rich young ruler stopped him as he was setting out on a journey. Peter interrupted Jesus at prayer, blind Bartimaeus called out to him as he was leaving Jericho, and the woman with the alabaster jar of very costly ointment interrupted his last supper.

The evangelist tells us that, “Wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that he might touch even the fringe of his cloak.” (Mark 6.56). Did Jesus reject or refuse all these interruptions? No, Jesus saw the realm of God at hand as an interruption to be welcomed.

Jesus was an interrupter himself. He interrupted the ordinary lives of some naïve fisherman by inviting them to follow him. He disturbed unclean spirits and demons that were holding innocent people hostage. He intruded upon the profitable career of Levi, the tax collector. He interjected himself into the argument James and John were having about being the greatest. Jesus interrupted the Sabbath. He interrupted a storm. He interrupted the corruption of the temple. He even interrupted the finality of death through the resurrection.

In all these interruptions, Jesus embodied a new definition of human reality: faith as human power; human power as divine power in the world; and divine power as the ability to heal the sick, feed the hungry and even raise the dead – thus, sending forth in amazement a revived humanity. Jesus placed his God-given authority at the service of desperate, needy and interrupting people, willing to see and to seize interruptions as opportunities for sharing the good news of God’s love.

The incarnation itself was a divine interruption in the earthly realm. As the 20th century German theologian, Johann Baptist Metz observed: Christianity is something that interrupts something — Christian faith insists upon a different, unexpected and unpredictable kind of future, in a situation where the future is assumed to be already familiar and under human control.<sup>[i]</sup>

On this Independence Day weekend, our nation is being interrupted by the moral crisis of our current immigration policies. If you passed the Chapel yesterday morning or found yourself in the center of Wellfleet or some 700 locations around the country, you would have been interrupted by neighbors expressing disapproval of our government’s policy of building border walls, separating families, raiding workplaces, refusing visas, and keeping innocent people locked up in horrid detention facilities.

What would Jesus do, and what is he calling us to do? I believe Jesus would not have passed by and ignored this crisis. He would have allowed himself to be interrupted, offered compassion to the suffering, and interrupted the political establishment by speaking out and expressing his opinion. You and I are called to do the same.

To repeat the words we heard from Paul this morning: “I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.” (2 Cor 8:14)

Again, most of us don’t like to be interrupted, and we’re taught that it’s not polite to interrupt others. One of the challenges of gospel living is to make room for interruptions: to look up and stop what we’re doing when we hear, “Excuse me, I don’t mean to interrupt but....” God only knows what will happen, what gifts might be given and received, how we might be instruments of God’s grace, how we might ease someone’s pain or share in another’s joy, and how we might experience the life of God more fully.

The other challenge of gospel living is to be willing to interrupt: to interrupt our neighbor when we need help; to interrupt our neighbor on behalf of another who needs help; to interrupt the status quo when it needs arousing; and to interrupt acts of hatred, evil and oppression whenever and wherever they may be found - even in the highest office of the land. For in and through the interruptions, we experience and release the life-giving power of God.

Yes, it might not be polite to interrupt others, but who ever said that Christianity was polite. So the next time you are interrupted, or you want to interrupt somebody else remember – *Life happens, God acts, and Christ appears in the interruptions.*

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[i] “God Bless America:” *Patriotism and Political Theology*, Alan Revering, Quincy University, American Academy of Religion, Nov. 25, 2002