

A week ago Friday, your Senior Warden accosted me, right out here on the beautiful front lawn of the Aiken Center. Unlike the Gospel you just heard and fortunately for me, there was no blood involved. But he was a little agitated that he found me at the office on my alleged day off. He, in fact, threatened to turn me in to the church police, the Vestry, unless I could come up with something quick. So I told him the truth. I told him that if I was not there, he and the rest of you, were going to hear silence when it came time for last Sunday's sermon. I went on to explain that I had not gone through a single ten minute period of time the entire week to that point, without being interrupted by someone. "It's really difficult to construct meaningful thought", I suggested, "in seven minute increments."

This past week, of course, was Vacation Bible School. We had 40 very happy children here for a week. It was a smashing success and in my mind, it represented the very best of who you are as the St. David's community. Our leaders and staff made sure every one of those children had a great time and learned something in the process. It was so gratifying to watch all of you work so cohesively and with such joy and love. Susan and Mike, Michelle, Greg, Bernadette, Connie, Judy, Alice, Mary, Katie, Carol, and Jean; all of you organizing, acting, craft making, game playing, music singing fools. And our teenagers, Kiki, Jordyn, Michaela, Adrienne, Catlin, Anna, Kristen and Kyle had the kids dancing like penguins and praying the coolest graces ever. They checked in and out all those kids all week and they never lost a single one! This was a complete church effort because I have not yet even mentioned those who made lunches for those throngs of kids. Frances, Gerry, Jody and John. Julie supplied fruit for every day for all those kids. It was amazing to see the results.

But the thing about Vacation Bible School is this; it is one constant interruption, one right after another. There are so many breaks from the activities, it is sometimes difficult to discern program from interruptions. What a joke my little ten minutes without being interrupted last week was the week before. All of you could not go ten seconds without being interrupted! You all deserve a medal.

In the midst of the constant interruptions during VBS, we were also interrupted from it by things like continuing to run the church and running the Food Pantry and regular worship. One of the many pastoral interruptions I had during the week was someone who asked me how to, believe it or not, deal with the constant interruptions that were occurring in their personal life.

It is probably not surprising therefore that as I turned to today's Gospel, I focused on a part of the reading that I had never given much thought to in the past. I suddenly noticed that today we have a story about Jesus setting out across the Sea of Galilee, back to the friendly confines of Jewish territory. We know that Jesus has some mission in mind when he arrives, but we have no idea where he wants to go and what he wants to accomplish. That's because the story is not about what Jesus set out to do, but rather all the interruptions that he gets along the way. How convenient for all of us living lives of constant interruption recently, that Jesus has to deal with the exact same issue today. What great timing that we get a lesson on how Jesus responds to interruptions in his own ministry.

Interruptions are frustrating for all of us. Some of us go to great lengths to prioritize our lives and try to work on the most important, or at least the most critical things first. When we are constantly prevented from finishing, or even working on that goal because of interruptions,

it is difficult to not get discouraged and perhaps overwhelmed. You can all ask our parish administrator how poorly I often am at handling such frustration.

But today's Gospel points out something very important, especially for all of us trying to keep it together in a world where interruptions are far more common than they were in Jesus's day. Sometimes the interruptions are not obstacles at all. Sometimes, as in today's lesson, the interruptions are the story themselves. Sometimes the thing that disrupts us, is so much more important than where we were going in the first place. In today's story, Jesus begins by being interrupted by Jairus, a well-to-do synagogue leader. But before he can even respond to this interruption, he is interrupted again, this time by a socially outcast woman. In both cases, Jesus deems that the interruption takes priority over the event that preceded it, or at least is just as important. Interruptions are apparently not frustrations for Jesus, and today they become the real story, a much more important story than Jesus's original goal. This is not unlike what I noticed happening during VBS. Our leaders realized that there were times when the interruption was more important than the destination.

Of course, if all of us responded to every interruption in our lives as Jesus does today, we would all be dead in no time. So once again, the critical word for us here is discernment. When, we need to recognize, is an interruption opening a new window of opportunity for us? When should an interruption become the new priority? We know that elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus chooses not to re-prioritize his time, sticking with the original plan. But today he chooses the interruption twice. Why? Because both cases involve a human being in great need. In fact, this is the criteria Jesus seems to use throughout the Gospels. There is no more urgent need for him than to be available to assist someone in trouble.

What I noticed continually last week is that this is also the criteria that our VBS leaders used during each one of their thousands of interruptions. If a child was in need, it took precedence over everything else. Program stopped, child assisted. Program stopped, children spoken to and cared for by a leader.

When the need of another human being is involved, Jesus points out to us that our response to them is often so much more important than what we were doing in the first place. Not only does this suggest to me that Jesus offers us a great way to prioritize our lives, but also that there is something about the idea of interruption, in and of itself. When handled with the grace of Jesus in our Gospel today, or as our VBS leaders did this past week, interruptions themselves become grace filled. They become instruments of grace in our lives and opportunities for us to bring healing. What this Gospel suggests to me is that interruptions are not things to sigh about, but are actually opportunities for us to create the reign of God in our midst.

I'm not sure I've worked out all the theology behind this, because of all the interruptions we had, but it seems to me that there must be a kind of spirituality of interruption. It includes a realization that interruptions themselves can be instruments of grace, if only we can stop getting upset every time they occur.

Within that spirituality, there are additional lessons that Jesus teaches us today. First, note that interruptions are not easily judged. The first interruption Jesus receives today is presented to him formally by a leader in the church community, a rich person in the eyes of those hearing this story. The second interruption comes from a social outcast, a person who by the law stated in Leviticus 15, is unclean due to her unnatural discharge of blood. She

interrupts Jesus in the most socially unacceptable way possible, by touching him, even though she is impure and thus makes him impure as a result. But in both cases, Jesus honors the request for healing. Rich or poor, socially uncouth or proper to a t, Jesus does not care. His concern is for the need of both. Sometimes, those most in need of assistance and healing are the least visible of all. And sometimes, the ones most in need are those who stand up and get in our face constantly. We are called to not be influenced by the obnoxiousness, or lack thereof, of the request.

Some have suggested that the common factor between the two interrupters in the Gospel is their faith and that is the reason Jesus chooses to help them. But it seems to me it is not actually faith that brings either of them to him, but rather desperation. Jairus loves his sick daughter so much, he does not bother to count the cost to him for doing what he does today. As an enforcer of church law regarding impurity, he could potentially lose his position by approaching Jesus. But he is so desperate, he does not care. And the unnamed woman with a hemorrhage is so desperate, she is willing to break every Jewish law to rid herself of her constant suffering. A spirituality of interruption also suggests therefore, that we not judge someone by their faith, but rather their need, and their willingness to do whatever it takes to create some measure of healing.

Some may argue that this is all a moot point. After all, others can interrupt us all they want, but we can't resuscitate them and often we cannot stop them from bleeding to death. It is good to remember here the distinction between curing and healing. Perhaps we cannot cure like Jesus, but we absolutely can heal those who come to us, because healing, as John Pilch has put it, "is all about restoring meaning to people's lives, no matter their physical

condition.” It seems to me that this is what each of us are called to do in a spirituality of interruption.

This becomes more clear when we realize that what Jesus is doing is also not just about curing. Obviously Mark wants us to know that Jesus has power over sickness and death. But there is much more to the connection. The girl in the story dies, and when she does, the ritual purity laws of Leviticus 21 come into play. People cannot touch the body. It is unclean and to touch it means that *they* become unclean. Just as Jesus has become ritually unclean by being touched by the hemorrhaging woman, the same thing happens when he touches the dead girl.

What Jesus does therefore, is way beyond curing a physical ailment. In the first century Jewish world, the purity code made it clear that uncleanness was always more powerful than purity. If you were touched by an impure person, you too became impure. So at that moment when the hemorrhaging woman touched Jesus, the entire world was turned on its ear. When suddenly she was healed and Jesus did not become ritually impure, the crowd’s understanding of the way the world operates was flipped upside down. To make sure those gathered did not miss the magnitude of what just happened, Jesus has the previously outcast woman point herself out to everyone. He then makes it clear that no longer is she ostracized from society, that she is now welcome not just by him, but by everyone to be part of the community again. When Jesus then proceeds to go and touch the dead girl, he throws the purity code on its ear all over again. The point Jesus is making changes an entire worldview. By touching these two unclean people he says that, 1) it is your reaction to the unclean person that is separating them from God, not their state of being; and 2) any law or way of life that

separates anyone from God and from the world is inherently wrong and potentially evil. What Jesus is doing is not just curing these individuals, but he is also restoring meaning to their lives. He is making it possible for them to reenter society. He is healing them and healing the brokenness around them.

Today, Jesus makes it clear that when we try to exclude someone we see as an outcast from our lives or from our church, we have missed his call to heal. Jesus doesn't judge someone's worthiness, he heals them. That is what Jesus teaches all of us to do. Stop judging and start healing.

Religion then, for Jesus, is only inherently good when it opens up paths to God for everyone. Therefore, whenever religion is utilized as a barrier to keep out people, whether they be rich or poor, formal or sneaky in their approach, then it is actually the opposite of Christianity as displayed by Jesus today.

This is the lesson I will be carrying to Anaheim next week as I represent you at General Convention. Here are the resolutions that we will be there to ponder, politic and pray over. But as far as I am concerned, we need to cut to the chase. We need to go right to today's Gospel. As we make every decision, we need to remember that we are not the church if we cannot accept the interruptions we receive from everyone in need. We cannot be the church if we turn our backs from those asking our help, whether they be rich world leaders or poor socially outcast people rejected by everyone else. I desperately want to stay connected to every member of the Anglican Communion throughout the world. But I cannot turn my back on today's Gospel, and Jesus's call to always accept the interruption of every single human being who desperately reaches out to us in their hour of need. Our church must always

remain a home for all, or we are not the church at all.

None of this, of course, is easy. Interruptions often make it so difficult to order our lives and accomplish anything. Being a people who continue to embrace everyone, even those who make us crazy, is not a task for the faint of heart. But Jesus shows us today the way to do it all. It's called multi-tasking. Maybe we think we invented the term, but the best multi-tasker ever, lived 2000 years ago, a guy who was interrupted by everyone, healed everyone, and still managed to complete the task at hand. When we can also begin to see the interruptions in our lives as sacred moments, we too will be able to multi-task, restoring meaning to our own life and the life of everyone who interrupts us. Amen.