

March 10, 2019 (Journey worship)

TEXT: Mark 5:21–42

THEME/TITLE: Interruptions/Multi-Tasking/Daughter, Arise

By the Rev. Dr. Randy Bush

In this passage from Mark 5, we have two stories woven together. There's the story of Jesus, confronted by Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, who tells him that his daughter is dying and asks Jesus to come to his house at once. While on his way there, Jesus encounters a woman with a flow of blood and heals her as well. Looking at this passage in its entirety, it appears that Jesus endured a series of interruptions. He was obviously on his way somewhere when Jesus interrupted him, asking to have his daughter healed. And while on the way to Jairus' home, Jesus was interrupted again by the woman who touched his cloak.

If you think about it, most bible stories involve interruptions of one sort or another. Ask Noah about interruptions, when he was told that a mighty rainstorm was on its way. Ask Moses about interruptions, when he was tending sheep and minding his own business when a bush began to burn before him. Ask Mary, who had an angel interrupt her prayer time to tell her of an unexpected pregnancy. Ask Peter, who was interrupted while mending his nets on the Sea of Galilee shoreline. Ask Paul, who was busy on a deadly mission to Damascus until a vision of the risen Christ interrupted his plans. And don't just stop with bible stories. Think about Rosa Parks, who was simply trying to get home after work when a racist bus driver totally interrupted her plans. Or think about Martin Luther King, Jr., a young pastor ready to begin work at his first parish in Montgomery, Alabama when the whole business involving Rosa Parks quickly interrupted his best-laid plans.

I was preaching on this passage once in the New Omega Baptist Church in Racine, Wisconsin. And as I ran through this series of interruptions, the congregation got animated and kept responding with "Amen's" in good Baptist fashion. I'd say "Ask Noah who was interrupted by a rainstorm" and they'd say "Amen." I'd say "Ask Moses who was interrupted by a burning bush" and they'd say "Amen." And that got me all wound up, and I spoke about how God isn't one who fits into our neat little schedules. God is a God who interrupts, because God is an all-time God—say "Amen." God makes a way out of no way—say "Amen." God is the Lord of the days of our lives *—the Lord of all my children *—the God of the young and the restless *—the bold and the beautiful *—the one who is constant as the world turns *—the one who is our true guiding light *—and this is good news since, you know, we only have one life to live *. (I miss those good ol' Baptists.)

Now back to our bible stories. How are we to understand what happened to Jesus on that day long ago? Was he interrupted—or was he doing precisely what he was supposed to be doing? Yes, to both those questions. At the risk of sounding anachronistic, Jesus was multi-tasking on that day when both Jairus and the unnamed woman interrupted his plans.

Multi-tasking is a relatively new word, but it's not a new concept. People have been multi-tasking for centuries. In fact, given the nature of patriarchy down through the years, women have historically all been multi-taskers—often tending to work, to households, to children, being pulled in five different directions at once all the time.

The question is this: What does it take to successfully multi-task? It takes being able to see the horizon and the long-term goals even when you're stuck in the demands of the moment. It means remembering the foundation upon which you stand even as you are being pulled in several directions at once. Unfortunately, the people who multi-task poorly are those who try to control everything; who try to keep up with every single email, text message and phone call, and whose self-identity is tied up with managing every small detail. By contrast, as our sermon theme for this month reminds us, healthy multi-tasking involves surrender—letting go of being fully in charge; keeping your eye on the big picture amid all the minutiae and craziness of daily life. Without trusting in God's grace and surrendering to the promise that God is with us always, we are simply folks who are kept busy dealing with interruptions. But by surrendering and trusting, we are able to do our work with faithful integrity because we see our actions as part of God's larger kingdom plans—whether that is child care or lesson plans or office work or volunteerism. Whatever comes our way can be seen as either furthering God's realm or harming God's realm, and that insight helps us prioritize and effectively multi-task.

Let's look again at the stories in Mark 5. On that day, Jesus was multi-tasking—walking along, teaching, then being interrupted by Jairus. As he was heading to Jairus' house, he's interrupted again by an unnamed woman from the margins of life. Her hemorrhaging meant she was considered unclean and couldn't enter the temple for worship. Scripture describes how she spent all her resources trying to find a cure. It was an act of desperation that led her to move as invisibly as possible through the crowd just to briefly touch Jesus' robe.

Here's an important reminder: There are no invisible people in God's world. That was true for Jesus on that day; it remains true for us today. Jesus was touched by the woman. He then stopped, called her forward, and offered the words she had longed to hear for 12 years: *Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.* In calling her forward, Jesus moved her from social outcast to social acceptability, from being excluded to being restored and fully included. This story causes us to look around and ask again, "Whom do we cast out of our temples and faith communities, our clubs and social circles? Who is marginalized because of economic policies and unfair work practices, because of a safety net full of gaping holes? Whose voice is unheard despite the cacophony of news and noise out there? Whose life is considered without value because of what they look like, where they live, whom they worship, or whom they love?"

But there's even more in this passage. Wrapped around the story of the unnamed woman is the drama focused on Jairus' dying daughter. This loving father and man of influence was willing to humble himself before Jesus, kneeling before an itinerant rabbi to beg for his child's healing. Here is another example of surrender—of giving up so

much of what the world valued in order to be open to what God values and prioritizes in this life.

Jesus hadn't reached the house when word came back that the little girl had died—a 12-year old daughter whose age calls to mind the woman earlier cured with her 12-year long flow of blood. The crowd told Jairus not to trouble the teacher any longer, but Jesus pushed this concern aside and responded, *Do not fear; only believe*. Outside the house, the mourners were weeping in grief when Jesus insisted the child was not dead but only asleep. This led them to laugh and mock Jesus – something that he'd endured before and would endure later when he was on trial before Pilate and would be mocked even as he hung crucified on a cross. The soundtrack of the life of faith will seldom be cheers and trumpet fanfares. The world will often laugh when the gospel is spoken clearly—because the gospel runs contrary to so much of what the world values. The world says: Stay busy! Look out for number 1! Earn big bucks and find happiness there! Multi-task and prove you're the Alpha Dog, better than all the rest, the self-made man and woman who can do it all.

But the gospel says: The first shall be last, and something far greater than what the world has known has come into your midst. This power, this amazing grace, this love that is stronger than death, incarnate in Jesus, calls us to surrender, to choose justice, peace, and life as it was meant to be lived.

Jesus went to the girl and said, *Talitha cum*—daughter, arise—and that's what she did. Just as earlier a woman was restored to full communion with the world, here a beloved child was restored to her family. Something stronger than death itself had interrupted the schedule of this world, the certainties of this life. And we are called to surrender to it, to hear Christ say to us, "Child of God, arise!"

In the second service today, I'll talk more about how we can quiet ourselves to expect this unexpected gospel message and hear its call to life more clearly. Faithful meditation and contemplation involve a sense of surrendering to something bigger than us—something that can sustain us when our plans are interrupted. Why is this important? Because in this life we will frequently be required to multi-task. Yet we can keep our head and our soul if we hold onto the big picture of God's realm toward which we strive—if we remember the foundation of God's love upon which we stand—and if we step forward by faith, trusting in the one who sees us, redeems us, and calls us this very day saying "Child of God, arise!" For this good news, may all God's people say, "Amen."