

Interrupting Jesus: *Mark 5:21-43*

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Have you ever had one of those days when you have everything planned out. It's a busy day, and there's no time for interruptions. And then you get a phone call, or someone stops by, and the whole plan is interrupted. There's no going back. Your day is gone.

I had one of those days three years ago, when I was ministering in Texas. It was a busy day at the office. And that's when Austin stopped in. He was a young man, early 20s. He had quietly visited church for several weeks. I knew he was homeless, but I didn't know why. He never asked me for anything but a ride, but that day he came with a request: "I need a bus ticket to Charlotte," he told me. "It's \$150."

I asked him why. He said it was just too hard being homeless in Abilene. There was only one shelter and it was always full. He was tired of living on the street, cold and scared at night. In Charlotte there was a good shelter, with a bed, hot meals, and some safety.

And I had a thought in my head: for \$150 I could send him on his way. I had a church fund to help with just this type of thing. For \$150 I would never see him again. He would not interrupt me again, and I could feel good for helping him.

And yet, deep down, I knew...it wasn't the right thing to do. So I told him I wasn't comfortable just sending him to another city, to start back over. And that was when the rest of my day, and several weeks disappeared.

I learned a lot about Austin over the next month, about his family in the Dallas Area, who didn't know where he was or how he was doing. I learned about his severe mental illness. On the surface he seemed okay, but when stressed or angry, it would come out, and he could even get a little violent. I had a few scary conversations with him.

But I also learned what could happen when a church committed to help. Our church came behind Austin. We provided temporary housing and food, helped him connect to a caseworker who got him back on his meds. But most importantly, we reconnected him to his mother and step-father, and, soon, he was able to go back home.

I will never forget the email his Step-Dad sent me. "You and you alone are the only person to actually show concern for Austin's well being beyond his actions. Most people give up and turn their back on him when faced with the fact of his illness."

Now, I don't tell you this story to brag about my great ministry skills. If anything, I offer it as a confession this morning, admitting that more than several times during this journey with Austin I thought, "Why didn't I just get him the \$150 bus ticket!" It sure would've made my life a lot easier.

I couldn't get Austin out of my head this week, as I was reflecting on our Gospel story, a story of Jesus getting his day interrupted by, not one, but two desperate people.

After their harrowing voyage across the Sea, into the heart of a violent storm and then, once safe on shore, confronted by a violent man possessed by a Legion of demons, they have now arrived back home. They're ready for rest, much like I know our CYF crew and sponsors were ready for rest after coming back from a week of hard work in Detroit!

But there is no rest. Whatever they had planned for the day is lost when they step off the boat and meet the crowd. Immediately, Jairus comes to them. He's a leader in the Synagogue. Now, I know to say that you're a member of the Church Board at Norwalk Christian Church isn't the most prestigious title you could wear in life, and usually doesn't mean much more than you have a few extra meetings to go to each month...but to be a "leader of the Synagogue", in Jesus' culture, meant that you were something. You had wealth and power and privilege. It was a position of honor.

Jairus is the kind of guy that, no matter what you are doing during the day, no matter how busy you are, when Jairus calls, you take the call. And Jairus is desperate. This man of dignity and power, we are told, begs Jesus 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." "So Jesus went with him."

But there's another interruption waiting for Jesus. This time, the scenario is very different. As they are journeying to Jairus' house to heal the little girl, a crowd presses in around Jesus. Yet, somewhere, in the midst of that crowd, is a nameless, faceless, desperate woman. She had been sick for 12 years with a uterine hemorrhage. She had spent her life-savings on doctors who promised relief, but never delivered, and, actually, only made things worse. She had nowhere to turn, no recourse. Until she heard Jesus was in town. She thought, in the words of Sam Cooke, "If I could just touch the hem of His garment I know I'll be made whole."

So she pushed through the crowd, and touches him. "Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease." And in that moment, Jesus is "Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him."

Now, this is another \$150 bus ticket moment. So he felt the power go out of him. He could've gone about his way. She was healed and, after all, there was a very sick, and very important, little girl waiting on him. But he didn't.

Instead, "Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' 'Who touched my clothes?'" The disciples think the question is ludicrous, and it sort of is--look at all the people! Everyone touched your clothes, Jesus!

But in the midst of that crowd, Jesus had to find this woman, and, we are told, he looks everywhere for her. Picture that. Jesus, looking everywhere for this anonymous woman.

She finally reveals herself, scared of what might happen, but Jesus tells her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

See, her disease was so much more than a hemorrhage. Her disease was isolation. Her disease kept her from community, made her unclean. Even Jesus, being touched by this woman, was made unclean by virtue of contact. When she touched Jesus, she was healed of her bodily disease, but when he stopped, looked for her, and addressed her to her face, she was healed of her social disease, and was restored to community.

He could've just ignored her, but he didn't.

After this incident, Jesus goes back to what he was doing. Time to head to Jairus' house. But, it seems, he waited too long. They receive news that the little daughter has died. And you know what, Jesus could've just told Jairus, “Sorry, I did the best I could, but we just didn't get there in time.” But instead, he argues with the diagnosis. He looks at Jairus and says, “Do not fear, only believe,” and then he tells the crowd, “She's not dead, she's just taking a nap.”

They laugh at him, but Jesus continues into the little girl's room. We are told she was 12-years-old. And then Jesus, joined only by his closest disciples, touches the girl (which, by the way, Jews were also not allowed to do because touching a dead body made you unclean). But he touches her, and says, “Little girl, get up!” And she stands up.

What a whirlwind of a story. Two women, desperate, with no one else to turn to. Jesus let them interrupt his day. He let their situations get into his head. He couldn't ignore their plight. And by letting his plans get altered, by allowing these women, who had no right to demand what they did on the Son of God, but by allowing them to interrupt the divine schedule, their lives were forever changed.

Things happen every day of our lives, and in the life of our church. Our great plans get interrupted by other people in need of our time and energy. And we can just buy the \$150 bus ticket, give them a hand out, give them a bag of groceries, some money for rent, a ride to the shelter, say a prayer, and send them on their way. We often call that type of ministry, a ministry of mercy, and sometimes, it's all you can do.

But Jesus doesn't just do mercy. He stops, find the woman who touched him, and finds the little girl who has died, and restores both of them to the community. That's more than mercy, that's justice.

And doing justice takes a lot more work. It's hard and time-consuming, and it means you can't just give a hand out, but you have to confront broken systems, and build relationships, and you usually get humbled a few times in the process.

Jesus risked his own ritual purity--which was a big thing in those days--by coming in contact with each of these women. Go read Leviticus. It's in there. You weren't allowed to have contact with women who were sick like she was. You weren't allowed to have contact with a dead body. It made you unclean. It made you like one of them.

Too often, I think, we help people, but only from a safe distance, never asking the next, hard question. It's amazing that we are surrounded by all this food for our Food Pantry. This is a good thing. A needed thing. But what of the people who have to rely on this food to live? Who are they? What are their stories? And what is it that they, ultimately need? In a place of such privilege, why do so many not have enough?

Those are the sorts of questions that can get you into trouble. Those are the sorts of questions that can interrupt your days, weeks and months, but those are the sorts of questions that will also bring you closer to the heart of Jesus.

Being a Disciple of Christ means doing what Jesus would do, if he were here, in our time and situation. So, what would Jesus do? How would he spend his time? Who would interrupt Jesus' day?

May we ask those hard questions and and may we never be too busy to stop, and hear the cries for justice from those whom God sends to interrupt our plans. Amen.