
Holy Interruptions and Attention Abundance

A sermon by the Rev. Canon Lauren Holder
The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 8, Year B

Good morning Cathedral of St. Philip. I love you.

And I love today's Gospel story. There's a lot to love about this Gospel, but what I love about it *today* is Jesus's invitation to trust, to believe in the healing and life-giving power of God, even and especially when life breaks in and interrupts our best-made plans.

Jesus comes ashore and barely sets foot on land before he's surrounded by a crowd. He's been healing people and calming storms and people are curious about who he is and what he's up to. And as the crowd is gathered, Jairus, a holy man who loves his daughter on the brink of death, falls at the feet of Jesus. The holy scriptures tell us that Jairus begs repeatedly—repeatedly—to come to his home and touch his daughter and make her well so that she may live.

I imagine Jesus had other plans that day. I imagine he was getting off the boat to head somewhere... perhaps a dinner party or a nap. But Jesus is moved by Jairus—by his desperate pleas and by his faith—and Jesus makes the choice to follow Jairus and see where this interruption might lead.

As they make their way to Jairus's home and dying daughter, the crowd follows along. What will Jesus do this time? Will he make it in time? Will they get to see this wonder with their own eyes?

A woman who had been bleeding for twelve years was in the crowd with Jesus. This woman had tried everything and spent every dime in search of healing. She has nothing left to lose but the faith she still somehow clings to, so she reaches out and touches Jesus's clothes, believing this will heal her. Not his arm, not his hair, not any part of his body—just his clothes. Her quiet faith paired with the power of Jesus heals her immediately. No one notices—no one but the now-healed woman and Jesus.

It is another interruption.

Jesus asks the crowd pressing in on him: "Who touched my clothes?"

It wasn't enough to heal this woman, Jesus wants to meet her, to see her, to listen to her story, and to speak words of comfort and assurance over her: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed."

It's a beautiful, powerful moment. Unless you are Jairus, who I imagine would be pulling his hair out in anguish: Jesus! Hello! Focus! Stay on task! My child is dying—dying!

And then, his worst nightmare is realized as some people from his home come forward to deliver the news: Your daughter is dead.

Jesus is still talking to the woman he has just healed when the messengers arrive, still leaning into this holy interruption, this healing distraction. But he overhears the news and turns to Jairus, saying: "Do not fear, only believe."

And somehow, Jairus does just that. He keeps walking toward his home, believing his daughter will live, opening his home, his heart and his mind to God's life-saving power and love. Jesus and Jairus arrive at last.

Jesus takes the young girl by the hand, helps her up out of bed and out of death, and tells her family to give her something to eat. I imagine the girl's mother invited Jesus to stay for dinner.

I want to pause here for anyone in the room blessed with Attention "Deficit" Disorder, which I really wish we could rename Attention Abundance, because observing and noticing all the things all the time is not a lack of attention, it's an abundance of attention.

Do you see that pattern of attention in Jesus's story? Do you see how he's headed in one direction, but then Jairus grabs his attention, so he moves in another direction, but then the bleeding woman grabs his attention, so he talks to her for a bit, and yet he's still able to overhear the messengers and their news of death? Do you recognize this way of being in the world? I hope you do recognize it, and you see it for the blessing that it is. It's like the Biblical version of the children's book: If You Give a Mouse a Cookie.

God shows up in the interruptions. God is in the distractions. The kingdom of God is not a hyper-focused place of efficiency and calculated self-control. The kingdom of God is a place of abundance, wonder and possibility. The kingdom of God is a place where all things and all plans are held lightly. It is a place where interruptions are seen as invitations.

I will admit that this can be a hard way to live.

Even as someone blessed with "Attention Abundance," I love my color-coded calendars—both hand-written and digital. I love my best-laid plans. I love my predictable routines. I cling to all these things tightly in effort to fool myself and others with the illusion of control.

But God doesn't offer us control. God offers us unpredictable moments of healing and relationship and grace.

And, God offers us something else too—something to anchor us and hold us steady so that we don't lose our way when everything around us or within us feels unsteady and unpredictable.

It's our faith. Our faith and God's faithfulness.

Hear these words again from the book of Lamentations... these words of faith and hope in a book of lament and grief:

This I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
God's mercies never come to an end;
They are new every morning;
Great is your faithfulness.

When something we don't expect takes us by surprise, we have faith in God's steadfast love that never ceases. When something we care about so deeply is suddenly changed or ended, we have faith in God's mercies that never end, but are somehow inexplicably new every morning. When our faith is shaken, we remember God's faithfulness, and trust God to be faithful on our behalf.

We started this service singing the words: Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone. That foundation, that cornerstone, that faith, that is exactly what gives us the grounding we need to move and grow and change and heal with the holy interruptions of our lives.

You know, this church, this cathedral, it has several cornerstones. The most recent cornerstone near the entrance is dated 2004 with the words: A House of Prayer for All People. And the oldest cornerstone from the downtown building of the 1800s is planted just outside, not far from where I am standing now.

This church has the cornerstone of Jesus, as we proclaim the risen life of Christ. And this church has you, the body of Christ, the people who gather together and pray together and live life together, grieving and celebrating and growing together. You, all of you—you too are a cornerstone of this place. And just as parishioners brought the cornerstone of the old church building to this place when they moved here, I take the cornerstone of this community of faith and life we share with me as I leave here. You, and the love of Christ that we share, has been a sure foundation for me. And it always will be. I take you with me.

Friends, look for the interruptions in your life, and consider them holy. Pay attention to the unexpected, maybe even unwanted, invitations to receive and extend God's healing touch in this world. Practice Attention

Abundance and see where it takes you. And ground yourself in this body of Christ, this beautiful community, knowing that as long as your foundation is sure, you will never lose your way.

Thank you. Bless you. I love you. Amen.

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