

Interruptions on the Walk

Mark 5:21-34

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Real Audio (3 MB)

Mark's gospel begins with intense drama. He says nothing about genealogies or even the birth of Jesus. Instead, in the first chapter he plunges right into Jesus' ministry of healing and casting out demons. The same high drama happens in the second chapter. By the time we get to chapter three we're told, "a great multitude from Galilee followed him; hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. He told his disciple to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so they would not crush him." In chapter four Jesus calmed a great storm at sea, and we are told that the disciples were "amazed." In chapter five Jesus healed a man who was driven out of his mind by a legion of demons. He sent the demons into the swine, that all jumped off a cliff, and then we are told that "everyone was amazed."

It is as if Mark is unfolding an intense drama that is building and building. And the reader is made a part of this great crowd following Jesus toward something spectacular.

Well, the next person who appears on the scene is Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, who asks Jesus to come to his home to heal his young daughter who is dying. Now, what you have to know is the synagogue has already taken a public position on Jesus calling him a false Messiah. That means that as a leader of the synagogue it's Jairus' job to keep the crowds away from Jesus. If Jairus is ever going to make it from his small country synagogue in Galilee to one of the tall steeples in Jerusalem, the last thing he ought to be doing is inviting Jesus and the crowd to his home for a healing service. But when your baby is dying, you don't think too much about career moves. Every time his little girl holds out her arms and says, "Daddy, it hurts," Jairus just about comes apart. He'll do anything to make her better. And so will Jesus -- who heads for their home.

This was the big event our crowd had been waiting to see. Jesus was about to win over the synagogue and take power over the established authority. Suddenly, a parade developed toward Jairus' home. But then, just as suddenly, the excitement was interrupted.

The very next line of the narrative states, "Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years." The reader hits this line like a speed bump. We want to say, "Oh, no, Mark. Don't introduce a subplot now. Jesus is about to do the big thing. The crowds are with him. He has an invitation to the home of the biggest cheese in town. This is his great opportunity." But it all has to be put aside in order for us to consider this ordinary woman who is sick.

Mark tells us, "she had endured much under many physicians, and spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse." Those of you in the medical community will prefer to read this story in the Gospel according to Dr. Luke, who omits the part about suffering under many physicians - and spending all she had - and getting worse.

But Mark makes it clear that this woman has spent all her resources. She has done everything she can do. But now she is out of money, expert advice, and out of hope. Still, the hemorrhaging continues.

The reason Mark presses this point is he is more interested in the crowd than he is in the big event at Jairus' home. So he puts a magnifying glass up to that crowd to focus our attention on just one woman who would be so easy to overlook--just one more chronically sick woman. He does this because he believes every one of us in the crowd is actually hemorrhaging. Maybe for you there is also a physical problem that will not go away. You've exhausted your patience, if not your insurance, and while you're not

dying, it doesn't feel like you're living. Others of us are bleeding from broken hearts and broken dreams, and hurts that happened years and years ago. Like this woman, the hemorrhaging may have started twelve years ago, but still you feel the pain.

We've tried everything. We tried to buck up and pretend it didn't hurt. We've run into hard work, successful careers, other relationships, and things that numb us to the pain. We can spend our whole lives trying to deal with whatever went wrong in life, only to find that, like this nameless woman, "we are no better, but rather grew worse."

Then we hear about this Jesus who is able to do so much. So we join the crowds at the church. According to Mark, some of us are here pushing to get as close to Jesus as we can because we've already set our goals for life, and we are just here to see if Jesus can help. We think, "Maybe he'll fix my relationships. Maybe he'll give me back my dreams. Yeah, I'll take a little bit of Jesus. What can it hurt?" But the woman, the one who was spent, did not grab at Jesus. In humility, she was afraid even to be seen by him. So she kneeled down on the ground, and as he walked by, she reached out her hand and touched the hem of his robe. And immediately she was healed.

All of a sudden, Jesus stops the parade. He looks at the disciples and asks, "Who touched me?" The disciples think he has to be kidding. "Who touched you? Jesus, half of Galilee is trying to get their hands on you and you want to know who touched you? Keep moving to Jairus home. This is a big healing. Don't blow it! Hurry up." But Jesus never hurries. This drives me crazy! I am hustling all the time for Jesus, so I think, surely he can move as fast as I move. But the Savior never does that. So the ruler, and the crowds, even the mission have to wait.

Jesus does eventually make it to Jairus' home, and heals his daughter as well. But he interrupts his own agenda because Jesus has to know who has the faith, not to grab what they want from him, but to touch him as if she were laying her hands on something holy.

It is not wrong to want something from Jesus. Both the pushy crowd and the sick woman wanted something from Jesus, but only the woman approached Jesus in humility. There are so many things in this life you can grab. You can grab a shirt on sale at Nordstroms, a promotion at work, or a lover to get you through the lonely night. But you cannot take the things you need the most in life. You cannot take healing, forgiveness, hope, or love. And those are the things that stop the hemorrhaging of the heart. But the only way you find these things is on your knees.

"Daughter, your faith has made you well," Jesus said, "Go in peace and be healed of your disease." by calling this anonymous, unimportant woman his daughter, Jesus has given her the same relationship with him that Jairus' daughter enjoyed. Just as the little girl was important because she belonged to the local big shot, so are you important because you belong to Jesus. Thus, your worth is found not in your pedigree or resume, but in your relationship to the Savior who considers you his beloved child.

So you see, Mark was right. Jesus' miracles were all building up to a spectacular event. But it wasn't the parade to the synagogue. No, the big event was when Jesus stopped everything to speak to someone who was on her knees - someone like you. Once you see that Jesus has stopped his messianic mission to save your chronically broken life, it changes how you see everything else. You may even lose interest in grabbing the things you want, because after you have encountered the Savior, you are too busy with gratitude to want more. Only then are you free, like Jesus, to attend to the interruptions that come to you.

Jesus never misses his moment. And he knows that his moment is not the goal, but the sacred interruption along the way. He lived by faith in the Father, and that faith gave him the spiritual vision to see these interruptions as sacred moments. Thus, Jesus was always ready for the interruptions.

In a couple of months, we will remember the anniversary of the horrible events of September eleventh. By now we have all become familiar with Todd Beamer's famous words, "Let's roll," as he led a group of passengers in overcoming the hijackers on Flight 93, and thus saved the city of Washington from another attack. Mr. Beamer, as you probably also know, was a follower of Jesus Christ. His aunt worships with us. Recently she reminded me of the important, less known, words he spoke before saying, "Let's roll." Those

were the words, "Are you ready?"

Todd Beamer started that trip with a different goal in mind. But because he had spent time following Jesus, he was ready for the interruption when it came. What about you? Are you ready?

How will you respond when your goals and agendas are interrupted by crisis? With frustration, anxiety, paralyzing fear, or with heroic sacrifice? You won't be heroic unless you are free from the tyranny of your goals. And to find that freedom you have to fall on your knees and reach out to the Savior who interrupted heaven and earth for you. Won't you take the time now to do that? Won't you please reach out in faith to this Savior who can save you from anxiety? Because someday a terrible event will interrupt your carefully constructed life. And like Todd Beamer, we really need you to be ready.

O God, deliver us from a preoccupation with lesser things to consider the glory of our salvation, that with grateful hearts we may be faithful in the interruptions that cross our lives. Amen.