

THE HOLY INTERRUPTION
Luke 5: 1-7 –October 9, 2011
The Church of the Covenant

Interruption, interruption, interruption –all of Jesus’ life and ministry was one giant *Holy Interruption*. *“On the way to Jerusalem (Jesus) was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village he was met by ten lepers...” (Luke 17: 11-12)* Jesus has a plan and that plan is to go to Jerusalem but along the way He is interrupted and stops and does ministry. *“And taking the twelve (Jesus) said to them, ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that was written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished...As (Jesus) drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging...” (Luke 18: 31 and 35)* Interrupted once again. A chapter later Jesus is still trying to move to Jerusalem to fulfill the important and critical destiny His Father has placed before Him but as He enters into Jericho there is another interruption, a blind man crying out to Him, *“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”* Interrupted again –will the Savior actually ever get to Jerusalem?

Before this the gospel of Luke records, *“One sabbath when he went to dine at the home of a ruler...And behold, there was a man before Him who had dropsy...” (Luke 14: 1-2)* The Bible is silent on whether or not Jesus actually ate dinner that evening, because He was interrupted by a man who needed help and He was then asked questions by a Pharisee who needed a soul. *“Now (Jesus) was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity...(Luke 13: 10)* He is in the middle of His sermon on the scriptures and He sees a woman who needs the healing of her back and the healing of her spirit and He stops His teaching and goes to her. His message is interrupted and there is no record of Him completing that sermon that day. *“Jesus was praying in a certain place (and) one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray...” (Luke 11: 1)* Jesus is praying and the disciples see the richness of His prayer life so they interrupt Him to ask Him to teach them how to pray. Jesus cannot eat, He cannot teach or preach, Jesus cannot pray without being interrupted.

“And (Jesus) took them (the disciples) and withdrew and took them apart to a city called Bethsaida. When the crowds learned it they followed Him...” (Luke 9: 11-12) Jesus just wants to spend some time with His disciples alone but the crowds follow Him and interrupt His plans for a quiet retreat time with friends. Elsewhere, Jesus is getting into a boat to cross the Galilean sea with His disciples, but by the time He arrives the crowds have already gathered and hang on His every word. No rest for Jesus. Or the story where Jesus is running late. He is summoned by Mary and Martha to come immediately because their brother Lazarus is sick and dying. But Jesus delays two days doing ministry elsewhere and by the time He arrives Lazarus is already dead. Lazarus is Jesus’ very good friend and Martha, Lazarus’ sister comes to Jesus and said words that must have cut Jesus like a knife –*“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (John 11: 21)* Jesus’ ministry had interrupted into the midst of His relationships with His best friend. And while Jesus was to raise Lazarus from the dead the stinging rebuke from Martha who had loved Him must have haunted the Savior throughout the remainder of His life.

Interruption, interruption after interruption –it would seem that all of Jesus’ life was one giant Holy Interruption. For the Spirit-led life, for that person who is open to the leading of God, for that person who follows God’s Sovereign plan for their life rather than their own plan for their own life, all of life is also just one big Holy Interruption as well. As a pastor, let me tell you, whatever my plan for the day is, it never happens. We plan and God laughs at our plan. Because we trust and believe God’s plan is far, far better than our own. Most days it takes me at least 20 minutes to walk from my car to my office on the second floor. I have to decide whether I come in the Commons Area (taking at least 20 minutes) or

park in the back parking lot, come in through the youth room on the second floor (taking at most 5 minutes). What takes me the extra time? --The Holy Interruption. People sometimes laugh that I am chronically late but I am late because I take that one more telephone call, I stop to talk with just one more person, I seemingly just cannot cut off that person who shares what they are really worried about at the very end of my hospital visit. So, do I say, "Oops, just look at the time, sorry, got a meeting in ten minutes. Hold that thought."? Or do I speak with the person then and there and ask Jesus to interrupt in THEIR lives in a spiritual way that takes and transforms whatever issue they face in life in that moment? That's why I have a sign on my office that says --"Behold, I set before you an open door...you are not an interruption but an opportunity for the grace of God..."

I have come to conclude that all of real ministry is really experienced in the interruptions, rather than in the plans we make ourselves. We plan our day but God plans our day as well. We plan; God laughs at our plan. Do we follow His plan or our plan for the day? And you say, "O Stu, you're supposed to do that; that's what we pay you for; you're a Presbyterian minister; this doesn't apply to me." Really? There's only one day that your child is five years, five months and five days old. There's only one day that your best friend needs you. There's only one day when your spouse calls you on the phone and you think you should leave work early just to be there for them. There's only one day when you can leave behind what you have so carefully planned and drive to New Jersey for the funeral of the Mother of your best friend. You have to decide now, today, whether you live out of the careful plans you have made or whether you choose to live out of the sometimes annoying, sometimes frustrating, always messy interruptions in life that are *really* God's plans in disguise. Interruption, interruption, interruption --all of Jesus' life and ministry was one giant interruption.....and so is ours.

In Craig Barnes' book, "*WHEN GOD INTERRUPTS*" --*Finding New Life Through Unwanted Change*--he has a section where he shares about when he was diagnosed with cancer. He was about to be called to one of the most prestigious pulpits in the land and at the same time he was diagnosed with cancer. He had always worked hard, been a person of goals set and met, had somewhere along the way convinced himself that even though he was a Presbyterian minister that all he had achieved really was the work of his own hand. But then God interrupted. I will not share with you the story of his pilgrimage along the way I will just share with you his conclusion --He writes: "*None of us know when the end of life will come. Only when we abandon all illusions that count on tomorrow will we ever have life, which can only be received with gratitude as God's gift today.*" (When God Interrupts, Barnes, p. 94) We can cherish our own plan for our own life...or we can cherish God's plan for our life...even and especially those HOLY INTERRUPTIONS.

You are not an interruption. You are received by a loving Savior with gratitude as God's gift given in love today.

Then there is our scripture also from the gospel of Luke today, The Parable of the Lost Sheep. The Good Shepherd has 100 sheep. And a truly GOOD shepherd keeps the sheep safe from all harm; keeps them together; brings them to the sheepfold safely; leads them to green pastures and by still waters; wants nothing but their good for them; leads them safely through the dark valleys; keeps the wolves of life at bay. But the problem comes when one of them INTERRUPTS; this one sheep wanders away from the fold; is in danger out there by himself, alone. The shepherd has a dilemma --does the shepherd go to find the one sheep and leave the other 99 perhaps to be harmed? Or do they stay with the 99 and let the one sheep go, perhaps to death and destruction? --The Holy Interruption. Quite a dilemma really. "*Which one of you*", asks Jesus, "*does not leave the ninety-nine...and go after the one which is lost?*" (Luke 15: 4)

Consider. Our Lord Jesus, the GOOD Shepherd, was praying in the Garden. He was praying for us, for people He had not yet met. And in the midst of His prayer He was interrupted one more time. The soldiers came and dragged Him away and brought Him to Jerusalem finally to live out God's plan for His life. The interruption was God's plan in disguise. His ministry was truncated and cut short. His life and ministry was over at age 33. Certainly His plan, His will, was not to end on a cross. Calvary was the final interruption in our Savior's life and earthly ministry. Interrupted every step along the way and even to Golgotha. That which seemed an evil interruption, by the love and grace of God, was to become the greatest and most HOLY INTERRUPTION of all time.

I am so very grateful that my Savior was willing to be interrupted in life and in death for me, a child of His own choosing, a sheep of His fold. And I will tell you, that He will always be interrupted, to seek you out, when we may feel far away; He will always leave the ninety and nine to search out the one who is in need. He will **always** be interrupted for you.

You are not an interruption. He IS the Good Shepherd. And we are His beloved sheep. Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!**