

Interruptions

II Samuel 1:1,17-27; Mark 5:21-43

On 15th September 2016 at around 10pm I received the phone call tell me I had been nominated as Moderator of the General Assembly. On 19th May 2017 I was installed as Moderator. Since then, until today, for you and for me life was one long interruption. You've had building works, change of personnel, and the usual life-event interruptions of births, deaths and marriages. For me, well, I think most of you will have some idea of what I've been up to, and in the months ahead there might be an opportunity to share some of those incredible experiences with you.

But it has been an interruption. An interruption of aspects of ministry here, certainly for me, and today is the day when it begins to re-establish itself and we pick up from where we left off. Except, of course, much is no longer the same.

Interruptions come in many different shapes, sizes and formats. The phone rings when you are reading a book and you are reunited with someone you hadn't spoken to in ages. The doorbell goes when you're doing the ironing and an unexpected gift is handed over. An old colleague announces they're retiring unexpectedly. A friend comes to see you to tell you about a health diagnosis that will change their lives. A loved one dies.

From the trivial to the traumatic, interruptions are parts of the fabric of life. They disrupt in good ways and bad. If nothing else they remind us that we are alive, and that we have feelings, and that we need to engage our brains in the way in which we live our lives as we respond to the twists and turns.

Looking at the stories of Jesus read this morning, if we were to give them a title it might be something like, "Jesus, the Multi-tasker." In our fast-paced C21st world the story of the double healing might not seem particularly unusual. Look more closely and you see coping with the unknown, coping with fear and coping with confusion that many of us still face today. Jesus copes, though the people around Him were frantic and desperate. He takes a deep breath,

makes a detour, and two lives are changed forever. The woman with the haemorrhage after years of debilitating illness is transformed. The little girl, in the doorway of death, is brought to life.

Whilst it's not easy to put ourselves into the shoes of the people in these stories about the healing of Jesus, we can begin to imagine the desperation, isolation and fear that motivate them. We can also imagine the faith questions that walk alongside these stories. "Does prayer work?" "Do you get what you ask for in prayer?" "What if my faith is not enough?" "What if the answer is no?" "What if I lose my faith?"

There will not be a person here in Church today who will not have been faced with that serious kind of interruption in their lives and had to deal with some of these questions.

It's normal. It's not easy. It's not pleasant. It's not even fair at times. But it's normal.

What does Jesus do in both instances? Jesus shows us that when He is approached, stopped in His tracks, reached out to by people in desperate need, He pays attention. God is never too busy to hear our prayers and respond to our pleas in amazing and unexpected ways.

We might not get exactly what we ask for, and may never know why that is, but we are not alone, we are not ignored, and God does not judge us despite what we might feel about ourselves.

The synagogue leader who came to Jesus to ask for help with his dying little girl, that was a hard thing for him to do. A man of power and influence, used to getting his own way; used to speaking and having a community respond to him, coming to this peripatetic rabbi who he barely knew, and swallowing enough of his pride to ask for help. Death was interrupting this man's normal routine, he was no longer in control, but Jesus stopped, and listened, and in this particular incidence and in a particular way, Jesus reached out, and helped.

The woman with the haemorrhage, I wonder how many people with long, desperate health conditions that seem to drag on and on can identify with her? Where no-one seems to listen or to understand, or the sufferer, embarrassed by themselves, no longer feels able to speak out because who has not already heard the story, and everything knows that little can be done. Yet

in this story, the woman, after twelve years of suffering, draining her resources, draining her life, finds from somewhere the ability, the strength, the courage to reach out, and touch.

There is a flash of precious intimacy between two human beings who are socially distant from each other. In that touch not a response of anger or alienation, but Jesus reached out to her, and wholeness and healing and peace come.

Interruptions. They break up, they unsettle, they make us question. But through the disruption, painful though that sometimes is, we are often given a chance to reassess, reconsider and recalibrate our lives and the way we live them.

Things do not go back to the way that they were nor, in all honesty, should they. But reflecting on what once was, learning to let go in order to take up, we begin to pick our way through the breaking and the disorder into something that is new.

The result of interruptions rarely lead us back to the way things were. But if we are able to roll with them and get passed them we might, to our surprise, find that we learn from them. Sometimes an interruption will help us realise that we have grown too comfortable with the way things are, and are stuck in a rut. Sometimes an interruption will help us realise that we have taken situations, or people, for granted. Sometimes interruptions stop us in our tracks and challenge us to reflect on who we are, what we are like, and what is important to us.

There are many ways in which we might look at these stories about the dying little girl and the desperately ill woman. For me beyond the interruption to Jesus' actions lies this. He paid attention; He stopped; He engaged; He touched.

Beyond the miracles, whatever they might have been, there is something that is in reality deeper. There is acceptance. There is intimacy. There is touch that makes things whole and brings a new understanding of peace.

Last year I visited the Lodging House Mission in Glasgow. It has over 100 years experience in helping disadvantaged people get their lives back on the right track. It's a Christian organisation with a mission to provide care and support to those in need regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender. With more and more men and women becoming homeless due to the current

economic downturn, we have a dedicated team of Support Workers and Volunteers who work together towards one common goal - making a positive difference in people's interrupted lives.

I met William, who is 30. He'd fallen on hard times following the untimely death of his girlfriend. He got into drugs to help deal with the grief but soon found his life spiralling out of control, and in the wrong direction. *"Looking back, it was a really difficult time. I lost my girlfriend, my job and as a result lost my confidence and self-respect. I knew I needed help to get back on the right road."*

"I'd heard of The Lodging House Mission through other people on the streets and knew it would be a place where I could get a cup of tea and a hot meal. I started coming regularly to get a good feed but soon realised there was a lot more help and support available."

"It's been good to get me thinking again and has built up my confidence. I feel positive about the future and have learnt a lot since coming here."

William has renewed self-confidence and is ready to start his new volunteering job after the traumatic interruption to his life. With the help of the Lodging House Mission, he now has his own place, and his long-term plan is to get back into employment.

In the time that we have been apart, minister and congregation, there will have been many disruptions, many changes, some for good, some less so. But as we take up again the connection that we have, whilst it may not be exactly the same as it was, and that's maybe no bad thing, we have the link of faith to hold us together.

After the interruptions, God's gentle touch nudges us into a future already held in God's hands. Shall we, through faith, reach out for ourselves, seeking God's touch, and beyond the interruption, or maybe even because of the interruption, discover those new ways in which God makes all things new, and makes all things whole, and makes all things more wonderful than we could ever imagine?

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen