

Sermon Notes: February 28, 2024

Focus: Interruptions and engagement

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Gospel text

he (Jesus) taught them as one having authority...Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority

Peril of the pulpit

There are no new Bible stories. I hear readings year after year and fall into a rut. This time around, I noticed something different. I noticed the *interruption*. The man with an unclean spirit was so "rude" as to interrupt Jesus' sermon. Without him, we would not have this story.

Jesus' sermon would still have been good, but it became great because Jesus embraced the interruption which led to his power on display. He turned on a dime to engage a disturbed person needing connection, healing, and help.

Children are more tuned to interruption

My daughter saw an unhoused man when she was seven and could not believe that I would drive right by him. She was distraught. So, we turned around looking specifically for him to give him all the money we had in the car. As we age, we put on blinders to interruption. We don't want to let go of our to-do list. Interruption is a given, grace is what you do with it. Maybe try being childlike and look around for interruptions or at least be sensitive to the 'young people' in your midst.

Katrina

A month before Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc on the gulf coast, a New Orleans church had embarked on a capital campaign. After the levees broke, their campaign was suspended and this unnamed (reason later) Episcopal church, became a major hub of relief activity.

I am not naming the church because it is not a story of glory. They did their work of healing, connecting, and helping. It was absolutely God's will for them to be a center of relief, and it was magnificent. If this were the movie version, their capital campaign would have restarted a year later with twice as much money raised. But this is not a movie. They are now much diminished, not because of Katrina, but because of the changing religious landscape. After the city's devastation, they were in the flow of God's mercy at the right time, responding in the right way, and righting the ship of their city. That does not need a movie finale.

Interruption is valuable

We are often too busy to notice subtle interruptions in our life, much less *value* them. Personally, I can preach it, but find difficulty in practicing it. My favorite holy interruption came 3 years after being ordained. I was celebrating the Eucharist at a downtown church in Houston. The ushers were bringing up the offering plates. Before I had a chance to say the the “offertory sentence,” a clearly unhoused man walks up the flight of steps to the Altar and dumps his convenience store cup into the plate. It was a buck twenty-five of various coins dripping with coca cola. No one on the team was upset (it was a new experience to me, but events like these were not new to them). I thought it was the most valuable \$1.25 I’d ever seen given to a church. I saw unruly beauty in a most ‘ruly,’ fancy church.

My last reflection on interruption is connected the present moment. When we worry about the future, when we worry about outcome, when we ruminate on the past: we are hobbled from responding to the world around us as it is. This Chinese proverb below tackles that very subject of dealing with the present. There are many variations, but they all follow the fourfold pattern in the proverb below.

- A farmer and his son had a horse. One day, the horse ran away, and their neighbors exclaimed, “Your horse ran away, what terrible luck!”
The farmer replied, “Maybe so, maybe not. We’ll see.”
- A few days later, the horse returned home, leading a few wild mares back to the farm as well. The neighbors shouted out, “Your horse has returned, and brought several horses home with him. What great luck!”
The farmer replied, “Maybe so, maybe not. We’ll see.”
- Later that week, the farmer’s son was trying to break one of the mares and she threw him to the ground, breaking his leg. The villagers cried, “Your son broke his leg, what terrible luck!”
The farmer replied, “Maybe so, maybe not. We’ll see.”
- A few weeks later, the army marched through town, recruiting all the able-bodied. They did not take the farmer’s son, still recovering from his injury. Friends shouted, “Your boy is spared, what tremendous luck!”
To which the farmer replied, “Maybe so, maybe not. We’ll see.”

The moral of this story: the future is up for debate, make more time engaging your life as it is.

The Message

Lastly to tie it all together: You know one of my favorite Bible “versions” is the Message, and this text is the essence of my sermon. *Matthew 6:34 MSG "Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.*

Interruptions strengthen us, especially when we take it one day at a time. **Todd**