

“An Interrupted Life”
Hickory Neck Episcopal Church—Toano, VA
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time—Proper 8 (Year B, RCL)
Mark 5:21-43

Not too long ago I read an article in *The Washington Post* about the life of Alyssa Mastromonoco.¹ Apparently, she sleeps for only about 4-5 hours a night. Her Blackberry is attached to her hip 24 hours a day. She rarely has time to herself, and for those who depend on her, she must carry the weight of the world on her shoulders. And if you’re now wondering how Alyssa Mastromonoco’s life is really that much different from yours, I should probably tell you that Ms. Mastromonoco is the official scheduler for the President of the United States, and without here the president’s life hangs in a balance some say.

Several months ago, as she was preparing to transition from being the scheduler for *candidate* Obama to the scheduler for *president* Obama she spoke with the official schedulers of President Bush to gain some insight to what she should expect. She quickly discovered a protocol that has been in place for decades. As one former scheduler said, “We have the president’s life down to a science.”² In fact, the president’s life is scheduled 18 months in advance and everything is kept top-secret and organized with daily flow charts on where he is supposed to be, who he is meeting with, their preferences, their history, and anything else that will keep in the mix.

If you ask me, the scheduler has a rather unenviable job. She takes the fall when things go awry. And when things go well...well, she rarely receives credit, because it’s just supposed to be that way. She is supposed to plan and predict for interruptions, a rather ironic task if you think

¹ http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/21/AR2008122102491_pf.html

² Ibid.

about. For if you can predict an interruption and plan for its consequences, well, then it's not exactly an interruption is it?

Despite the irony of Ms. Mastromonoco being expected to predict and work around interruptions of the President of the United States' life, we, too, wouldn't mind if someone could handle the chaos that seems to ensue when things do not go as we thought they would. We have been fooled to believe that we can control the uncontrollable, and there is nothing as frustrating as discovering that our well-planned days have encountered an unexpected detour, such as a sick child and a boss with little understanding for the need to be away or a financial crisis that sends our plans and our security reeling.

And if we cringe at interruptions in our lives, and the leader of the free world needs an official gatekeeper, how in the world did the most sought-after and controversial person handle the demanding schedule of being the Messiah? With crowds pressing in to see him, how in the world did he get everything done that he needed to get done? How did he survive without a gatekeeper to keep him focused?

Today's Gospel lesson gives a clue. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem via Nazareth when he ran into a woman who had been ill for 12 years. This woman. Oh, this woman. She had been to all the healers. She had tried everything, but for 12 years she couldn't stop bleeding. She had heard about this man named Jesus though. She knew he had healed people. She had heard that there was something different about him. But she also knew he was needed and wanted by so many. So she thought, if I can just touch the hem of his garment, I know I can be made clean. Forget about trying to shake his hand or being prayed over, she just merely needed a touch. She knew she wasn't welcome. She knew she considered unclean. And she...well, to her Jewish

community, she was just a woman—a person without rights and honor. And she wasn't on the schedule either. *She was an interruption.*

She wasn't the only one though. There was Jairus. He was a leader. He had power in the Jewish community. He had a lot to lose, too, by seeking out Jesus. But he also had a daughter at the point of death. And nothing else mattered. So he came running frantically to Jesus. He had learned the hard way that trying to have it all together was nothing more than a game that people played. And he was tired of the childishness masking for independence and surety. So he got on his knees and begged because he knew that most people didn't really give children priority in Israel. I don't think Jairus was on the schedule either. *He was an interruption, too.*

A woman at the bottom of the social and political ladder, a woman who had been marked as dirty and unwelcome in her own home. And a grieving man at the top of the power spectrum who was risking everything because he was first and foremost a father, and the thought of life without his little girl was too much too bear. They were *interruptions* to everyone around them, even Jesus' disciples.

And yet it was the interruptions, not the schedule or the plan or the expectations that Jesus cared most about. He thrived on being with people in their deepest time of need. He stopped everything for the interruptions, for Jesus knew they weren't interruptions. They were part and parcel of his mission to turn the world upside down, to render death powerless over life in Christ. Jesus always knew what he came to do and it was this knowledge, that he was about his Father's business of setting the world free from its sense of self-importance and fear of failure and the shoulds and oughts that we have placed on ourselves and those whom we love, that rendered interruptions stepping stones on his journey.

Jesus knew how the hurting woman felt and the grieving father felt, and He, too, knew about being unwelcomed and unplanned for. His own birth had interrupted an unsuspecting girl named Mary. His resurrection years later interrupted the grief of his grieving disciples. And one day he will interrupt our world again with such force and love and majesty that it will leave us speechless, mystified...and perfect. Jesus was *and* is the master of interruptions. The only thing is, when Jesus interrupts, it's not an interruption. It's grace. For when Jesus noticed that he had been touched, he did not merely allow the woman to keep on going, he stopped, sought her out and called her "Daughter" before sending her on her way. The one who had been left without honor for 12 years was now marked with the greatest honor of being God's own.

Author and theologian Henri Nouwen wrote that while taking a walk with a professor at Notre Dame, the teacher shared, "You know, ...my whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I discovered that my interruptions were my work."³

Reflecting on his friend's words, Nouwen went on to say: "What if all the unexpected interruptions are in fact the invitations to give up old-fashioned and out-moded styles of living and are opening up new unexplored areas of experience? What if our history does not prove to be a blind impersonal sequence of events over which we have no control, but rather reveals to us a guiding hand pointing to a personal encounter in which all our hopes and aspirations will reach their fulfillment?"⁴

My friends, interruptions will always be a part of our lives. Our calendars will go haywire and our best intentions will be thwarted and we will get frustrated. Our call as Christians is to surrender to the hope and grace that God has the final say-so in our lives, that what is in front of us may shake us and hurt us, but Jesus stands ready and waiting to hear our cry, just as a parent

³ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

with a child. And whatever interruption you are facing, know this: God is with you, and you will get through it.

I can vividly recall that like most youngsters growing up I had a horrible fear of monsters under my bed and in my closet. Often times I would wake in the middle of the night from some awful dream. Other times I awoke simply because I was thirsty. Whatever the reason, I would immediately yell out for my mom because you know, with potential monsters under my bead, I couldn't actually get out of the bed and go to her. Sometimes I would yell out for my mom again and again because I really needed her to come now and I thought she didn't hear me! But she always did. And without fail, she came into my room no matter what time of the night it was. If it was water I needed, she'd bring it. If I needed her to sleep in the other bed across from me, she'd do it. If I just wanted to crawl into the bed she shared with my dad, she'd let me (*often with some reluctance*). Although I interrupted her precious sleep, I was also my mother's child. And when your child calls, you coming running.

So it is with our Savior. Whenever we call, he's there. And while the leader of the free world may need a scheduler to keep his life straight and a gatekeeper to prioritize his life month in advance, the Savior of all Creation does not. He needs no scheduler. He has no gatekeeper. His life can't be tied down to a science. He is love and mercy, grace and redemption. And all he asks is for you to come. Any time. Any place. No appointment necessary. And you need not worry about the cost. Jesus already took care of that on Calvary.

Amen.