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“Interruptions”

Matthew 1:18-25
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Most days I have a list of things I need to get done both at work and at home.

Things like prepare a sermon and a lesson for a class,
visit the sick, attend meetings,
go to the store, the bank, get the dry cleaning, go to the gym.

You know how it is—your days are just as full.

But the frustrating thing is that I rarely ever accomplish all the things on my list in any given day, besides more things pop up all the time.

I live with a constant sense of never getting enough done.

One of the reasons I am not more productive is that I am continually interrupted.

Things beyond my control always seem to derail my carefully laid plans.

A pastor friend of mine likes to say that he could be a really good pastor, if not for the people, because with people come interruptions and complications.

He wants people to just leave him alone—then he'd be a really good pastor.

I read a devotional written by a woman who really wanted to practice her faith.

She wrote: “I know I have not lived the kind of Christian life I'd like to, so last night when I said my prayers, I asked God to help me live a really Christian life.

The next morning when I woke up, I thought of this desire again, but even before I got out of bed, the telephone rang.

It was my next-door neighbor. She'd had a terrible toothache all night, and when she called the dentist this morning, he told her to come right down.

She had just one slight problem: Her little boy was in bed with the measles.

I said that I'd be right over. I gave Billy his breakfast and took care of him until she returned. There went my morning.

As I was finishing up lunch at noon and thinking of what I could do in the afternoon that would really be of service to God, there was a knock at the door. It was a friend who has been in and out of a mental hospital for the last few years. She had a couple of dresses over her arm, and she asked if I would help her take up the hems and shorten them.

I got out my pins and we went to work. The time passed quickly as we drank coffee and visited while we sewed.

There went my afternoon.

It was suppertime before I had a chance to think of my resolve again - to live the kind of Christian life I've always wanted to live. As I prepared dinner, I tried to think of some big, important thing I could do in the evening to serve God. But before I could think of anything, my husband George came in the back door and said, "We're having company this evening! I met a fellow today who just moved into town. He's had a lot of trouble finding a job because he has a prison record. He has excellent recommendations but he can't find anybody who'll take him on with his prison record. I thought we could get acquainted with him and his wife tonight, and maybe I can find a place for him down at the plant."

Great, I thought. Dinner guests on short notice. Hooray.

They came, and I did enjoy the evening. George had phoned the man's former employer earlier in the day and was pleased with what he heard.

George offered him a job that night.

All too soon it was bedtime. Another day has passed - another day in which I wasted my time and did not live the kind of Christian life I'd like to be living. I want so much to serve God. But how can I with all of these interruptions?"

Well, you get the point.

It is entirely possible and highly probable that God speaks to us in the unexpected and often unwelcome interruptions of our lives.

Perhaps even **more so** than in the structure of our most carefully laid plans.

Those unexpected opportunities are the places where Gods Spirit can guide us to possibilities we would have otherwise missed.

Throughout Biblical history, people are constantly being interrupted by God. Abraham and Sarah are asked to pull up roots in old age and start a new nation.

Moses is asked to lead a people out of slavery into freedom.

Deborah was an obscure woman who was the keeper of the temple lamps, who found herself at the height of political power leading her people in a time of war.

And the list goes on and on when you consider Jonah, Daniel, Esther, Job.

All of these people had other plans for their lives. They were not planning to be used by God. It would be disruptive and difficult.

Of course, the birth of a child is the most stunning interruption of them all.

No matter how prepared you think you are, you really are not.

And the birth of Jesus Christ was a historical interruption of stunning magnitude. The Messianic predictions were nothing like the way it actually happened, and in the birth narratives you do get the sense that this birth was a shocking event.

The first people whose lives were dramatically interrupted were Mary and Joseph.

They were a young couple, engaged to be married with a bright future.

Mary learns she will miraculously bear the son of God.

And Joseph learns that the woman to whom he is engaged is already pregnant.

This was devastating news, and Joseph had every right to walk away.

A betrothal was an ancient form of engagement, which was far more binding than today's engagements. The only way out of a betrothal was divorce.

Another option was that Joseph could have had Mary stoned to death for infidelity.

But he is a good man, not vengeful or vindictive. He decided to divorce her privately, not wanting to humiliate her, and while Joseph is making those preparations, an angel appears to him in a dream.

The angel tells him that this baby is from the Holy Spirit,
so he should go ahead and marry her.

Joseph agrees and allows this stunning interruption to be the path into a new and uncertain future. He welcomes it, and whatever challenges it may bring.

He didn't have to. He could have walked away and made better plans for his life.

But he listens to the voice of God, and allows himself to be used by God.

There is hardly anything written about Joseph in the Bible,
and not much has been written about him ever since.

He was never the center of attention; he did not have much to distinguish him.

Joseph could have been interchangeable with lots of men of ancient Palestine.

But he allowed himself to be used by God. He did what was right even when it would cost him dearly—his pride, his reputation, his well planned future.

Joseph was solid and faithful to the depths of his soul.

He did what the angel told him to do, although he was not what he had chosen.

And as a result, he was blessed beyond his imagining.

That is what some interruptions have the power to do, bless us and change us.

So many of the interruptions of my life have blessed me, from unexpected relationships to unplanned experiences. I wish I had been open to more of them. Therefore, I know it would help me, and perhaps you as well, to learn to welcome the interruptions of our lives with prayer, perspective and presence.

First prayer. When something comes into your life that you had not planned or made time for, ask God to keep your heart open and teach you something. Be ready for the ways God is going to stretch your consciousness and compassion.

Secondly, try to put the detours of your life in their proper perspective.

It might ruin your plans but not your life. In fact it might give you a new life.

Third, give your undivided attention to whatever is in front of you at any given moment, even those annoying interruptions. (But not telemarketers at dinnertime.)

I am ashamed of those times I have been working on the computer while talking on the phone, or talking with someone while thinking of something else.

Be fully present to your life and allow God to work through you.

Meet interruptions with prayer, perspective and your full presence and you will discover them to be blessings in disguise.

As we continue our journey through Advent, let us be attentive to the unexpected and surprising ways in which God comes to us, even in the form of a poor, innocent baby born a long, long time ago.

Let us pray...

Help us, dear God, to be your instruments of grace in this world, to be open to the ways you want to use our lives to help and bless others.

Give us patience for the ways in which our lives do not go as we had expected.

And bless us now through these symbols of your great love for us.

As we remember your Son who was life, hope, peace.

He lived a simple life and freely gave up his life, that we might have Abundant and Eternal Life. In these symbols of his body and blood, he promised to be with us always, even to the end of time. For the great gift of his life in us and with us, we give you thanks and praise.

Amen.