

INTERRUPTIONS

Dr. L. James (Jim) Bankston

June 28, 2009

8:30 and 11:05 a.m. services

(Fourth Sunday after Pentecost)



ST. PAUL'S

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Lectionary Texts:

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

⁷Now as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you – so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. ⁸I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. ⁹For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. ¹⁰And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something – ¹¹now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. ¹²For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have. ¹³I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between ¹⁴your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. ¹⁵As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

Mark 5:21-43

²¹When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. ²²Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.”

²⁴So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.”

²⁹Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

³⁰Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?"

³¹And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'"

³²He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

³⁵While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?"

³⁶But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe."

³⁷He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.

³⁹When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping."

⁴⁰And they laughed at him.

Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!"

⁴²And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

William Muehl, professor of preaching at Yale Divinity School, tells his seminary students, "Always remember that most of the people you face on Sunday morning almost decided not to come."

I don't want a show of hands, but I know people are busy today, and you have lots of other options. And at a deeper level, you sometimes wonder if anything will be said or done that will make a difference in your life. Yet you did come, and many of you are here most Sundays. What can we say or do that makes a difference in your life?

In the Gospel reading today, Jairus, the leader of the synagogue, and the unnamed woman in the crowd didn't have to think about going to church, or at least about going to Jesus, which hopefully is the same thing. They went because they needed help, Jairus for his daughter and the woman for herself. They came to Jesus because they were desperate. It was a life or death venture.

I know sometimes people come to church because they are desperate for healing or community or fellowship or hope or love or any number of other things. Not everyone comes to church because they are desperate, but in a sense everyone who comes with any degree of openness to God or sensitivity to the human experience comes with some hope of healing at some level, for self or other, or a relationship or the world.

So you, like Jairus and the unnamed woman in the crowd, have made the effort to come to Jesus today. He is after all, the Healer, the one who feeds our souls.

One of the ways we describe St. Paul's church is to use the phrase, "traditional worship for contemporary people." I think it is a good description of who we are. The worship experience here follows the cycle of the Christian year and involves liturgy and the Lectionary readings appropriate for the day, music that reflects a more classical or traditional repertoire, always done with feeling and integrity. We are a place of traditional worship. No video screens or praise songs. I hope that part about contemporary people also describes who we are. I mean by that phrase that people come here who are not really defined by a pretend world or a used-to-be-world, but by all of the hopes and possibilities, fears and inconsistencies of the 21st century. People come here who are not afraid to ask questions and don't want simplistic answers to complex questions. And yet in that mix, people come here like anyone else, seeking a healing touch from Jesus.

I have a friend who runs a social ministry not far from here, just across 288 in the Third Ward. He is an African-American Baptist preacher whose ministry is to keep kids and adults off drugs and alcohol and to help those who are using to get sober. He works with family systems to keep kids in school and moving toward a responsible productive life. He has a great ministry. He's been to church here a couple of times, and I've been to his place. When he sees me, he will ask me how church went. And he will say, "Jim, did you hoop last Sunday?" Now I know what he means by "hoop." He means did I shout and dance and sing in my sermon. I tell him I don't hoop much; folks here might not understand, and it's not my style. He knows that, but he enjoys asking me anyway. Worship styles differ, but all churches have to speak to the real life hopes and dreams and doubts and fears of real life people, or those who almost didn't come will stop coming.

Kate Layzer, writer, poet, and pastor of Union Congregational Church in Winthrop, Massachusetts uses this image of a church that looks good on the outside but really doesn't offer anything to feed the soul. She says it is like your thrifty relative who saves the box that once held chocolates and gives it to you at Christmas with a half dozen white handkerchiefs in it. From the outside you were hoping for so much more, and you got those starched white hankies instead. Whatever is on the outside and whatever the style, Jesus has to be our model for healing on the inside.

I gave this sermon today the title, "Interruptions." When I turned that title in on Monday morning, I intended to talk about Jesus being interrupted by the woman in the crowd as he was on his way to heal Jairus' daughter. How do you handle interruptions in life? Jesus was ready for the interruption, etc. But the more I thought about this text this week, Jesus was not the one interrupted. He was doing what he does consistently, bringing healing to people. It was the people in the story whose lives were interrupted. Jairus' life was interrupted because his daughter was very ill. The woman in the crowd had had a train wreck for a life for 12 years. Whatever normal was for her, with her disease, normal life had been interrupted, and she was sick, outcast, and penniless. It wasn't Jesus whose life was interrupted. He was consistent, just being Jesus. It was contemporary people, that is every day people, whose

lives had been interrupted by something unexpected. That is the way life is for all of us from time to time. It is why we still go to Jesus for a healing touch or at least to try to make some sense of it all.

Jesus is our model for healing, whether it is emotional or spiritual or physical. It is why Methodist and Baptist and Catholic and Episcopal churches and others build hospitals. In the lobby of our Methodist Hospital, right down the street, you'll find a bronze sculpture of Jesus touching and healing a woman in the crowd.

All of us find ourselves in the midst of a national health care crisis and debate, even as we speak, here in America. Nobody knows exactly where this is going to go, but I think most people agree that we have to address costs and coverage. If Jesus is our model, it is interesting and timely to note that Jesus heals both the daughter of wealth, the leader of the synagogue, and the daughter of poverty, the woman in the crowd as well. It is not a stretch to say that the health care delivery system of that day failed these people. The text says that the woman had been suffering for many years. She had endured many physicians, the text says, spent all of her money and was no better but grew worse. Of course we have wonderful health care possibilities in America, but figuring out how to care for all people at a reasonable cost is going to take compassionate hearts and engaged minds. I think faith communities ought to be a player in all of this. We Christians have Jesus as our model and it is just an extension of churches dealing with the real life issues of contemporary people.

Paul's interesting word on generosity in the Corinthian letter is that those who have much do not have too much and those that have little do not have too little. These are relevant Christian principles to be factored into our national debate. It is a part of what it means to speak to the real life issues of real life people. If the health care delivery system of the day failed the people in our story, the religious community didn't do any better. The religious establishment of the synagogue apparently couldn't help Jairus' daughter, and the disciples were just confused by all of the above. How could Jesus know who touched him in the midst of a crowd? And what does it matter: he's on a mission to save a little girl. When the report comes that the little girl has died, the disciples are all too ready to give up. And when Jesus suggests

that all is not lost, they laugh as if there is no chance of new life. Little wonder Jesus would simply say to them, “Let’s don’t talk about this” and “Give her something to eat.” The one who has the power to heal is the one who also has common sense.

If you follow the verbs in our text today, you get a sense of the deeps of life that Jesus addresses. Begged. Come. Endured. Touched, Healed. Believe. Weeping. Wailing. Laughed. Get up. Overcome. Ordered. Give. All strong words. Jesus, the loving presence of God yet with us, speaks a word of healing and hope to hurting people. We in the church of Jesus can do no less.

I don’t know how close you came to not coming today, but I’m glad you came. Our witness is that there is a healing presence amidst the interruptions of life.