

“Saying Yes To Intrusions”

June 12, 2016

Mark 5:21-43

SCRIPTURE INTRO: I’m preaching a sermon series based on a book by Paul Miller called *Love Walked Among Us*. The subtitle is *Learning to Love Like Jesus*.

What Paul Miller does, and what we’ve been doing is look at a wide variety of stories in the Gospels where Jesus interacts with people that give us insight into how Jesus loved.

After we see how Jesus loved people, then we’ll think about how this applies to us and our interactions with the people God has put in our lives.

I’m going to finish the series these last three Sundays of June.

INTRO: Years ago there was a man who was down on his luck. He had no job, no car, and he would walk up and down St. Joseph and then he started randomly stopping by the church. I would witness to him and read the Bible to him but I got to where I dreaded when he showed up because he was a bottomless pit of need. One time he asked if he could take a shower. There used to be a shower stall downstairs. I was so glad to get rid of him that I said—Yes, go take a shower. So he left my office and finally I was able to start studying like I needed to. But I had just settled down to my books when I heard him calling my name. Andrew, Andrew!

I walked out to see what he wanted and he was standing on the stairs, soaking wet, with nothing but a towel around his waist, and he looked up at me and said—Do you have any shampoo? Jamie Peterson was our youth director at the time and Jamie walked by at that moment, when a wet man in a towel was asking me for shampoo. Jamie started snorting with laughter and looked at me and made gesture like—Hey, the man needs shampoo!

All of you have experienced people intruding on your life—needing things from you, asking things of you. Occasionally it's strangers, but mostly it's people you are acquainted with or connected with through family or church or work or some other setting. They appear at inconvenient moments and they want your time, your space, your attention, your conversation, your emotional connection, your physical presence, your help, or your money.

Sometimes it's easy to say no. No, I do not have shampoo and I'm not going to get you shampoo. But usually it's harder than that—especially when you can tell it's a genuine need and when your Christian conscience tugs at you. And compounding the difficulty is the realization that this is a severe inconvenience and that you have absolutely no idea how long this is going to take. Your schedule will be interrupted and you won't be in control if you say yes to this intrusion.

It happened to Jesus a lot. In story after story people intrude on the Lord, wanting things from him. I could have picked any number of passages to illustrate this.

I'll explain why I picked this one in a few minutes.

But what's striking is Jesus' response. He mostly said yes to intrusions.

When people came to him at inconvenient times and wanted things from him he was constantly open to letting their needs invade his world.

It was one of the ways he loved people.

There are things here for us to learn.

Let's look at this passage and this topic under three points.

We'll see how intrusions are opportunities

1. to imitate Jesus
2. to love people
3. to trust God

MP#1 Intrusions are an opportunity to imitate Jesus

There's a tradition of separating these two stories and preaching them separately. Verses 25-34 about the bleeding woman are preached first covering themes of faith and Jesus' lordship over disease.

Then, in a separate sermon, the preacher goes back and reads verses 21-24 about Jairus asking Jesus to heal daughter, skipping the woman's interruption and picking up with verses 35-43 about the little girl being raised—the themes again are faith and Jesus' lordship over death.

That makes a lot of sense.

Otherwise woman's healing can easily get skipped over for the greater miracle. Plus, in Mark's gospel there is a progressive revelation of Jesus' power starting in chapter 3 with his lordship over storms, demons, disease, and death.

But when you take these two stories together as Mark has written them, it shows us just how much Jesus' life and calling was characterized by intrusions.

The chapter just before this records a series of events that must have left Jesus exhausted physically, mentally, and emotionally.

When he crossed the lake again with his disciples he certainly needed rest.

But as soon as he got out of the boat a large crowd was waiting.

There were many people and they all needed things from him.

But Jesus didn't avoid them. He said yes and waded right in to the crowd.

Then there was another intrusion.

A prominent man, a synagogue ruler named Jairus pushed through the crowd and fell at Jesus' feet and pleaded with him to come and heal his dying daughter.

Jesus said yes to that intrusion and began to go with him.

Did you notice the next detail?

The large crowd followed and pressed around him. They weren't giving up.

Then there was this woman in the crowd who needed healing.

She was able to get close enough and touch his garment.

This was the third intrusion, and even though she didn't overtly ask for something, she still needed Jesus' attention and that's what he gave her.

He stopped then and there to talk to her.

Then there was the fourth intrusion, the messengers from Jairus' house and the difficult decision about what to do at that point when they hear that the little girl has died. Should they keep going?

Jesus told his disciples and Jairus—Yes, we're still going to see your little girl. He not only experienced intrusions but intrusions embedded inside intrusions.

While Jesus was responding to one need, he is confronted with another one. They piled on top of each other and to each one Jesus said yes.

After seminary I was called as an assistant pastor and my boss was Dr. Bruce Fiol.

Bruce was one of the most gracious, gentle Christian men I've ever known. He did not like to talk on the phone, but he loved to write letters.

You'll think I'm exaggerating, but he wrote over a thousand letters a year.

Most of them were short notes, but he had an enormous correspondence list. And he loved talking to people face to face.

Bruce believed the pastor's door ought to be open to church members and strangers. He believed that if someone wanted to talk to you or needed you that you should drop everything and give that person your full attention.

Even study time and sermon preparation were not off limits.

In fact, he believed that interaction with people in their needs gave life to sermons.

He told me early on—Your calling as a pastor means you must be open to interruptions and intrusions. In fact, in many ways, that is the calling.

I think Bruce was right about the pastorate—not that I've been able to fill shoes. And I know for a fact that he got his inspiration from Jesus and passages just like this one where Jesus said yes, yes, yes to most inconvenient intrusions. So this passage has a special application for ministers.

Jesus is not a CEO behind walls of secretaries and rigid schedules.

But what I want to suggest is that there is something here for all believers to imitate, because no matter what your particular vocation or work, we are all, every one of us, ministers of the Lord Jesus.

So we should be open to saying yes to people when they inconveniently intrude on us with their needs.

So intrusions are opportunities for you to imitate Jesus.

We always need to remember that Jesus is our Savior first, not our example.

He lived the perfect life of love we cannot live.

He strides like a giant through the pages of history. No person can be like him. But by faith in him we get credit for his perfect life—Jesus is perfect, you aren't.

That's the Good News!

And, at the same time, as saved people, untied to Jesus, filled with his Spirit—we are expected to try to imitate him. Here's one way—response to intrusions.

MP#2 Intrusions are opportunities to love people

Throughout this series we've been looking at how Jesus loved people.

We've seen often how even the subtle things he did can teach us a lot. That's certainly the case here.

I want us to focus on the intrusion that would have been the easiest for him to ignore and the one that, in his cultural setting, would have been most offensive—that's the woman with the bleeding problem touching him.

A few months ago I got an email from a friend of mine who is the pastor in northern India, in Dehradun. Not Paul Billy Arnold who we support. He's in south India. In the email was testimony of one of the elders in church how he became Christian. This Indian man was from a tribe there in the hills of northern India that had its own religion with very strict purity laws.

One thing they believe makes you religiously unclean is menstrual blood—just like in the Old Testament purity laws.

Normally a woman would go through a monthly ritual of re-purification.

But a woman in this condition, bleeding for twelve years, would have been perennially unclean, never able to achieve purity. Would have been an outcast.

If she intentionally touched someone, it would have been a grave offense.

So when someone gave him New Testament, he started reading it, he came to story.

Reading from his perspective he thought what she did was incredibly offensive.

Knowing she was unclean and then deliberately touching a holy man.

So what first amazed him was that she did not go insane or was not struck dead.

And he was dumfounded when Jesus spoke to her kindly and commended her faith and blessed her. None of the priests or holy men in his religion would have done that. They would have cursed her.

That struck such a chord with him that he gave life to Christ and had joined my friend's church and eventually became an elder in the congregation.

We read this story from our Western and American perspective and we feel pity.

We imagine how hard her condition must have been.

We read the comment about how she had spent all her money for medicine and doctors and got no relief and we think—those rascals!

That pity we have for her is not instinctive.

It is the influence of Jesus Christ and Christianity on Western culture.

In her day she was viewed the way this Indian man viewed her—

as unclean, polluted, and corrupting to anyone she touched.

She was a person to be avoided because to come in contact with her

would require elaborate and expensive purification rituals to wash off her taint. She had likely been divorced because of her condition.

If she had asked Jesus for healing, it would have invited public shaming. So she just reached out and touched Jesus' clothes and was healed.

Jesus stopped and looked around and asked who had touched him.

The disciples pointed out that everybody was touching him

but Jesus knew it was not a normal touch.

Now here's where it gets interesting and ties in with our earlier studies.

We've seen over and over how Jesus always looked at people.

He saw people in their need and then he would reach out and heal them.

Jesus never healed without first connecting with the person.

He never separated his power from his love.

But the woman's actions forced him to reverse his normal pattern.

Jesus was in a hurry. He was on his way to Jairus' house.

Jairus was an important, honorable man with a dying daughter.

Jesus had already said yes to Jairus, Yes, I'll come. Said it in front of people.

But it was so important for Jesus to see her and look at her and connect with her in a personal way that he just stopped what he was doing.

He put the emergency visit to Jairus' house on hold so he could focus on her and hear the story of her twelve years of pain and shame.

When people intrude on us, the love of Christ requires that we look at them and to listen to them and perhaps hear their story of pain and shame and need.

We might not be able to do anything else.

We certainly can't heal them with a touch like Jesus, but we can look and listen.

And that's especially important when it's someone who is an outcast or unclean.

I was in a big city once with a friend and we passed a man who was begging.

My friend said: Did you hear that? Did you hear what he was singing to himself?

I hadn't heard anything. My friend said: It was a hymn.

I kept walking. My friend went back and later caught up with me.

He asked the man if he was a Christian. The man said he was.

My friend asked what he could do for him. The man said, pray for me.

How easy to toss money in the hat and keep walking. How easy it would have been for Jesus to let the healing happen without the personal connection, but love . . .

MP#3 Intrusions are an opportunity to trust God

I imagine some of you might be panicking a little at this point.

You are thinking of all the people who might intrude on your life—
maybe even some specific souls whose intrusions you dread—
like the way I dreaded the man I told you about who would drop in on me.

You might be wondering, where's the balance? Where's the control?
Surely there are times you have to say no to people.

There must be times when you even have to tell someone that you can't
talk to him or to her any more.

You're right about that.

Sometimes Jesus said no. I'm probably going to cover that next week.

There is a loving no have to say to people about some things they want from you.
But I don't want to bring that into the discussion of this passage
because saying no is a hot topic in psychology and counseling right now.
Boundaries. Keeping people from invading your space.

Modern psychology and counseling says you need to say no because it's
important for you personally in order to be a healthy individual.

The focus is on your personal growth and your personal needs.

As Americans, we love that message.

I was afraid getting into that topic in this sermon would muddy the waters.

Jesus does say no, and if we get to that next week, you'll be surprised why.

It doesn't have anything to do with his personal emotional health.

Also, you can't really understand his no until you first appreciate passages
like this one, and that he mostly said yes to intrusions.

So instead of thinking in terms of having the no option to balance the yeses—
let's look at this another way.

Intrusions are an opportunity for you to trust God.

Dear heavenly Father, you've allowed this person to intrude on my life.

Your Son Jesus, my Savior said yes to many intrusions. I want to be like him.

But I'm not as wise and loving as Jesus.

If I open the door to this intrusion, please give me wisdom and love.

Help me look and listen. Help me know what to say and do.

Help me give this person what he needs if I can, or help me tell him plainly—

I'm sorry, I can't give you that, and not feel afraid or guilty.

And then you trust him, see what happens—see how he guides and protects you.

There's another level to this trust, maybe a deeper level.

That's to remember intrusions are divinely ordered by God.

We're Presbyterians. We believe in the sovereignty of God.

So we trust there is some great purpose in these intrusions.
It might be to bring a person to salvation. It might be our sanctification.
But we usually don't know, and won't know until we get to heaven.

I know you've often heard the illustration of God's sovereignty as a tapestry.
It goes like this: If you look at the back of a tapestry,
you see a jumble of tangled threads, you see lots of loose ends.
You might think you see a pattern or an image, but you can't be sure.
That's our life in this world—lots of jumble and tangle and loose ends.
But then you turn the tapestry over and you see a master weaver has been
making something beautiful all along.

Corrie ten Boom wrote a poem about it:
Oft' times He weaveth sorrow; / And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper / And I the underside.
But sorrow is just one category of jumble and loose ends.

Intrusions and interruptions by people are another category.
Sometimes a person invades your life with an inconvenient need and then
he's gone and you wonder what was that about and then it passes—
and it's just one more loose thread of life.
Only it's not a loose thread—part of the tapestry the Lord is weaving.
And when you get to heaven, you'll see how he has used those times
when you said yes—
for your sanctification, for the salvation of others, for his glory.