

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
“ACCIDENTS ALWAYS TAKE US BY SURPRISE”  
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
June 28, 2009  
Mark 5:21-43  
10:00 A.M. Service**

No matter how hard we try to plan to control the future, things have a way of coming apart. Even our best laid plans can go awry. There is really no way to prepare for an accident. Accidents always take us by surprise. But faith can help us deal with things that are not on our agenda.

Repeatedly, Jesus dealt with the needs of those who came to him. He was on his way to cure the daughter of a pious Jew names Jairus. But other people in need interrupted his plans. He had no choice but to heal them as well.

Part of the beauty of small children is how blissfully unaware they are of time. As we grow older we become increasingly time-conscious and most of us end up becoming slaves of time. We learn to live with one eye on the clock and the other on the calendar. There are things we must do. There are other things we would like to do. And there is a limited amount of time in which to do everything. This requires planning. One efficiency expert advises that you **“Plan your work and then work your plan.”** For conscientious, well-organized time managers there is no enemy more threatening than interruptions.

Our reading from the Gospel lesson today reminds us that Jesus' life was full of interruptions. One day he was at the seaside, surrounded by a great crowd of people. This was an ideal teaching opportunity. On other occasions Jesus got into a boat, pushed out from the shore, and taught the people. Some such setting may have been what Jesus had in mind for this particular day, a period of uninterrupted time with the people who came to

hear his teaching. Other things often intruded, however, and Jesus would end up spending the day dealing with things that were unplanned and unexpected.

The other two main characters in this story personify the same phenomenon, but from another perspective. This father did not expect his child to have a health crisis. It was an unwanted interruption in his life. This woman did not plan to become chronically ill. But it happened. She had spent a dozen years of her life and all her money trying to get well. This is how life happens. We have one thing in mind but end up having to deal with something else. Sometimes changing our plans requires only a minor adjustment. At other times, however, life's agenda is so permanently changed that things are never the same again.

What can we learn from Jesus about handling interruptions? No one ever had more important work to do, yet few people were interrupted as often as he was. What might he say to us about dealing with interruptions in our own lives?

It is difficult to imagine that anyone in history had more important plans for each day of life than Jesus. His purpose was too clear and his commitment was too deep for him to have a casual approach to life. It is unthinkable that he would amble into a new day with nothing particular on his mind. On the other hand, Jesus was not exclusively active, constantly making things happen, eagerly exercising control over situations and individuals. The same Jesus who *made things happen* would also *let things happen*. Jesus acted upon life, but also allowed life to act on him and on others. Jesus' wisdom to us might be, **“Remain flexible. Sometimes reacting is more important than acting.”**

There is a relevant word in the Epistle of James. It is addressed to a busy man who has his life fully planned. He will go to a certain city, stay there for a year, make a few deals, and show a profit. All of this is perfectly legitimate. Responsible people make plans. But James reminds us that we do not even know what life will be like tomorrow, much less a year from now. All our plans should begin with conditional clauses: **“If the Lord wills . . .” (4:15)**

This is sound advice for everyone. It is good to plan, but we need to remind ourselves how unpredictable life is. The only thing we can really

count on is the will of God, and since we do not always know what this is, it only makes sense to remain flexible. Being a bit tentative about our plans and our knowledge is a part of having faith in God.

When our plans for the day do not allow time for helping a hurting person, our plans may need to be revised. This is what Jesus did. The sick child in this passage was not on Jesus' schedule. Still, he set everything aside and went straight to her. This was typical of Jesus, who would leave ninety-nine sheep safely in the fold to go in search of the one that was lost. Nothing was more important in Jesus' life than helping a person in need. If we are his disciples, this will be true of us, as well.

This is more easily said than done. There are too many hurting people in the world. All of us could work full-time trying to help just a few of them. Then other things, important things in our lives, would be left undone. What is more, sometimes we are not even sure how to help. The easiest thing is to give money. But this is the last thing some people need. Putting money in some hands would be like putting a gun in a child's hands. Our generosity needs to be balanced by our practical wisdom. Sometimes the best we can do is to keep our hearts and minds open to the interruptions that fill our lives. They may be God-given opportunities to love and serve as Jesus did. In a very busy day, Jesus rearranged his schedule to help a critically ill child and a chronically sick woman. These were things not on his agenda. But if he had the day to live over, surely he would do the same again. For Jesus, and for us, it became a day on which the sun has never set.

Three men from Ridgewood, N.J. were interviewed on NPR's Morning Edition. Phillip Sorace, Kenneth Weimann and Robert Delaney had been brokers on Wall street. Sorace had also been the CEO of a small bank. But now they were "**Men In Transition**" whose lives had been altered by the recession that hit Wall street. They are no longer taking the 45-minute journey into Manhattan and retuning home at night. Their world has been turned upside down. But they know each other better now than ever before. At rush hour on Monday mornings, they no longer take the train ride into Manhattan. Instead, they meet in a weekly fellowship and prayer session at St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church. The church developed this ministry to help people adjust to life out of work and deal with the struggles of looking for fulfillment.

Although they know and talk about how hard times have been they feel that the group helps them be more open about their fears and vulnerabilities. They now have time in their schedule for new things. A church official came to the group and asked if they would be interested in cooking a meal for local homeless men.

Not only did they say yes, but they decided to add their personal touch. No this was not about making them feel better, but of course it did. This was about dealing with things as best you can when life comes crashing in on you unannounced and without warning.

May God forgive us our presumption in thinking we know how to make the best use of any day. May God forgive the audacity and self-importance reflected in our organizational plans and agendas. May God open our eyes to the opportunities for service that come to us as interruptions. And may God grant us grace to be as patient and caring with others as Christ has been with us.

If you are a visitor, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.