

Preaching from St. Stephen's Pulpit

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Williamsburg, VA

July 18, 2021

Interruptions

Psalm 23 Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 8th Sunday after Pentecost

Isn't it wonderful when you are cleaning your house and your best friend calls just to talk? Or how about when someone comes into your office and says, here's a cookie for you? It's delightful, too, or a child comes to you and says, "Let's play hide and go seek!" I'm certain you can think of many welcome interruptions. We get interrupted hundreds of times in a week. Some of those are welcome, and some are not. Some disruptions are momentary, and others are more permanent.

Falling in love throws our life off course. I think that's why we call it falling. None of us plans to fall! Having a child or a grandchild will change your life. Discovering you are called to a new career will turn things around. Then there are the major interruptions that we would avoid if we could. Our company reorganizes, and we lose our job. The tests results come back, and it's cancer. A loved one dies. Our lives get interrupted. When I was visiting someone in an assisted living center, one of the residents had a sign above their door, "This is not the life I ordered."

We have been living through a major life interruption. COVID-19 has changed not just our lives, but the whole world. We underwent an extended time of isolation. Friends and family were hospitalized. Services for those who had died were postponed. Teachers and students struggled to teach and to learn. Did you know that trauma lodges itself in our bodies? Though we are starting to resume activities, we are not in a familiar place anymore. It's hard to find our way, and our smartphone can't help us.

Jesus has been in that place. Last week, we heard the story of Herod's beheading John the Baptizer. Jesus' disciples were the ones to bring him the news. After hearing it, Jesus said, "Let's go away to a deserted place." But when they arrived, a large crowd had gathered. Jesus looked at their faces, and "had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd."

Jesus' life had been interrupted by the death of John the Baptizer, and his time of recovery was interrupted by the needs of the people. I imagine the needy people who interrupted Jesus had had their lives interrupted. They needed, we need, a savior who understands what it meant to be worn out. It's an exhaustion that takes

more than a good night's sleep, but rather a tiredness that yearns for deep peace. That's what sheep need, a shepherd who has experienced life's significant interruptions, and redeemed them.

One of the most compelling portraits of Jesus as shepherd is one written by Flora Wuellner about a painting she had seen:

It is not the [image of] the robed and peaceful person holding a small lamb with a flock at his feet that we often see depicted in stained-glass windows. Rather it's a tattered and bleeding person who had crawled down a steep cliff edge to rescue a lamb that had fallen. The lamb was injured and a bird of prey circled overhead. I could not see the shepherd's face as he strained down to the sheep, but I could see the knots in his muscles, the bleeding hands and arms gashed by thorns, the twisted garment torn in the steep descent....The determined shepherd was paying a painful price to rescue the lamb, and the lamb would be saved.¹

Belonging to Christ does not mean nothing bad will happen to us. It means that when we are in the valley of the shadow of death, Jesus crawls down the steep cliff edge to rescue us, who walks with us to the still waters, and restores our soul.

~Pastor Cheryl Ann Griffin

¹ Duckworth Penelope. Teaching Sermons on the Incarnation. "The Lord is My Shepherd." Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998. 52-33. Print.