

“INTERRUPTIONS ARE WHY WE’RE HERE,” A Sermon delivered by the Reverend Dr. Geoffrey G. Drutchas, St. Paul United Church of Christ, March 28, 2021

Today is Palm Day, a glorious day, COVID-19 notwithstanding, in which we remember and celebrate Jesus’s entrance into Jerusalem acclaimed by crowds who greeted him as Israel’s long-awaited messiah as the entire nation is about to celebrate Passover.

“Hosanna,” they shout. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” (*Mark 11:1-10*)

Unlike the Roman legions who rode into their conquered Jerusalem on strutting steeds and stallions, Jesus is astride a colt. The offspring of a donkey, it was regarded as a holy sign of Davidic kingship—in other words, an ideal mount for someone taking up the mantle of Israel’s long-cherished King David who ruled in the glory days of his nation. Indeed, the colt is an explicit fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy as found in the Book of Zechariah about the coming of a “new David” and messiah for Israel (*Zechariah 9:9*) But that colt, secured by the apostles for Jesus, also signifies power and authority exercised with humility and modesty. No prancing show horse for the messiah! Israel’s messiah was to be a lord who didn’t lord himself over his people. The colt that Jesus rode on that glad day suits him in every way.

Of course, Jesus’ greatness is not only revealed on that last stretch of the Jerusalem road when he rides along to heaped praise and honor. It is also demonstrated a bit earlier when he is less conspicuously still on foot to Jerusalem, 15 miles and eight or more hours earlier. Those moments are captured by the first half of our morning scripture lesson. (*Mark 10:46-52*)

As described by Mark, Jesus is just leaving Jericho, that ancient town made famous by Joshua and his army who tumbled its walls. No one seems to recognize him at all. Yet, suddenly, Jesus is greeted from the side of the wide, dusty road by a blind man and beggar. His name is Bartimaeus. We even know that his father was Timaeus. His is a great bellowing voice that calls out with a plea. “Jesus, Son of David,” Bartimaeus calls out. “Have mercy on me!” Many hear him and consider him a nuisance. Shut up, they scold him. Shut up, they say again. But Bartimaeus, scorned and stigmatized by most because his disability makes it impossible to read scripture, won’t be silenced.

In these incredible moments, Jesus hears him and is impressed. Firstly, Bartimaeus knows Jesus’ name. Secondly, this blind man can “see” him coming. But, thirdly, his sight is even greater than that. He actually addresses Jesus as “Son of David,” an expression always reserved for the messiah. In other words, Bartimaeus recognizes Jesus as the messiah before anyone else on the fateful road to Jerusalem does, apart from the apostles.

Although Jesus has miles to go before he sleeps, he stops. He then asks his apostles to summon Bartimaeus. And jumping up and throwing off his own cloak, making himself literally and figuratively vulnerable, the blind man comes to Jesus. Unlike so many fellow Jews who see blindness as a divine curse and punishment, Jesus is not afraid of being spiritually contaminated by sharing the presence of a disabled man. “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asks. “Teacher,” Bartimaeus responds, “I want to see again.” “Go,” Jesus simply tells him. “Your faith has made you well.”

The Gospel informs us that “at once” Bartimaeus is able to see. His sight is regained. What’s more, Bartimaeus need no longer sits like cast-off refuse along the side of the road. He is able to follow Jesus down the road. And does.

Jesus didn’t have to stop for Bartimaeus. He had a Passover festival to attend in Jerusalem. He already had his sights set on his destiny which was to be a cross. Given the vagaries of travel in those days, especially when you’re on foot most of the way, he had no time to lose. Yet Jesus heard the shouting of a blind man from the side of the Jericho-to-Jerusalem road and he paused to help and to heal. Like the Good Samaritan he preached about for all who had ears to hear, the one whom we know to be the most important person in the whole wide world made time amid his own concerns and precious itinerary for someone he didn’t know and who everyone else considered a nothing. (*Luke 10:29-37*) Because Jesus stopped and helped, a nobody became a somebody, remembered two thousand years later in Biblical history.

The story of a healed, once-blind Bartimaeus continues to reverberate through the annals of time. There is a profound message for us in the story of Jesus and Bartimaeus—a multi-layered message. First, our gospel passage underscores for us that Jesus is a healer whose love is inclusive. His love and commitment to healing will not be put off by the prejudices of his own day that would abandon or ignore a disabled man like Bartimaeus. Secondly, Jesus is a model of spiritual integrity. He practices what he preaches, just as he calls us to do likewise. This whole episode on the Jericho-to-Jerusalem road is a living example for us all of Good Samaritanism. Finally, Jesus’ gracious, caring conduct in helping out Bartimaeus whom he unexpectedly meets affirms the great Christian truth that how we conduct ourselves on the way to our goals and objectives is as important as whatever we have our sights on accomplishing.

Yes, goals and objectives in life are important. But so are our means in achieving them. Also, we should never be so compulsive and obsessive about our goals down the road that we are blind to what is happening now and what is needed now. This is especially true when others are calling out to us in dire need, just as Bartimaeus called out to Jesus.

This life that God gives to us is always going to be full of interruptions. That includes our present COVID-19 pandemic. How thoughtfully and graciously we handle them reveals a

lot about us and our own faithfulness. What we perceive as interruptions can be a spiritual test. God may also be using interruptions to share and communicate something important for us that we can't foresee or immediately grasp. The interruption that we might find so annoying can sometimes even prove to be the event that saves us—like the traffic jam that makes us late for a plane that crashes without us.

Yes, interruptions can later prove to be divine interventions. In the moment, who knew? How important then for us as Christ's own disciples to stay positive on the road of life even when there are interruptions and delays. In the face of interruptions, let's not lose our tempers or our faith. Let's look to how God may be speaking to us when our plans and schedules get disrupted. In these moments, be humble. Fortified by your faith in God's greater workings, think creatively and constructively. Don't forget your empathy and sympathy in dealing with others who seem to be getting in the way of what you had intended to get done. Through them, as holy scripture affirms, you may be entertaining angels unaware. (*Hebrews 13:2*) It has happened before. It can happen again.

Particularly in my own work of ministry, seeking to be a true servant of God, I always try to keep in mind that interruptions are why I'm here. Interruptions can matter. Better said, the people interrupting with their needs like the blind Bartimaeus on the side of the road, always matter. They matter to God and they matter to me—and all who have a heart of faith.

Jesus took the time to heal Bartimaeus. But he still made it to Jerusalem to fulfill his destiny as God's son and our savior. What he did for us all on the cross of Calvary was life-giving and life-saving. Yet so too is the example he left for us from the road. May God bless and empower us to be faithful not only in goals but also in the loving, compassionate ways in which we fulfill them as men and women walking in the way of Jesus through this life on our way to eternal reward. **Amen.**