

Interrupted!

Scripture Luke 2:1 – 14

I hate interruptions! How about you? I do not enjoy detours and unexpected developments. Detours and unexpected developments in ministry are very unwanted. A senior minister told me that is why he hides in his office. He hated unexpected developments! He said he hated drop in visits or unexpected phone calls because they usually meant a death or hardship for the congregation. But there are some powerful opportunities that arise from the ministry of interruption. As a matter of fact, I think God sometimes used those accidental encounters even more than intentional ones! God often gives us a glimpse of something unexpectedly sacred along the way.

The story of the birth of Christ is full of sacred interruptions and unintentional encounters. Mary and Joseph's lives were interrupted in a way that they never imagined! The shepherds were no doubt shocked at their angelic interruption. Even Simeon who was waiting for the Messiah was surprised by his providential encounter. God has a way of interrupting our ordinary lives with something extraordinary! Perhaps our greatest challenge is to allow ourselves to be interrupted.

Today we are looking at an event in which a nameless participant uses an ordinary gesture to allow the sacred a place to enter the world. It is the brief description of a hurried and anxious husband and wife whose lives have already been interrupted by an unexpected pregnancy and now they have to make an unexpected journey at the worst possible time. Although the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted in the census was a journey of less than 70 miles, it would have been a long and treacherous journey by donkey or on foot. This is especially a difficult journey for Mary in the late stage of pregnancy. The journey was further complicated upon their arrival in Bethlehem when they find that the inn is full! There is no room at the inn. Mary and Joseph probably had been searching for hours for a place to stay. They were probably near desperation!

Have you ever been on a trip and your vehicle broke down? Have you ever taken a journey by car and your car broke down? This has never happened to me, thank God, but I feel your pain! I can feel your discouragement! I am sure you were discouraged and I am sure you were tired. You were a stranger in an unknown place and your car is in need of repair. I feel for you!

Did you ask the Lord to lead you? Did you ask the Lord to help you? I bet that you did not ask the Lord to lead you or to help. WHY?

Mary and Joseph were tired. They were dusty. They were hungry. Mary was in pain because she was going into labor. Now, I can not feel her pain, but ladies I think you can! Mary and Joseph were probably discouraged by the situation they are in. They did not want to take the journey in the first place, especially considering Mary's condition. They are in a strange town, discouraged and tired!

Mary and Joseph still trust in God. Mary and Joseph still believe in God. They trust in the Lord. They do not complain to the Lord. They ask the Lord to lead them. They ask the Lord for help!

To Mary and Joseph, the stable looked good. It was warm and dry. They probably did not even notice the smell of animals, but they did thank God for this place to stay while trusting that this was according to God's plan.

One would think that Mary and Joseph might have thought these things – Why here God? Why a stable? But Mary and Joseph knew that God's plan, that 'WHY' is not important!

Mary and Joseph know that in a lowly stable or in a regal palace, God can accomplish his work. Trusting where God leads is what matters. Yielding to God's will is what really matters.

For us, in the Sistine Chapel or in a small chapel in DE, God can accomplish his work. For us, in the magnificent cathedral of St. Patrick's in NYC or in a small church with no stain glass windows, God can accomplish his work. We need to trust where God leads us, that is what matters. We need to yield to God's will for us that is what really matters!

But even more discouraging is the fact that the inn has no room left! When they get to Bethlehem, they hear the words – ‘No room in the inn!’ This must have intensified all they were feeling. They must have gotten more discouraged. But still, they do not complain. They still ask the Lord to lead them and help them.

And then the nameless inn keeper allows the young couple to spend the night in his stable with the barn animals. Although we know nothing of the inn keeper, we sometimes think of him as a heartless man who has no concern for the young couple. Most often, we think of the inn keeper as a businessman who wishes he could sell the young couple a room but he has compassion on the young couple so he allows them to stay in his stable. Really, no one knows who he was or what he was like. One thing is certain, he allowed himself to be interrupted!

His inn was full. He had no vacancy! That is all he had to share with Mary and Joseph, and yet he did more! He found a spot for them! He thought outside the box and allowed himself to be so moved by his compassion that he found a way to serve the young couple.

We will never know the inn keeper’s name. We will never know much about him except when the time comes for Mary to give birth to Jesus, he was probably there. He was there to notice the band of shepherds arrive at the stable. He may have even noticed the bright star in the sky. Do you wonder if the inn keeper knew something significant happened that night?

The inn keeper has a small but important role in our Savior’s birth. His actions foreshadow in many ways the ministry of Jesus. The inn keeper allowed himself to be interrupted. The inn keeper allowed himself to be moved. The inn keeper allowed himself to show love and grace. Even when he had no obligation to do so, he allowed himself to be part of God’s plan.

Likewise, I think we are called to be interrupted. We are called to be mindful of the needs around us. We are called to look outside of our responsibility and obligations to serve others unexpectedly!

This Advent season is soon coming to an end. We must celebrate that God allowed God's plan for creation to be interrupted with our Savior. We celebrate the interruption allowed by those characters in the nativity story. We celebrate God's divine interruption of our lives. We celebrate God's divine interruption which intervenes when we did not realize we needed intervention. And most of all, we celebrate Christ who allowed his divinity to be interrupted to experience what it is like to be us. May we allow ourselves to be interrupted to show that same love to those around us!

Let us pray:

Now, go into the world of interruptions and be thankful for the interruptions of Mary, Joseph, the inn keeper, and most of all Jesus! Because Jesus allowed himself to be so interrupted by our needs that he sacrificed all for us. Go and likewise allow yourself to be interrupted by the needs of others.

Lord God, thank you for your Son, Jesus. Thank you that just as Mary and Joseph found you faithful, we can also trust you in all things. May we look to you daily during this Advent season and beyond to find your guidance as we yield to the plans you have for our lives.

We pray this in the name of the Babe in the manger – AMEN.