

Bed Rock of Faith

Interruptions

Text: Malachi 4:1-2a

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13(Series C, 23rd Sunday after Pentecost) Isaiah 12

Luke 21:5-19

Before all these things take place, however, you will be arrested and persecuted; you will be handed over to be tried in synagogues and be put in prison; you will be brought before kings and rulers for my sake. But not a single hair from your heads will be lost. Stand firm, and you will save yourselves.

Let us pray:

Our neighbour to the South just had their midterm election, and all the potential and threatening narratives of outcomes and events around the world seem to be written into this Gospel we have heard a moment ago.

I would like to draw your attention the Interruptions. Interruptions can be annoying. You are watching a movie on TV and just when the story is getting exciting an advertisement comes on destroying the moment. You decide that it's about time you replied to the letters that you have received.

No sooner do you get started and someone in the family want some help or just want to talk, and there goes all you good intentions. Sometimes interruptions, though initially annoying, can be creative and constructive.

A pastor tells the story of how he was interrupted by a phone call at a youth meeting where he was leading a Bible study. The pastor admitted that he felt annoyed being interrupted at a critical moment when he was coming to the main point of the study and the young people were following him intently.

He was gone for the rest of the meeting. Some members of the group expressed their annoyance that the pastor had even answered his phone. The pastor came back just as everyone was leaving and told them that an unknown young man had been on the line.

He had decided to take his own life but wanted to give someone – anyone - one last chance at arguing why he should continue to live. The interruption to the Bible study interrupted and stopped this young man's intentions.

The whole story of the Bible can be looked at from the viewpoint of interruptions. The devastating effects of sin interrupt the peace and harmony of life in the Garden of Eden. Sin interrupts God's plans for the world and so he interrupts sin by becoming a human being who lives among us filled with grace and truth and dies for us.

Take a character like Jonah fleeing from God who had commanded him to go to Nineveh and preach repentance. His escape was interrupted by God's big fish that swallowed him and while in the belly of the fish he repented and then went on to Nineveh.

God's people were caught drifting away from God's grace He sent prophets to interrupt their drift away from him and bring them back into a relationship with their Creator and Saviour.

The story of Jesus in the gospel is one of interruptions. The announcement of the birth of Jesus interrupts a young girl's life and her wedding plans. The silence of the night is interrupted when angels announce the birth of the Messiah.

As the disciples stroll into the town of Nain enjoying a friendly chat with Jesus they are interrupted by the loud wailing and crying as a group of mourners pass by. Death is always a powerful interruption to our well-laid plans.

Interruptions are events in our lives that can't be forced back any more than the sea can be kept 3 metres from the shore line. In my ministry I have seen many interruptions in people's lives.

A young 20 year old boy, fit and popular with his mates, last winter was in Cuba with friends and in May was in Norway visited his father and in September he was dead, his young life was interrupted by cancer. Without a doubt some interruptions are painful. On the other hand, interruptions can bring joy.

Today's difficult gospel text makes us aware of the interruption that will affect the whole world. Jesus is leaving the temple and he is looking around at one of the most magnificent structures in the world at that time. He tells his disciples that this grand monument will be destroyed.

We know that this happened at the hands of the Romans, but even if the Romans hadn't touched the building, the forces of earthquake, fire, storm, and plain old neglect would lead to the ruin of the temple much the same as the once magnificent structures in Greece and Rome.

The history of the temple will be interrupted and brought to an end, he says, and it was. He goes on and says that everything we cherish, every institution and tradition, every treasure that we count on and store up will be interrupted and brought to an end.

Wars, earthquakes, famines, and other disasters in nature, persecutions when family members will rise up against other members of a family, will interrupt our way of life and the peace we enjoy.

Families will be interrupted, businesses will be interrupted, governments will be interrupted. We can see this happening in our world. Two years ago, our world was interrupted by a deadly virus called Covid-19 which claimed thousands of lives.

Peace and safety in our world and in our community are very fragile things and can easily be interrupted by fear. The place that Christ had in the hearts of the people of our nation has been interrupted and replaced with all kind of other religious and political values that can easily be understood as Christian but clearly they are false.

The interruptions that we experience almost on a daily basis are reminders that things in this world are very uncertain. We are reminded that at any time our own life will be interrupted and that there will come a time when the history of our world will be interrupted.

This last and final interruption will happen when Jesus comes to establish his kingdom. One thing that will never be interrupted, that is, the love that our God in heaven has for us.

St Paul says, "*Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present or the future, nor powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

Whoever believes and trusts in Jesus and his saving work on the cross, and whoever holds on to the Good Shepherd's hand as they walk life's journey, and listens to his voice and follows his ways when everything else passes away will receive the crown of eternal life. Even though the history of our world will be interrupted, nothing is able to interrupt God's love for us.

Nothing can destroy this fact. All kinds of disasters may happen to us in our lives and to our world, but that one fact stands forever. God loves us and his saving work will not be interrupted.

No amount of interruption in our world can take away from us the grace and love of Jesus. It is that love that he has given to us freely on the cross that will stand by us when disasters in our world threaten us and overwhelm us like a giant tidal wave of fear.

Every possession, every power and authority, everything that we cherish in this world will disappear some day, either at our death or when the last day comes, but what will not disappear is this – God's kingdom and our place in it as citizens of heaven and heirs of eternal life.

When Christ bursts into this world on the last day, that will be the last interruption that we will ever experience. There will no more interruptions by sickness, death, wars, natural disasters, accidents, crime or whatever. We will be taken into God's presence and join those gathered around the throne of God.

The words of the psalm are very helpful when we think of this final interruption, *"We will not be afraid, even if the earth is shaken and mountains fall into the ocean depths; even if the seas roar and rage, and the hills are shaken by the violence. ... The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge (Ps. 46).*

In the meantime, we need to deal with the interruptions that take place in our everyday life, especially those interruptions that bring us fear and grief. The apostle Paul had to deal with these kinds of interruptions often. But nothing interrupted his trust, faith in Jesus.

- How easily is our faith in Jesus interrupted?
- How often do we allow or even try to find interruptions that keep us away from reading God's Word, praying and worshipping together with our fellow believers?

Let us take a breath and stop living in the fear that more terrible things will happen. Yes, of course they will, they always have, from the beginning of time not a day goes by on this earth without something dreadful happening to someone, or to many, and the instant access to media headlines confirms the fear we are conditioned to have to keep us from moving forward in faith.

But life is filled with many wonderful and life-giving moments also, if we but look for and turn to the light to find, see, and appreciate them. God grant that the Holy Spirit would interrupt every sin, every temptation, every fear and doubt, and remind us everyday that God's love for us is uninterrupted. God grant that our commitment and faith be as uninterrupted as God's commitment to us.

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