

Poole Bay Methodist Circuit worship
Sunday 21st July 2024

Where is God in life's interruptions? – Reverend Tony Cavanagh

Welcome

Prayer

Lord, you are with us wherever we go.
Your presence constantly encourages us
to step out into new adventures.
Forgive us when we try to limit you.
Make us ready to respond to your voice,
and to seek the new things to which you call us.

Amen.

Hymn: STF 513 – Take this moment, sign, and space

The music and words can also be found here: [YouTube Link](#)

Take this moment, sign and space;
take my friends around;
here among us make the place
where Your love is found.

Take the time to call my name,
take the time to mend
who I am and what I've been,
and I've failed to tend.

Take the tiredness of my days,
take my past regret,
letting Your forgiveness touch
all I can't forget.

Take the little child in me,
scared of growing old;
help him/her here to find his/her worth
made in Christ's own mould.

Take my talents, take my skills,
take what's yet to be;
let my life be Yours,
and yet, let it still be me.

Opening Prayers (Based on the hymn we have just sung / listened to.)

Take this moment, sign and space,

We give thanks for this time. Time to worship you our God. Time to appreciate our world and those we share our lives with. Let us be aware of your love.

Take the time to call my name,

Thank you that you know each one of us. Loving each one of us. You know us, even the bits of us that make us uncomfortable, the bits we hide, that bring us shame. You love us always.

Take the tiredness of my days,

We know we make mistakes. We get things wrong. We paralyse ourselves with self-doubt and the knowledge we fall short. Help us accept your forgiveness, your unconditional love.

Take the little child in me.

We get scared. Fear the future. Fear that we are unworthy. Fear being ourselves... in your image. Help us to know our worth. Our potential. Your love for us.

Take my talents, take my skills, take what's yet to be.

Thank you for all you have given each of us. Our individuality. The opportunities each new day brings. Your unconditional love. We are yours and yet you delight in our individuality. Thank you. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Reading: Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

³²So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

⁵³When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. ⁵⁴As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. ⁵⁵They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Reflection on the reading:

Some weeks as I am preparing for Sunday, I read the gospel and I just immediately think to myself, "Yes, that's speaking directly to me, that describes my life." Today's gospel (Mark 6:30-34, 53-56) is one of those. And I'm betting it describes your life too. So I want to ask you two questions to see if today's gospel fits your life the way I think it does.

Here's the first. Have you ever made plans for your life?

And the second. Have your plans ever been interrupted?

Chances are you answered yes to both of those questions. We've all made plans. Maybe it was for an hour, a day, a weekend, a holiday, our work, finances, family. And we've all experienced the interruption of those plans by circumstances that changed or the unexpected that happened. Every one of us could probably say about today's gospel, "Well... That's all about me. That describes my life." Today's gospel describes the tension in which we live. And it's the same tension in which Jesus and his disciples lived.

The apostles have just returned from teaching, casting out demons, and anointing and curing the sick. They're telling Jesus about everything they taught and did. He says to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." He's made plans and has some expectations of what will happen. A boat ride across the lake will take them to a quiet place and give them some time to rest and eat. Or so he thought. His plans, however, are interrupted by the many people who run ahead to meet him and the disciples as soon as the boat lands. His expectations are unmet. There is no quiet and there is no rest. There is only the great crowd of people, lost like sheep without a shepherd, interrupting what he had planned.

Hasn't that happened to you? The circumstances may be different, but we all know what it's like to have life interrupted. What is it they say about "The best-laid plans..."?

We all live in the tension between our plans and interruptions, our expectations and the unexpected, life as we want it to be and life as it happens. Every one of us could tell a story about that. It happens in small ways and in large ways. It's the dog waking you up early from what you thought would be a quiet hour, or a day that had nothing on the calendar that turns into a day of one thing after another. It's taking on a new responsibility and finding that you are not doing what you planned, and you are doing what you never expected. It's a diagnosis that interrupts your life plans. It's a shattered dream, a divorce, a death. Our life plans get interrupted in a thousand different ways and the unexpected happens all along the road of life.

I wonder what that looks like for you today. What are the plans or expectations you have for your life? And what are the interruptions or unexpected happenings with which you are dealing? Where is God in all of that for you?

When our life plans are interrupted it's easy and tempting to work even harder to make it happen, reinforce our boundaries, blame others, rage about things not working out, or pray that God will make it all go the way we want. But Jesus, in our Gospel doesn't do any of that. He doesn't turn the boat around when he sees the crowd. He doesn't get angry or resentful. He doesn't blame or complain. He doesn't ignore or deny the interruption. He's simply present to what is before him.

We often hold our plans and the interruptions in opposition, as if it is one or the other. But what if it's always both? What if one is not necessarily better or more important than the other? What if we could be equally present to the plans and the interruptions? What if we trusted that God's spirit was present and moving in both?

Now, I don't mean here that God picks or causes one over the other but that within both the plans and the interruptions God is present and calling. I am not suggesting that we take a *que sera sera* attitude, that we give up planning, or that we just stop caring. What I am suggesting is that everyday life with all its plans and interruptions is our most important spiritual practice.

Everyday life is where God shows up. It's where we learn about ourselves. It's a school of love. It teaches patience and offers opportunities to soften our hearts and act with compassion. It invites us into the mystery of creation. How we relate to another mirrors our relationship to God. We learn to forgive. We practice faithfulness and hope amidst the uncertainty of life.

That's not to take anything away from prayer, study, outreach, charitable giving, going to church, or any of the other things we might think of as our spiritual practices. It's to recognise that all those are about being in relationship and living everyday life. That means that we must learn to see more deeply and be more present to whatever is, whether planned or unexpected, desired or unwanted.

Faithfulness is about being as intentional and caring toward the interruptions as we are to our plans. Isn't that how Jesus lived? That's what we see in today's gospel. And throughout Jesus' life. Remember the stories before today's reading? Jesus and the disciples get in a boat and leave the crowds behind. A storm arises. Jesus is asleep. The disciples interrupt his nap. He calms the sea and the wind (Mark 4:35-39). As soon as they get across the sea and Jesus steps out of the boat he's immediately met by a man with an unclean spirit. Jesus calls the spirit out of the man (Mark 5:1-13). They go back across the sea, and he is again surrounded by a crowd. Jairus comes to beg Jesus' help for his dying daughter. Jesus goes with him but then gets interrupted by the touch of the haemorrhaging woman. She's healed and Jesus continues on when Jairus sends messengers who come to say it's useless. The girl is dead. He raises the girl. (Mark 5:21-43) He goes to his hometown and teaches but is interrupted by questions and unbelief (Mark 6:1-6). And then we come to today's gospel. It's one interruption after another.

All along the way Jesus is present and faithful to whatever and whoever is before him, whether planned or unexpected. That's not just about tending to the lives of others. That's also how we tend to our own lives. That's how Jesus tended to his life. He knows the spirit of God "blows where it chooses" (John 3:8). That means we are always to be discerning the movement of the spirit in our lives, in plans and interruptions alike.

What is that movement in the plans and interruptions of your life today? In what way is God present and calling in the midst of that? What do you see? What might be hidden at the intersection of your plans and the unexpected?

Maybe there is always something of God hidden at that intersection. The feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:35-44) and Jesus walking on the water (Mark 6:45-52) are hidden at the intersection of Jesus' planned get away and the interruption by the crowd. The crowd that interrupted Jesus' plans is the five thousand, "and all ate and were filled" (Mark 6:42).

Those two stories, however, are not part of today's lectionary reading. They fall between the first half of today's gospel, Mark 6:30-34, and the second half, Mark 6:53-56. What if they were not omitted or

excluded from today's reading but were intended to be understood as hidden? What if abundance and nourishment, presence and reassurance, are somehow hidden at the intersection of our plans and interruptions?

What if the fringe of Jesus' cloak (Mark 6:56) is always being made available to us? Yes, we have hopes and desires for ourselves and our lives but let's not lose sight that God also has hopes and desires for us and for our lives too. Amen

Hymn: STF 530 – To be in your presence

The music and words can also be found here: [YouTube Link](#)

To be in your presence
to sit at your feet
when your love surrounds me
and makes me complete

To rest in your presence
not rushing away
to cherish each moment
here I would stay

Chorus:

*This is my desire, o Lord
this is my desire
this is my desire, o Lord
this is my desire*

Chorus

Noel Richards

Prayers of intercession

Today, instead of using lots of words for our prayers of intercession and our prayers for the world, we are going to hold a couple of times of quiet, and I simply invite you to join me in bringing your own prayers into those spaces.

Firstly, I invite you to spend a moment praying for those close to you: people in your family, your friends, perhaps members of church, who are in your thoughts.

It might be the people you are worried about, or just someone who you know needs to feel God's presence today. In the stillness, hold that person, and their situation, in the light of God's love.

[Pause for a minute or two. You might like to play some quiet music during the stillness].

Come Lord God. Answer our prayers, in Jesus name.

And now, in this space, I invite you to bring a situation or person further afield. Perhaps a story from the news, or a situation or story that has found its way to you. It is probably about people or a person you will never meet, but in this moment, you want to hold those people in prayer.

In the stillness, we pray for a better world.

[Pause for a minute or two. You might like to play some quiet music during the stillness].

Come Lord God. You know the names, the faces, the situations that we've held in our hearts and minds over these past few minutes.

Answer our prayers, in Jesus name. Amen.

Hymn: STF 434 – Rock of ages, cleft for me

The music and words can also be found here: [YouTube Link](#)

Rock of ages, cleft for me,
hide me now, my refuge be;
let the water and the blood
from your wounded side which flowed,
be for sin the double cure,
cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Not the labours of my hands
can fulfil your law's demands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears for ever flow,
all for sin could not atone:
you must save and you alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to your cross I cling;
naked, come to you for dress,
helpless, look to you for grace;
stained by sin, to you I cry:
'Wash me, Saviour, or I die!'

While I draw this fleeting breath,
when my eyelids close in death,
when I soar through realms unknown,
bow before the judgement throne:
hide me then, my refuge be,
Rock of ages, cleft for me.

*Jubilate Hymns version of Rock of ages, cleft for me
Augustus M Toplady (1740 - 1778)
© Jubilate Hymns Ltd*

Closing Prayer

God of all our days,
our beginning and our end,
help us to walk with you;
to trust you at every turning of the way;
to follow where you lead us;
and to go where you send us.
In all the ups and downs of life,
in times when we are certain about what we need to do
and in times when we doubt that you are with us,
open our ears to hear your voice;
open our eyes to see you at work,
and open our hearts to trust you in every step of our journey.

Amen.