

June 28, 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Mark 5:21-43

Two people in great distress do what a third, the Gerasene demoniac, has already done: they interrupt and rearrange Jesus' day.

by [Cleophus J. LaRue](#) in the [June 24, 2015](#) issue

How often are we told to plan out our days in order to make the most effective use of our time? But well-planned days are not always our most effective days. Sometimes the days filled with interruptions, detours, and unexpected demands prove to be the most rewarding for us—and the most transformative for those we serve.

In this week's Gospel reading, two people in great distress do what a third, the Gerasene demoniac, has already done: they interrupt and rearrange Jesus' day. It is in his willingness to flip the script and be redirected by their desperate pleas that healing comes for all involved. Jesus seems to take the interruptions and rearranging in stride. In Jesus we see no flash of anger at being interrupted, no musing over what will have to be put off for another day, no hand-wringing over best-laid plans gone astray. He simply addresses the needs before him.

Jairus, casting aside every entitlement to rank and prestige, falls at the feet of this itinerant rabbi with a desperate plea for his little daughter. As a synagogue ruler, Jairus is regarded as a very important person but not necessarily a spiritual one. But in an act of faith, he begs Jesus repeatedly to come and lay his hands on his child. His plea and his prayer are that the divine power he so desperately needs for his daughter will be made manifest in the unlikely person of Jesus.

As Jesus makes his way to Jairus's home, a woman makes her way through the crowd and touches one of the four tassels that Jesus, a devout Jew, wears on his outer garment. She has been suffering from hemorrhage for 12 years, and she sees Jesus as her last hope. No doubt she has heard of his healing power, and perhaps she shares the ancient view that the healer's own person is so potent that his

clothing or even his shadow can bear that power.

A deep desire for healing thrusts both people into Jesus' presence. Jairus approaches Jesus driven by concern for another's life, while the woman comes to him out of a desperate desire to save her own.

We do not know what Jesus had planned for this particular day. But the unfolding narrative does seem to shout, detour! People in need literally block his path, stop him in his tracks, and interrupt his day. In obedience to God's will, Jesus stops to hear their pleas and meet their needs. It's not always the planned day that renders us most useful; sometimes what renders our days most effective is our ability to see the hand of God in the unscheduled needs of the people. Ministry often presents us with one crisis after another. Over time, those who are tied to a schedule lose their ability to be flexible in their dealings with others. We are blessed more than we know by the interruptions in our lives.

A recent church gathering found a line of cars parked at a church at noontime. A woman in need saw this and rushed inside, thinking they were handing out food for those experiencing hunger in her town—only to be told that she had come to the church on the wrong day. The food giveaway was scheduled for the next week.

The woman was embarrassed for interrupting the Bible study. But she replied that her family needed food that day, not next week. They apologized and said that she would simply have to wait until the twice-monthly food giveaway came around again. With a look of disappointment, the woman backed out of the church door and walked away empty-handed.

Then another interruption occurred—a transformative interruption. Several people got up from their Bible study and followed the woman out the door. They did their best to meet her needs from their own resources. A couple of the women even offered to give her a ride to the grocery store and then back to her home with the food they helped her to purchase for her family. Somehow or another, in that interrupted Bible study, they were able to hear in the distressed woman's voice more than a plea for food. They heard God's invitation to partner in the work of making the world that God so loves whole again.

Interruptions bless us—if only we can take time to discern the presence of God. When we sense God's presence, those interruptions often detour into invitations to partner in the healing of the world.

No one should fault a church for scheduling a food giveaway on a particular day. After all, it does not have a limitless supply of food to hand out. But the people who interrupted their own Bible study, followed the woman out the door, and tried to meet her needs from their limited funds are to be commended. Interruptions have a way of forcing us to see—and hopefully to participate in—God’s transformative actions in the world, even when other, equally important matters lay claim to our well-planned calendars.

Our challenge is to be open to such interruptions and the different ways they come before us. The inflexible calendar is not the thing that should guide us through our day. Rather we should be guided by those unscheduled occurrences that often appear before us as untimely interruptions. In them, we are most likely to partner with God in the great work of redeeming, healing, and restoring broken humanity.