

INTERRUPTED BY GOD

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps I am still feeling the aftereffects of the long lines I experienced during the Christmas season, or maybe it is just the continuing reality that I am essentially an impatient person ... but I was struck by the first four words of the Gospel reading:

The people were waiting... (Luke 3:15)

Being the visual person that I am, I began to imagine the scene playing out in my mind. Here is what I saw ...

John the Baptist is standing waist deep in the Jordan River.

- Two of his assistants are standing on the edge of the river, helping the baptismal candidates get into and out of the water.
- Another assistant is announcing the names and sins of those who have come (because this was a baptism for the forgiveness of sins, according to Matthew's account)
- The rest of the assistants are herding the people into an organized single file line.

As each candidate for baptism approached the edge of the water, the announcing assistant gets a name and a general description of the sin to be confessed, and relays that information on to John.

- "Zechariah, from Judea, got his cow out of a ditch on the Sabbath."
- "David, from Jerusalem, coveting his neighbor's wife."
- "Bathsheba ... his neighbor's wife."

Each would step into the Jordan river, and John would say, "Do you renounce the devil and all his wicked ways?" They would respond "I do." John would baptize them. And the crowd would cheer.

"Next" the call would go out. And so it would go on, in an almost rhythmic fashion. Into the water. Out of the water. Next! "Keep it moving!"

- John and his disciples have been doing this for some time now. They have the system running smoothly.

But all of the sudden, this highly efficient, rhythmic baptismal process, is interrupted by a man. Picture it with me.

"Next! What's your name, buddy?"

"Jesus of Nazareth."

"Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee. Got it. What sin are you confessing today?"

"Nothing. I've never sinned."

Long pause.

"Ok. Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee. Sinless."

It is not a part of Luke's gospel but when Jesus stepped into the water, John said something like this:

- "Wait a minute. This is backwards. You should be baptizing me."
- To which Jesus replied, "No, John, this needs to happen. Baptize me, just like you have been doing for everyone else."
- So John did. And something utterly incredible happened.

Luke records that:

Heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on (Jesus) in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22)

This was not the first day John had held a mass baptism. It is quite apparent from the Biblical accounts that he had done it many times before. In every way, this was an ordinary day at an ordinary place, filled with ordinary people doing their ordinary thing.

But on this ordinary day in this ordinary place, among these ordinary people doing their ordinary thing, God showed up. This was a day that was interrupted by God.

God interrupting the ordinary activities of ordinary people isn't a new thing, and it wasn't new one the day Jesus was baptized. The Scriptures are filled with such interruptions:

- Abram was contently living in Ur when God interrupted his day and told him to move to a new land where he would become the father of many nations
- David was contently watching over his sheep when God interrupted his day and told him to fight the giant Goliath
- God interrupted Paul's (then known as Saul) day and blinded him while he was traveling to Damascus to kill Christians.
- The Acts passage read earlier today ... An ordinary day when God interrupted and sent the Holy Spirit on a group of Samaritan believers

Do you think God still interrupts the lives of ordinary people today?

- Don't answer quickly. Think about it for a few moments.
- We live and operate within a theological framework where we emphasize that God is with us always.
 - I will never leave you or forsake you...
 - Lo I am with you always ...
- I'm not asking if you believe that God is here right now. I assume that your presence in this service indicates that you believe God is here. And I am hopeful that you believe that God will go with you when you walk out the doors later this morning.

I am asking if you think there is any possibility that God could interrupt an ordinary day in your ordinary life in ordinary Springfield Ohio at ordinary Grace Lutheran Church and do something incredibly unforgettable. Do you?

- I think the reality is that most Christians – those in this room and Christians around the world – believe it **could** happen but it **probably** won't ... and even if it did, it probably wouldn't happen wherever I happened to be.
- In our more honest moments, we might even confess that we aren't really confident that God knows who we are or that He really has any idea of our particular needs. (Tom who?)
- We read passages of Scripture like:

And my God will all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus... (Philippians 4:19)

... **AND SAY** "He doesn't really mean my needs" **OR** ...

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (Matthew 10)

... **AND RESPOND** "At least He doesn't have to count as high as He used to!" ... never really believing that God knows me so well that He actually saw today's hair as it washed down the drain.

But what if the God of the universe actually does know you and care about you? What if God actually does intend to do something amazing that you personally could witness? Wouldn't that be wonderful?

And so when I read, "The people were waiting ..." I totally get that. Been there. Felt that. I know what it is like to wait on God – ordinary days, ordinary places, ordinary me.

- But when I read farther in the text, I find that it actually says:

The people were waiting expectantly. (Luke 3:15)

Not just waiting, but waiting expectantly.

Let me suggest to you that there is a difference here ... a difference between "waiting" and "waiting expectantly." I want to make a two statements about that difference ...

1. **WAITING EXPECTANTLY IS BASED ON WHAT GOD HAS PROMISED TO DO**

Look again at verse 15:

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. (Luke 3:15)

The Messiah? Where did they get that idea? From the Scriptures, of course.

- From the third chapter in Genesis through the Old Testament prophets, the Jews had been waiting expectantly for the promised Messiah.

You know many of those verses. We have heard them recited in our worship services throughout the advent season ... verses like:

The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel... (Isaiah 7:14)

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given... (Isaiah 9:6)

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

These people were able to wait expectantly because, in part, they knew **what** God said He was going to do. God promised a Messiah, so they expected that a Messiah would come. Could it be John? Maybe.

In order to wait expectantly for God, I need to know what God says He will do. That means there is absolutely no substitute for reading and studying the Bible. You've heard that before. But, please, I am encouraging you to – along with all of your other New Year's resolutions – commit yourself to reading the Bible this year.

Also ... In order to wait expectantly for God, I need to understand the difference between what God says He will do and what I tell God He ought to do.

- Over the years of my ministry, I have talked with many Christians who have told me that they no longer expect anything from God because He has failed to deliver on some big ticket item they want (e.g., healing, children, job)
- And because God hasn't done what they wanted, they no longer think He will do anything
- God invites me to ask for what I want, but my asking in no way obligates Him to respond. If I get those things, I can be thankful. If I don't get them, I cannot be angry or upset with God.

2. WAITING EXPECTANTLY MEANS I BELIEVE GOD WILL DO INDEED DO WHAT HE SAYS

It is not just that I know what He says ... that is intellectual (head) stuff. Waiting expectantly also means that I am convinced that what God has said will indeed occur. It moves out of my head and into the rest of my body.

When you firmly believe something will occur, everything about you moves in that direction.

On October 5, 1979 I asked this cute little cheerleader named Karen Bryant to marry me. I believed with all my heart that she would say "Yes." (She did.) I was so convinced I bought a ring before I asked, and I had it with me when I asked. And when she said "Yes" I put it on her finger.

Think about all those episodes of the Bachelor you have been watching. The final episode ... he **always** has the ring. He **always** pops the question. She **always** says "Yes." Of course, they break up three days later, but everything the bachelor does communicates to the viewers that he knows she will say "yes." In fact the episodes aired before the final one all about getting ready to propose because he knows she will say "Yes."

So what did these people in our text do? What do we see reported about them that would communicate that they believed God would send the Messiah?

1. **They made sure they were in the place where God was at work.**

The earlier verses in this chapter of Luke and the other gospel accounts of Christ's baptism make it clear that this was no easy task.

- Matthew talks about how John was "preaching in the Desert of Judea" and how "people went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan."
- They weren't just going across the street or turning on the internet. For almost all of them, to be present was a journey of more than one day.

But they believed that God was going to do what He had promised ... and the Messiah just might possibly be John. **And if John was the Messiah, they were not about to miss the moment.**

- It was as if the prayer of their heart was "Lord, help me to be wherever You are going to show up."
- So where is that place?
 - Therein lies the challenge. We don't get a schedule from God months in advance.
 - But if we are faithfully in a right relationship with God, we can begin to "sense" where He is moving. And getting to that place will be a priority for us...**if we are waiting expectantly.**

2. **They prepared their hearts so they would be ready to receive what God would do.**

In our text, the people were repenting of their sins through an act of baptism.

- That is, they were not only making sure they were in the right physical place but also that they were in the right spiritual place – that their hearts were right with God.
- They believed that God was going to do what He had promised, and they wanted to be ready when it happened.

Waiting expectantly means I am putting myself in the right place physically and spiritually so that when God moves, I am ready to experience it.

CONCLUSION

Wouldn't it have been wonderful to have been present on that day ... to hear God's voice call out from the heavens "This is my Son!"

Wouldn't it be wonderful to see God do something spectacular in our midst today?

- My heart breaks at the thought that many Christians have no expectation that God is moving and preparing to do something amazing in our world. I pray that you are not one of those Christians. I pray that you are waiting expectantly.

As we prepare now to express our faith through the Apostles' Creed and celebrate the gift of God in the sacrament of Holy Communion ... let me encourage you to think about your own faith journey.

- Do you believe that the God of the universe knows and cares who you are?
- Do you believe that it is even remotely possible that this God – described in our Scriptures today, proclaimed through the various elements of our worship – might want to interrupt and make Himself known in your life in some very special way?
- Are you waiting expectantly ... or just waiting?

In the Name of Him whose baptism we celebrate today, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

