

Reflections on Labor in Word & Song
08/31/2025 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

Scripture Lesson: Mark 5:21-42

Pew Bible N.T. pg. ??

²¹ When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him by the sea. ²² Then one of the leaders of the synagogue, named Jairus, came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³ and pleaded with him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.” ²⁴ So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years. ²⁶ She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had, and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ for she said, “If I but touch his cloak, I will be made well.” ²⁹ Immediately her flow of blood stopped, and she felt in her body that she was healed. ³⁰ Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my cloak?” ³¹ And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” ³² He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” ³⁵ While he was still speaking, some people came from the synagogue leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” ³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the synagogue leader, “Do not be afraid; only believe.” ³⁷ He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the synagogue leader’s house, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” ⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ Taking her by the hand, he said to her, “Talitha kum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” ⁴² And immediately the girl stood up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³ He strictly ordered them that no one should know this and told them to give her something to eat.

Response to the Word

One: This is the Word of God for the people of God

All: Thanks be to God!

***Hymn FWS #2185: “One Great Peace”**

- 1) This thread I weave, this step I dance, this stone I carve, this ball I bounce,
This nail I drive, this pearl I string, this flag I wave, this note I sing.
- 2) This pot I shape, this fire I light, this fence I leap, this bone I knit,
This seed I nurse, this rift I mend, this child I raise, this earth I tend,
- 3) This check I write, this march I join, this faith I state, this truth I sign,
This is small part, in one small place, of one heart's beat for one great peace.

How often are you working on a major task or deadline, and the interruptions just won't go away? How do you deal with them? The 5th Chapter of Mark's Gospel shows Jesus dealing with two interruptions in a short period of time and handling them with grace. Whatever his intended task was, the episode focuses on two healings. In the first one, a prominent local religious leader named Jairus asks Jesus to heal his adolescent daughter, who lays on her deathbed at home. On his way to Jairus' home, an unclean woman touches Jesus' robe, knowing she will be healed from 12 years of hemorrhaging.

Yes, even Jesus' interruption is interrupted.

Henri Nouwen wrote of a now-famous conversation which helped him think about interruptions as something other than a bother. He writes, “While visiting the University of Notre Dame, where I had been a teacher for a few years, I met an older experienced professor who had spent most of his life there. And while we strolled over the beautiful campus, he said with a certain melancholy in his voice, “You know . . . my whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I discovered that my interruptions were my work.”

What if we saw interruptions as a gift? What if, instead of resisting them out of frustration, we saw them as an opportunity to be open to God?

Nouwen went on to be transformed by the professor's statement. He later wrote, “It has been the interruptions to my everyday life that have most revealed to me the divine mystery of which I am a part . . . All of these interruptions presented themselves as opportunities . . . invited me to look in a new way at my identity before God. Each interruption took something away from me; each interruption offered something new.”

Interruptions confront our illusion that we are in control of our time. Notice how we talk about time as though it were a commodity: we have it, we spend it, we want more. Instead we should remember that in the beginning, God created time by giving us the rhythms of day and night, work and Sabbath. Time is a gift. How can we receive it well? The Protestant work ethic has formed us to think that time, like money, is not something to be “wasted.” Marva Dawn wrote a book about worship called *A Royal Waste of Time*. Her title suggests that what the world deems wasteful – worship – we see as honoring God.

Is your task at hand really so important? Or does God mean for you to be doing something other than what you—or your business, or your church, or your institution—think is important?

To Jairus, it may have seemed that Jesus was wasting time in choosing to stop and engage the hemorrhaging woman. His daughter was dying! To the crowd, Jesus' choice may have likewise seemed wasteful because he was delaying helping a prominent man to strike up a conversation with a pariah, whose medical condition made her perpetually unclean.

Nevertheless, the outcast was made whole because he decided to stop. He restored not only her health, but he restored her to the community of the faithful. But she was only made well because he was willing to be interrupted.

When faced with interruptions, what if we used this question for evaluation: “Even if I am on my way to doing something good—something for my church, something for my family, something

for my community, and I am interrupted by someone who needs help, is this interruption the thing that God wants me to do first. Or instead?"

One blogger's reflection prompts me to offer an alternative to the now clichéd WWJD. Instead, we might want to have cute little paperweights on our desks that read "What would Simon of Cyrene do?" Interruptions are a way to take up the cross and deny ourselves. But like Simon of Cyrene, if we see the interruption through to the end, we may indeed be blessed to have carried Jesus' cross for him.

Special Music: *"God Has Work For Us To Do"*
Bryan Latimer, Soloist

by Mark A. Miller

Reflection: *"On Work"*
Jim Doane, Reader

by Kahlil Gibran

You work that you may keep pace with the earth and the soul of the earth.
For to be idle is to become a stranger unto the seasons,
and to step out of life's procession, that marches in majesty
and proud submission towards the infinite.

When you work you are a flute through whose heart
the whispering of the hours turns to music.
Which of you would be a reed, dumb and silent,
when all else sings together in unison?

Always, you have been told that work is a curse and labor a misfortune.
But I say to you that when you work,
you fulfil a part of earth's furthest dream,
assigned to you when that dream was born;
And in keeping yourself with labor you are in truth loving life,
And to love life through labor is to be intimate with life's inmost secret.
But if you, in your pain, call it an affliction
and the support of the flesh a curse written upon your brow,
Then I answer that naught but the sweat of your brow shall wash away
that which is written.

You have been told also that life is darkness,
and in your weariness you echo what was said by the weary...
But when you work with love, you bind yourself to yourself,
and to one another, and to God.

And what is it to work with love?
It is to weave the cloth with threads drawn from your heart,
even as if your beloved were to wear that cloth.

It is to build a house with affection,
even as if your beloved were to dwell in that house.
It is to sow seeds with tenderness and reap the harvest with joy,
even as if your beloved were to eat the fruit.

It is to charge all things you fashion with a breath of your own spirit,
And to know that all the blessed dead are standing about you and watching.

Often have I heard you say, as if speaking in sleep,
 "He who works in marble, and finds the shape of his own soul
 in the stone, is nobler than he who ploughs the soil.
And he who seizes the rainbow to lay it on a cloth in the likeness of man,
 is more than he who makes the sandals for our feet."
But I say, not in sleep but in the over-wakefulness of noontide,
 that the wind speaks not more sweetly to the giant oaks
 than to the least of all the blades of grass;
And he alone is great who turns the voice of the wind
 into a song made sweeter by his own loving.
Work is love made visible.

And if you cannot work with love but only with distaste,
 it is better that you should leave your work and sit at the gate
 of the temple and take alms of those who work with joy.
For if you bake bread with indifference, you bake a bitter bread
 that feeds but half man's hunger.
And if you grudge the crushing of the grapes,
 your grudge distils a poison in the wine.
And if you sing though as angels, and love not the singing,
 you muffle man's ears to the voices of the day
 and the voices of the night.

So I say again: work is love made visible.

***Closing Hymn UMH #581: “Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service”**

- 1) Lord, whose love in humble service bore the weight of human need,
 Who upon the cross, forsaken, offered mercy's perfect deed:
 We, your servants, bring the worship, not of voice alone, but heart;
 Consecrating to your purpose every gift that you impart.
- 2) Still your children wander homeless; still the hungry cry for bread;
 Still the captives long for freedom; still in grief we mourn our dead.
 As, O Lord, your deep compassion healed the sick and freed the soul,
 Use the love your Spirit kindles still to save and make us whole.
- 3) As we worship, grant us vision, till your love's revealing light
 In its height and depth and greatness dawns upon our quickened sight,
 Making known the needs and burdens your compassion bids us bear,
 Stirring us to tireless striving, your abundant life to share.
- 4) Called by worship to your service, forth in your dear name we go,
 To the child, the youth, the aged, love in living deeds to show;
 Hope and health, good will and comfort, counsel, aid and peace we give,
 That your servants, Lord, in freedom, may your mercy know and live.