

I

Some of the most significant moments in my life have begun with an interruption. For example, on a rainy, humid afternoon, as I was busy moving into my freshman dorm, there was a knock on the door, and when I answered it, there stood a blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl holding a clipboard. I had no way at the time of knowing that that interruption would change the course of my life forever.

II

Life is like that, isn't it? Oftentimes, some of the most significant moments in our lives begin with a simple interruption. Oftentimes, in the moment, we're not even aware of their significance. In the words of British theologians Paul McCartney and John Lenin, life is what happens when you're busy making other plans.

III

Our story this morning involves an interruption. This winter and spring, we're making our way through the gospel according to Mark. And when we come to our story this morning, Jesus has begun his public ministry, and his fame has begun to spread among the little fishing communities nestled along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

So listen now for a Word from God from Mark 2:1-12.

2 When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2 So many gathered

around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. 3 Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 8 At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? 10 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— 11 "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." 12 And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Jesus has returned to the little village of Capernaum, and people have come from all over to see this one who teaches with astounding authority and who, it's been rumored, even has the power to cure diseases and heal injuries.

But not him. We don't know anything about him, other than the fact that he's paralyzed. We don't know his name or age or the cause of his paralysis. But as all of Galilee is making their way toward Capernaum, he's stuck right where he is, completely unable to move.

But at that very moment, unbeknownst to him, healing is about to come. Forgiveness is about to come. Movement is about to be restored, all because one pilgrim is about to accept an interruption. One pilgrim will stop long enough to see him. One pilgrim will put his needs above their own. One pilgrim will rally other pilgrims together and lead them together toward Jesus.

We don't even know his or her name, or age, or gender, or race, or occupation, or preferred political party. All we know is that this unnamed stranger is moving toward Jesus, and that movement toward Jesus brings this one who is on the move face to face with the one who is stuck.

It's not clear from the text that before that moment, they had ever met. For all we know, up until that moment, they were strangers to each other.

And the pilgrim could have easily rejected the interruption. The pilgrim could have sidestepped the paralytic and kept on walking, as no doubt so many others had already done. No doubt other pilgrims had seen the paralytic lying there along the road, and crossed by on the other side.

And still other pilgrims had seen him and expressed sympathy while explaining all of the good and sound reasons about how, as much as they'd like to help, they just didn't have the time or resources or strength to do it.

But this one pilgrim saw the paralytic and embraced the interruption, and in that moment, the healing began.

The paralytic was clearly too heavy for the pilgrim to move alone. And so the pilgrim set about interrupting other pilgrims passing by on the road to Capernaum. And as the afternoon sun began to fade to evening's twilight, not one, not two, not three, but four pilgrims resumed the journey to Capernaum, each of them carrying a corner of the paralytic's mat.

But when they arrived at the house, the crowd was enormous, spilling out of the door and into the courtyard. There was hardly enough room to breathe, much less carry a man on a mat through the door.

But something had happened to the pilgrims along the road. Something happened to them as they worked together to share the load of the paralytic. Something happened as they embraced the interruptions and put someone else's needs above their own. The four pilgrims discovered that they were far stronger together than they were apart.

And working together, the four pilgrims found the strength to get

themselves and the man and his mat onto the roof of the house.

The house was so full and so noisy and so dusty that at first, no one noticed the group on the roof digging through the mud and the thatch. But then, as if descending from heaven, the paralytic came gently floating down on his mat, his heavy weight shared equally among the four pilgrims.

And Mark tells us simply, “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’”

And the one who had been stuck for too long to remember was now able to move again. The one who had not been able to dance or walk or run or simply get from here to there stood up, rolled up his mat, walked out the front door, and went home.

All because one nameless pilgrim accepted an interruption of the journey.

IV

I suspect, my friend, that there is someone or something in your life that is in need of healing. I suspect that there is someone or something that has become stuck, frozen in place, paralyzed.

Maybe it’s an important relationship that has been hardened by resentment and bitterness. Maybe it’s a situation that has become stuck, unable to move forward, unable to reverse course and go back.

So here’s my question. If and when you come across someone or

something that is paralyzed, stuck, unable to go forward or back this week, what will you do?

Will you avert your eyes, and cross to the other side, and hurry on about your business? You won’t be the first, and you certainly won’t be the last to take that path.

Will you give a sympathetic nod, and then go on to explain about how you’d like to help, but you just don’t have the time, the strength, or the resources. If you choose that path, you won’t be the first, and you certainly won’t be the last.

But the truth of the gospel is this: all it takes to begin the process of healing, all it takes to begin the process of getting unstuck, all it takes for freedom and movement and forgiveness and new life to begin, is for one pilgrim to accept an interruption of the journey.

After all, it wasn’t the faith of the paralytic that healed him – it was the faith of the four people moving him toward Jesus together.

V

And that, in a nutshell, is a picture of the church, isn’t it? A community of pilgrims moving toward Jesus together.

A quick glance at this morning’s headlines reveals that there is much in this world of ours that has become paralyzed. There is much that has become stuck, unable to move forward.

There is much hardness of heart and bitterness and paralysis in our world, in our nation, in our city, in our schools, even in our houses of worship. Positions have become entrenched and dug in, and any sign of movement away from those positions is considered treasonous.

But right here, in this house of worship, we can play a part in the healing. We can play a part in bringing peace. We can play a part in building the kingdom of God, right here in Athens, Georgia.

All it takes to get started is just one pilgrim willing to accept an interruption. All it takes is one willing to let go of an entrenched, hardened position and take one step toward Jesus. All it takes is one to move and remind us all that we are far stronger together than we are apart, that there is far more than unites us than divides us.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Your sins are forgiven."

Thanks be to God. Amen.