

Jesu Juva

“The Lord Interrupts”
Text: Isaiah 64:1-12; Luke 1:8-23

This was a big time in Zechariah’s life. It was the time for his priestly division to serve at the Temple in Jerusalem and on top of that, *his* name had been selected to offer incense in the Temple. That was something some priests never got to do. But Zechariah did. When he heard his name, chills of excitement must have run up and down his spine. Yes, this was a special time for Zechariah . . . *and the Lord picks this time to interrupt!* Right when Zechariah is in the holy place, going through the ritual, placing the incense on the fire, an angel appears and things come to a screeching halt while a conversation takes place. A message to Zechariah from God.

Now, I don’t know about you, but I don’t like being interrupted! You’ve got your day all planned out, or maybe even bigger than that, you’ve got your holiday all planned out or maybe even your life all planned out, and all of a sudden you’re interrupted. Something gets in the way, someone steps in, events change things, and all of a sudden everything is messed up and comes to a screeching halt.

So it was for Zechariah. For not only was his Temple service interrupted but, the angel Gabriel tells him, his life is about to be interrupted.

Because even though he and his wife Elizabeth were old and past the normal age for children, they were going to have a child. And not just any child, but one who would have a special, God-given job; the one who would be the forerunner of the promised Messiah. So they would have to raise him special and with great care. And when Zechariah doubted that this was real and true and would actually happen to old fogies like them - which, we might say, is pretty logical - he is interrupted *again*. He will not be able to speak until the child is born. Over nine months. He will not be able to speak the priestly Temple ritual and prayers. He will not be able to speak to his wife. He will not be able to utter any words at all.

This was not the first time God had interrupted the life of His people. The Old Testament is filled with such stories, one of which we heard about tonight from the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah’s day, Israel was a kingdom divided, and were doing much to displease the Lord. They wouldn’t listen to the prophets the Lord sent them, so the Lord, in mercy, stepped in and interrupted them with the armies of Babylon and Assyria to conquer them and take many of them off as prisoners of war. No small interruption, that. And no short one either. Their 70 years in exile makes Zechariah’s nine months or so seem like small potatoes.

All these interruptions, though, are for the same reason: *for God to work salvation and*

eternal life for His people.

And God got the attention of the people in Isaiah's day! Isaiah prayed for Him ***to rend the heavens and come down*** and save them. To tear open the heavens and come down with some mighty and awesome and spectacular deeds, like He had done in the past, like He had done in the exodus, like He had done to get the people through the wilderness and into the promised land. *Do that again!*

But just as God does not always abide by our plans, so also God interrupts in His own ways and in His own time. And while He did answer the prayers of His people and come down to save them, it wasn't in the way *they* wanted or asked for - it was rather that day in the Temple, to an old priest no one had really heard of until then, and with a child. Awesome in its own way, in God's way.

So too, then, for you and me today. God interrupts our lives for no other reason than for our salvation and eternal life. Maybe you don't think you need the interruption, and maybe you don't want it and aren't particularly thrilled by it. But like Israel, and Zechariah and Elizabeth, and even Mary and Joseph, God knows you need it. To shake you out of your boredom and complacency, or to interrupt your anger and bitterness, and work in you. Work in you as Isaiah pictured for us, *as the potter works on his clay*. God forming you, shaping you, carefully, individually, to make you His own precious work of art.

Here is how one author put it: *This is the great conversion in our life: to recognize and believe that the many unexpected events in our lives are not just disturbing interruptions of our projects, but the ways in which God molds our hearts and prepares us for His return. Our great temptations are boredom and bitterness. When our good plans are interrupted by poor weather or poor health, our peace of mind by inner turmoil, our hope for peace by a new war, our desire for stability by constant change, and our desire for immortality by real death, we are tempted to give in to a paralyzing boredom or to strike back in destructive bitterness. But when we believe that patience can make our expectation and hope grow, then fate can be converted into vocation, wounds into a call for deeper understanding, and sadness into a birthplace of joy* (Henri Nouwen, slightly edited).

Or in other words, all those interruptions we really don't want and really don't like, perhaps they are *divine* interruptions, for God to bring us to repentance and faith, for Him to bring us His forgiveness and mercy, to bring us to love and good works for others instead of self-absorption, for Him to bring us joy and work in us all that is pleasing in His sight. To see interruptions in this way is to see them not as unwelcomed intrusions into our well-ordered lives, but as wonderful, God-given opportunities and as the loving hand of your heavenly Father in your life.

I don't know if Zechariah saw it that way right away, but after nine months of silence

perhaps he began to understand. So for you too. Interruptions will come. Of that you can be sure. But when they do, how do you react and respond? Perhaps after tonight, you can think of Zechariah and think a bit differently. And instead of seeing these interruptions as *distractions* from your true work, to see them *as* your true work. Fulfilling a vocation that perhaps you've been neglecting. An opportunity to receive from another. A chance to love and forgive and care. A time to realize that God is working in you and molding you, and that He cares enough to interrupt to do so. For after all, one of the greatest interruptions of all produced the greatest gift of all - the gift of His Son, our Saviour. For when God interrupts, it is to give. To give to you. To give you what you need.

So repent of your sin, receive His forgiveness, and rejoice in His interruptions, as He prepares your heart for the next greatest interruption of all: when our Lord will rend the heavens and come down - when He comes again in glory.

Lord God, heavenly Father, thank You for Your divine interruptions in our lives. Enable us to see Your hand at work in our lives, help us to repent and turn to You, and fill us with trust that even when unwelcomed interruptions come, that in these too You are working for our good, now and forever, through Your Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.