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Third Sunday in Ordinary Time: B

I don't know many people who welcome interruptions. In most cases, we view them as pains in the necks and the people who interrupt us as worse. They are, after all, pains in the drains. We even teach our children that it is not polite to interrupt others, for it is not good manners.

Today's liturgy of the word is filled with interruptions. Holy Interruptions, and the people pay attention.

In the first reading we see the city of Nineveh hearing from Jonah. This was no average city. This was a huge land of people who were famous for the wickedness, the brutality, arrogance, and most important of all, their abuse of the people of Yahweh, the people we call Israel. Into this people, the prophet of Israel speaks to the people who beat up the Israelites. And, it is a shock that these people listen to Jonah. They change their ways, and they changed their ways quickly.

We see a similar dynamic in the gospel, too. Andrew, James, John, and Peter were busy about their day jobs, fishing in their families' businesses. Jesus comes to them, interrupts them in the middle of their workday, and they leave all.

Both the Ninevites and the early apostles are interrupted by God and they have similar responses: They stop what they are doing, look at their lives and their God, listen to the interruption, and act to change their lives. Stop. Look. Listen. Act.

Do we have the same faith to meet our holy interruptions with the same response?

Whether we are interrupted by a crazy colleague, a bothersome classmate, an unexpected pregnancy, the illness of an in-law, or the evil of war, we are called to respond in a way that believes that God is present to us, calling us stop, look, listen, and act in a way that brings the gospel to life. In our planned lives never plan on the grace of God to crack through them. But our Christian lives must be open to receive and respond to the grace of God that can transform others, and us as we respond to the holy interruptions with the gentleness, justice, and peace of Christ.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians presents another challenge to us folks who wouldn't like interruptions. Paul takes things a step further when he tells the Church of Corinth to live as if time didn't exist, for the Kingdom of God is coming. Very simply, Paul tells us to live in a time that doesn't count time. Not the "chronos" time that goes tick-tock, but the "kairos" time that can waste time on love and family and relationship and healing, for there is nothing to waste when these graces are before us. In God's time there are no turning hands on a clock, but the embracing arms of Jesus, whose peace and justice hold the world in a new relationship of harmony and freedom and equality. It is a timelessness

that exposes the insecurity of material possessions as so evident that we recognize the futility of acquiring more of them.

In this day of PDAs, Franklin Planners, deadlines upon deadlines, and a society suffering more from anxiety than the other societies suffer from hunger, it is hard to live in the type of timelessness of God. But we are challenged to do just that. Honeymooners frequently report that they cannot believe how the time of their trip flew by. Brides and grooms and the parents who frequently pay for the wedding say the day seemed to be over in an instant. Loved ones sitting with their beloved on a deathbed say that the final moment were more peaceful than painful. And, new parents sometimes forget hours of labor amid the eternal joy of holding a newborn child. These are not the only kairos moments. We Christians are called to have them throughout our day, especially during things called holy interruptions, opportunities for us to experience the grace of God cracking through to change our lives, shift an attitude, or help us shed a way of living that is unhealthy, unloving, or maybe even sinful. The earliest disciples were called to leave behind their nets. What do we need to leave behind in order to follow Jesus more closely this week?

During this week of Christian Unity, the norm of our Church's ordinary time and calendar is interrupted to look to our sisters and brothers in other churches to learn from them and ask them to learn from us. I think it is fair to say that it is nothing short of miraculous that Israelite-killers, the Ninevites, would be converted and convinced of God's love by someone they were killing. It's like our learning something from Osama bin Laden. But, we are called to respect and be open to every last person, every last opportunity, and every last moment that God may use to reach us. Let's pay attention, for the next time we are interrupted may not be just another scratch on our nerves, it could be Jesus calling out us, asking to stop, look, listen and act. Let's suspend time during these days of holy interruptions.