

Have you ever had unexpected guests that throw off your plans? Perhaps you just sat down to dinner and someone rang the door bell? Maybe you planned a party and an extra guest arrived? Maybe you just settled in to enjoy a relaxing weekend after a hard week at work and relatives showed up out of the blue?

I suspect that given these circumstances, most of us would scramble. We would rush to get that extra plate on the table, make sure there was enough food, check to make sure the guest bed was made. And if we were honest, we'd probably acknowledge feeling a bit put out, a bit annoyed that our plans which were laid so perfectly had gone awry. Then as soon as the guest is gone, we'd try to get things back to normal as quickly as possible, praying that there'd be no more interruptions.

Today's lessons have a lot of interruptions in them. More interruptions than I think any of us would like.

But more than that, the stories we heard this morning suggest that those interruptions are the stuff of faithfulness, somehow central to who we are as Christians.

Abram experiences that first interruption, the moment when he is called by God to leave everything behind, to step out into the unknown. He leaves his homeland behind to wander from place to place, calling none of those places home. There was no returning to normal, no going back.

God the uninvited guest said "Go!" and Abram went.

The interruptions don't stop there. Jesus walks up to Matthew while he is at work and says to him, "Follow me." Matthew gets up, leaving his business behind and follows. Things are interrupted.

More interruptions ensue. Jesus sits down to have a meal with the wrong kinds of people, interrupting the norms of propriety by sharing food with tax collectors and sinners, with the unclean and unrighteous.

As he eats with them, *he* is interrupted. A man says, "Come lay your hand on my daughter and she will live." Jesus got up and followed. On the way he is interrupted again, interrupted by the need of a suffering woman. He stops in his tracks, healing the woman who interrupted his journey.

Interruption after interruption. Nothing in these stories is ever quite stable. Things are repeatedly thrown out of whack.

This past summer, I worked as a hospital chaplain at the large county hospital in Sacramento. As part of the chaplaincy, we were each assigned days to be on call. They gave us these nice little black pagers and told us what procedure to follow whenever they went off. Particularly on the weekends, we always hoped that pager would be silent, that our days would be without interruption.

Inevitably though, the calls came. Sometimes they were sort of funny: there was a nurse who thought Muslim patient wanted someone to come in and bless his food when he was actually asking if the meat had been slaughtered in accordance with the guidelines of his faith.

More often, the events were traumatic or involved difficult decisions. There were car accidents and fights about whether or not to remove life support. The hospital would call, interrupting our relaxation. Often I found myself confronted by situations for which I felt ill prepared. What do I have to say to a grieving mother whose young child just died? What can I do for the family waiting to hear the results of an emergency surgery? Aren't there people out there more qualified and capable to handle these things?

However ill-prepared I felt, no matter how much I was certain that there was someone better who they could have called upon, I was the one who received that particular call. Every call came as an interruption.

God's call to each of us is something like that little pager or the unexpected guest. It is the command to Abram to go and the invitation to Matthew to follow. God's call takes us out of our routine, pushes us outside of what feels safe or comfortable. God doesn't stop to ask, "Is now a good time?" but confronts us just as we get settled in.

Far too often we associate call exclusively with priests and bishops and deacons, the so-called religious professionals. I think this is in part because we are all a little afraid of inviting interruption. If we can say that "call" is for those other people, then we don't have to worry about our own lives being interrupted. For those of us who are ordained, we can put the call in a box with a nice label telling us exactly what to do and when. Either way, we distance ourselves from the possibility of interruption.

But, as Christians, all of us are invited to be on-call, to live our lives with the expectation of interruption. We are invited to remain attentive and open to the voice of God in stranger, friend, and enemy, in the victimized and the voiceless, in the distressed and the destitute. We are invited to see such interruptions as opportunities rather than disruptions, opportunities to follow Jesus as he works in us, and through us, and around us to bring about the Kingdom of God.

We are not promised stability, security, or order. We are only promised that each of us is called and that each of us will be given what strength, courage, grace, and hope we need in order to follow.

God's call to us does not always ring as clear as Yahweh's voice to Abram or Jesus' command to Matthew. Sometimes it comes in a verse of scripture that captures our attention, sometimes in the voice of a man on the street looking for something to eat.

The good news of God's incessant interruption, of God's constant calling, of God's poking, prodding and nudging is that despite our doubts and insecurities, God has found and made us worthy to build God's Kingdom here and now.

God is calling, will you answer?