



SIEBENQUELL

The Wildness of God: The Way of the Holy Springtime III

When Jesus stakes a claim on our time



SOURCE: PIXABAY

Hardly has Jesus stepped foot inside of the boat, and already he issues his second challenge through the very manner in which he enters our lives. For the next thing he does is captured in this line: »He asked him to put out a little from the land. « Jesus, who has no right to be standing in this boat in the first place, now asks Peter to take the time to himself get back in the boat and set out a little ways from the shore. Here is the second great challenge of the way Jesus enter into our lives. He stakes a claim on our time.

This is particularly easy to skip over when we read the story. Later in the story, we hear that the fishermen have been out on the lake all night. They are wearied from their labours and disheartened by the lack of success. Luke makes it very clear what time it is for them: »And Jesus saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. « This washing of the net takes place at the end of the workday, or in this case the work night. They are getting ready to wrap up their labour. They are preparing themselves to go home and sleep. This is not the time for new initiatives, but the time to bring an unsuccessful and tiring day to a close.

At precisely at this moment, Jesus takes a claim on their time. He does not ask whether it is an opportune moment. He does not ask whether the time suits them. Moreover, he does not ask whether this time of his choosing is a time they would choose. This is how Jesus breaks into our lives. He stakes a claim on our time. He does it at a moment which they, and if we are honest, we, would hardly consider the most opportune time. Why not ask when we start off our workday, when we are fresh and full of energy? Perhaps you could ask us when we are already we are heading out onto the lake anyway. When Jesus breaks into our time, we usually look to coordinate the schedule to something more to our liking.

That is the challenge of Jesus. The responses that we can find in the layers of this story are the responses we can find in the layers of our personal and daily lives. Often enough, we will say: »This is not a great time for me. Come back some other time.« Or we will excuse our lack of willingness in the here and now by proposing a vague, undefined time in the future, when we will supposedly have much better conditions for meeting his challenge.

Jesus staking a claim on our time is not as harmless as it sounds. Although we are often unaware of it, time is one of the things we most jealously guard. If a beggar asks me for five euros or for five minutes of my time, it is considerably easier to give him the money, than it is to give of my time. It is far easier to open the wallet than the calendar.

We often believe that men and women are driven by the desire for wealth. Yet, we seldom reflect on what wealth really means to them. Wealth gives us power over our time. If we have money, we can determine how we will spend our time, with whom and where we will spend our time. If a person comes into great wealth, then they can decide whether they still want to work and if they still want to work for the same people. They can determine when and where they will eat and where they will spend their free time when they vacation. If we do not have money, then we have absolutely no control over any of these things. In a soup kitchen we eat then they open the doors, not when we please. Then we will work whether you like it or not. Then we will spend your time working for people we probably don't even like. Wealth gives us power over time.

That is why we guard our time with such jealousy. That is why we shield it from others. Therefore, any story in which another stakes a claim on our time, will evoke real resistance. When Jesus comes and stakes a claim on our time, we will be faced with a real and pressing question. Will we offer it?

As I did in the last reflection, I remind you, beloved reader, that even if Jesus takes the initiative and breaks into our space, and in this case into our time, this is not a story of coercion. The stories of breaking into our lives, which is something God often and gladly does, are not stories of force, but of decision-making. Once Jesus steps into that boat, Peter can tell him to get out. Once Jesus takes a claim on his time, Peter can say to him: Who do you think you are to boss me around? This story, as all stories in which God breaks into our lives, does not leave us powerless, and it certainly does not leave us without a choice. What this type of story does, is force the choice to the forefront. We can no longer delay, push it away, or come back to it another day. What Jesus does in this story, as in so many others, it's to force the point. He places the question into the space between us. And now we are confronted, not with an order, but with the decision.

This is also part of the radical challenge of Jesus. Many of us believe, that the primary question of religious living is making the right choice. I do not entirely disagree with that. But the more fundamental question of religious living is to decide rather than to avoid the situations that demand a decision.. It is to face the questions of life, when and where they appear, instead of running away from them. It is too wager something instead of putting it off until some distant and unknown day.

While we love to marvel at the unexpected fullness at the end of the story, that fullness is not a fluke. It is the result of a process, and on step in that process is to give Jesus the access to our time when he requests it of us.

So, I end with the same reminder as in my last reflection. Of course it is risky to get involved in a surprise. What we must not forget is that it is just as risky to never wager one of the surprises of God.

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