

Just in Time

A Message for Sunday Morning Worship

on January 31, 2021

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT

Text: Luke 8:41-56

Just in time! That's a phrase that conjures up all sorts of images in our heads. Running for the school bus with the kids. Screeching into the parking lot at work after getting stuck in traffic unexpectedly. Making it to the dentist's office late just before having to pay that pesky fee for missing an appointment. Dashing into the store on a whim to see if that deeply discounted item you want is still in stock and you snag the last one. Any of these sounding familiar to you? I'm betting it is because that sense of accomplishing something necessary at the last possible moment is a deeply satisfying one. It feels like you beat the odds, like you averted disaster or even that you snatched victory right out of the jaws of defeat. It's a good feeling, even if most of the time we don't get to enjoy it for more than a second or two. After all, there's still those teeth to be cleaned. There's still work waiting on your desk. But, for that one moment, victory over time was yours and it was great!

We've all had those just in time moments. Usually they are pretty mundane, like the ones I described above. Still important to be sure, but mundane nonetheless. None of our usual just in time moments are going to make the evening news, that's for sure. Such was not the case for Eugene Goodman a few weeks ago during his usual shift at a job that was important but often uneventful, even boring. Does his name sound familiar? It should. Eugene Goodman was the Capitol Police Officer who singlehandedly held off part of the rioting mob that stormed our US Capitol Building on January 6, potentially saving lives of lawmakers and other law enforcement officers in the process. Officer Goodman knew he had a split second to figure out how to keep a violent mob, one person armed with a military assault weapon in plain sight, from discovering and then crashing through a single door separating the mob from the Senators and the officers attempting to secure the doors so they could lead the Senators to safety. In 85 tense seconds, Officer Goodman first confronted the mob, then distracted them and managed to lead them in the opposite direction of what

he knew they were searching for – US Senators – for who knows what nefarious purpose. In 85 seconds – or 1 minute, 25 seconds if that’s easier to process – Officer Goodman assessed an incredibly dangerous situation accurately and then determined and executed a plan to protect the Senators as they escaped. In other words, he did his job and he did it just as he needed to, just as he was trained to. He did it just in time. No one knows what would have happened if Officer Goodman hadn’t done his job in that moment. No one, myself included, even wants to speculate on that and thankfully, we don’t have to. And we don’t have to because Officer Goodman was able to do what he needed to do just in time.

History is full of moments like these, moments when a split second occurrence changes the course of history. Sometimes these moments turn out well, like they did in Officer Goodwin’s case. Sometimes they don’t, like in the case of Officer Brian Sicknick who died that same day in a different part of the Capitol building when confronting a different group of rioters who beat him to death with a fire extinguisher. Officer Sicknick’s split second occurrence had devastating consequences for him, for his family, for his fellow officers and for the people who were part of the mob which assaulted him. Whatever reason those rioters might have thought they had had for being there, it did not justify the death of an innocent man doing his job. They took his life and destroyed their own in seconds.

Dear ones, the simple truth is that lives can and do change in an instant. None of us want to believe this is true, but it is and always has been. Today’s story from Luke’s Gospel is just such an occurrence that transformed the lives of so many people in one of those just in time moments. We know this story of the healing of Jairus’ daughter and the healing of the woman “with the issue of blood.” Both are familiar to us, at least a little. But we do tend to forget that the one healing story is actually embedded inside the other. These two healing encounters for Jesus are thus inextricably linked, and yet we often tend to look at them as two separate stories just coincidental to each other. Not hardly. The story begins just after Jesus has healed a man afflicted with so many demons that they told Jesus their name was Legion. Jesus cast them out and into a herd of swine who then promptly ran off a cliff and drowned in the Sea of Galilee. Needless to say, the pig-herders were upset at this. Unfazed Jesus

continues on his travels, a throng of people surrounding him as he walked. A man named Jairus was waiting for him and asked for his help in healing his daughter who was very ill. It was significant that Jairus approached him for help because Jairus was a leader of the local synagogue and these local religious leaders were not always supportive of Jesus. In fact, they were often downright hostile. So, it is no surprise that Jesus immediately agrees to go to Jairus' house with him.

As they are walking along, surrounded by this ever growing crowd of people anxious to talk with him or be healed by him, Jesus suddenly stops in his tracks. "Who touched me?" he asks the crowd. No one admitted to it and Peter – the Captain Obvious of the disciples – said to him, "the crowds surround you" meaning it could have been anyone. But Jesus was intent on finding out who touched him because, he explained, he had felt power go out of him. At this moment, a woman came forward and fell on the ground in front of him, admitting that she had touched him and immediately been healed. This took real guts on her part because her affliction was that she had been bleeding for years and no other medical treatment had healed her. She was desperate, desperate enough to reach through the crowd as an unclean woman (the constant bleeding made her unclean) and touch the fringe of Jesus' robe. She reached him just in time, just long enough to touch the very outermost edge of his robe and, just as she hoped, she was healed in that split second. She hadn't counted on Jesus noticing this tiny act, though. She had hoped to escape just in time before she was noticed, before she was apprehended as an unclean woman and punished, perhaps even stoned, for spreading her uncleanness to a man unknown to her. So, as she trembled at Jesus' feet she braced for the worst and instead hears words she must have had trouble believing – "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

Just in time, Jesus saves her from what would quickly have become an angry mob and we now have a whole new appreciation of what that can mean, don't we. But there's no time for Jesus to process this incredible situation because at that exact moment, someone from Jairus' household comes up to tell him that his daughter has died so there was no point in bringing Jesus to see her. Jesus was having none of this, though and told Jairus, "Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved." So, they kept on

walking to Jairus' house and when they arrived, Jesus along with Peter, James and John go to the little girl, along with her mother and father. Everyone in the house was weeping and wailing but Jesus said, "Do not weep; she is not dead but sleeping." They responded by laughing at him. No way this is a just in time moment, they convinced themselves. Then Jesus called out to her and said, "Child, get up" and she did. He told her parents to give her something to eat, and he left.

Twice in a matter of an hour or two, Jesus made possible a just in time moment. One for a woman healed from a malady that had plagued her and kept her away from society and her own family for years followed closely by a second one for a little girl and her parents. Twice in one day Jesus made new lives where only minutes, seconds, before there had been only tragedy. Twice in one day, Jesus came to the rescue just in time. How amazing is that! If only that would happen to us, we think. If only Jesus could be just in time to help me, to save me, to bless me, to make all my problems go away. Yes, I get that thought. We've all been there.

But here's the thing. What makes you think Jesus hasn't been there in all those just in time moments you've experienced in your life? That day you made it to the dentist office just in time to keep the appointment, maybe it was Jesus who had a hand in keeping traffic light that morning. And the time you made it to work just in time or to the airport just in time, or to wherever it was you had to get to, how do you know it wasn't Jesus who cleared the path ahead of you? I know, I know. Put that way, it sounds silly. But it isn't. Not really. It's not silly because this is exactly how you bring Jesus into your life every day. You bring Jesus into your everyday life by looking for him in your everyday life. If you look for him, I promise you will find him. Every time. How do I know this? Simple. Because if you are not looking for Jesus, you'll never find him anywhere. Jesus is not like one of those funny Bernie in Mittens memes where Bernie pops up in all kinds of crazy places and you can't miss him. That's not real. But Jesus is. Jesus is just there, right beside you, close at hand in those moments when life seems overwhelming and exhausting. He's there when bad things happen and when the good ones do. He's there for the simple reason that he promised he would be. "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let

them be afraid,” Jesus says in the Gospel of John. He promised us all, “so that where I am, you may be also.”

Dear ones, Jesus is with us. Jesus knows what we need before we ask. Jesus cares when we are hurting, and when we are joyful. Jesus knows when we are frightened as we watch the nightly news and as we wait for news at the doctor’s office. Jesus knows how weary we are of this Pandemic and how much we miss hugs of friends and loved ones. Jesus knows we want to sing hymns and drink coffee and eat cookies together again on Sunday mornings. Jesus also knows that there are times in life when a just in time solution is not happening. That’s why it matters so much to look for all those moments each week, each day, when we can see Jesus’ hand in our lives in all those mundane moments – green lights when we need to get somewhere or red lights when we need to slow down, especially when we need to slow down. It matters that we be able to recognize Jesus in the eyes of the kind and good people who touch our lives each day, hidden behind face masks though they may be. It matters that we pause to consider those moments when we might be as Jesus to someone else, perhaps even in a just in time moment. All this matters, dear ones, because we are and have always been the vital piece of Jesus’ efforts in the world each day because *we* are Jesus’ hands and feet. *We* are Jesus’ eyes and ears, his mouth to speak kindness to those needing it desperately as well as speaking truth to power when that is what the situation demands. We are the ones – the only ones – who can live out the great commandment Jesus left us with when his earthly life was finished. Jesus taught us always to love God with all that we are and all that we have and that we reveal this in all the ways we love the other as much as we love ourselves.

So, the next time you experience one of those “just in time” moments in your life, I hope you will stop for a moment and look for Jesus because I promise you, he’s there. And the next time you end up being a “just in time” moment for someone else, I hope you’ll thank Jesus for putting you right where he needed you to be, doing what he needed you to do. After all, just in time is really just more proof that with God all things are possible. Who knew? Well, now you do. Amen.