

Sunday, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019, Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Amos 7:7-17, Psalm 82, Colossians 1:1-14, Luke 10:25-37

## Interruptions

### Introduction

In 1984, East German security policeman, Gerd Weisler – agent of the infamous secret police, the STASI, is ordered to spy upon the playwright and author, Georg Dreyman, and his partner, the acclaimed actress, Christa-Maria Sieland. Weisler and his team, bug their apartment, setting up the surveillance equipment in the attic of the building. Breaking into Dreyman's and Sieland's apartment when they are not at home, he steals from the study desk a book of poems by the eminent German playwright of the early twentieth century, Bertolt Brecht. Upon reading a poem of love, which somehow generates an inward journey, a spiritual experience, Weisler then listens in to a phone call to Dreyman from a fellow member of the arts community, informing him of the suicide of their mutual friend and colleague, Albert Jerska, caused by the refusal of the East German state to allow him to leave. As chance has it, Jerska himself only days before has gifted Dreyman with a musical piece called "Sonata for a Good Man". Dreyman in sorrow, then plays the piece in tribute to his now dead friend, while upstairs in the attic, Weisler secretly listening, is reduced to tears. Dreyman's words about the piece, are excruciating for Weisler who is in a state intense crisis: "Can anyone who has heard this music, really heard it, be a bad person"? Weisler's conversion is complete, as he realizes who he has been, and who he must become. That conversion is tested in what immediately follows, where upon returning home, a little boy with whom Weisler shares the lift, innocently asks whether it is true, as his father has said, that he is a STASI agent, and therefore a "bad man". Weisler's initial mechanical, cloned response, is to demand the name of his father, but then stops himself, realizing that that life must end.

What stands front and centre in this story, is the life-giving interruption that Dreyman means for Weisler. In this rather boring, repetitive security activity, which no doubt, Weisler has done thousands of times before, this one, stops him in his tracks, and forces him to rethink. Something happens within Weisler's own heart: the appeal of a nameless God for his humanity.

### The Gospel

What are we to make of interruptions in our own lives: those moments when others, the lives of others, break into our own, with the potential for transforming us, humanizing us, making us altogether more deeply and authentically Christian? Let's turn to the story of the Good Samaritan for help, for clarification

The narrative of the Good Samaritan, is at its most basic, about the interruption of a man, a wounded man into the life of a Samaritan, on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, a road then referred to as *Bloody Pass*. You probably already know this story and those points that have become a commonplace.

But I want to look at this differently. I want to look at the story through the lens of the *subjective experience of the Samaritan*: what happens *within* him. If we read the text discriminately, we discern that the subjective experience of the priest and the Levite is very different to that of the Samaritan. We are not told directly what motivates them to ignore the wounded Jew; a fellow country-man. But we can imagine that fear was probably the strongest emotion in both of them. Of course, fear that it might be a set-up, a trap, but also, at least for the priest, fear about violating his religious identity, needing to remain ritually pure, clean: a delicious irony. Neither can see the weight of the interruption of this wounded man in their lives. Rather it is 'business as usual'.

The Samaritan, on the other hand, we read as comprehending the interruption, understanding, discerning the weight of the moment. Moreover, we hear the words, "he felt compassion". The word, here is *splanchnizomai* and literally means, "to be moved to the guts". For the Hebrew

emotion is felt in the guts, in the intestines, not as we Westerners put it, "in the heart". It is this subjective experience, this most intense private experience of screaming NO, that overcomes his fear, and drives the Samaritan to act.

The interruption of the wounded man – God's interruption – leads to a conversion of this non-believer – remember he was a Samaritan an outsider – *but not* a religious or creedal conversion: we are not told that he becomes a Jew. Rather it is a conversion to *a way of living*, to an ethics.

### **Conclusion**

What to conclude? That, God appears in the most unobvious guise: in the one who interrupts us, in the one who challenges our way of seeing things, our daily routine, our world view. This is the story of Gerd Weisler who is interrupted by George Dreyman. This is the story of the Samaritan, who is interrupted by the wounded Jew. It is our story, if we are open to really seeing those individuals or groups who cross our path as they invite us into their lives.