



Third Sunday in Lent
3 March 2024

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Chris

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

There is nothing slow about this season of Lent. Already, we find ourselves gathering to worship on this 3rd Sunday of Lent. We began at the river Jordan – a baptism and a thunderous voice from the clouds – we entered the wilderness and watched Jesus and Satan trade jabs back and forth. Last week, we heard Jesus tell us to deny ourselves and pick up our cross. It is no small journey we have undertaken – every step measured, every step a struggle. On Wednesdays in Lent we have been invited, reminded to rest; to be peacekeepers; this week we will be reminded of God’s presence with us – always. Today, we find ourselves following Jesus into the temple in Jerusalem. In the book of John, the cleansing of the temple happens at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. In Matthew, it happens at the end of his ministry. Regardless, today we meet the Jesus we all need but were seldom introduced to in our Sunday School classes and children’s times. Today, we meet the Savior who gets angry. And if that anger does not disrupt your sensibilities about a Savior who chases after lonely lambs and forgives sinners without punishment or consequence, well today may be the day you meet your Savior again for the first time.

Last Saturday, I was responsible for chauffeuring our youngest child to her basketball tournament. We pulled up to the high school and Hadley jumped out and ran through the doors. I parked the car and made my way into the lobby and up to the table to pay my entrance fee. I said, “Good morning, I need to pay to get in.” And this lovely, but possibly short-sighted, woman looked at me and said, “Do you get the senior discount?” I was like, “Whaaaaaat?” I mean, let’s be honest. It has been a tough six months. A major surgery in August – but I have come away feeling pretty good about myself. I am 30 pounds lighter. I had trimmed up my beard nice and tight. Shaved my head the night before. I think I look pretty good – but this woman making change at the basketball tournament thinks I look like I am in my late fifties or worse, early sixties. Since I was struck speechless like Zachariah in the temple when the Angel Gabriel showed up to tell him he was going to have a son, she immediately said, “Umm, wait, I’m sorry.” And I still could not respond! And then I said, “no, it’s fine, but I need to pay full price today.” She laughed politely. I smiled politely. And I went into the tournament. Talk about disruptive! People, come on. I mean, my next stop is going to be Pick and Save to buy some “Just For



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Men” hair dye! But for about thirty minutes or so – I needed to process that I am looking more like 55 than 45. So be it.

Jesus enters the temple and is shocked, appalled at what he sees. It is not the cattle, sheep and doves that shock him – they were all necessary offerings – prepared for purchase and sacrifice at the temple altar. No, the shock is in the moneychangers. In the temple, you cannot use roman coin because roman coin has the image of Caesar on it which qualifies as idolatry. So the Roman coin must be exchanged for temple coin. And the temple coin comes at a cost – the exchange rate of the moneychangers is expensive, abusive, exploitative of those coming to worship and offer sacrifice. And Jesus gets angry. So much so, that he fashions a whip and overturns the tables – one can imagine the coins flying everywhere, the doves flying everywhere, the moneychangers running everywhere. It is chaos. It is disruption of the status quo to the glory of God.

We are created to be disruptive at tables where injustice and inequality are revealed. Disruption is often perceived as a negative action. People use words such as fight, battle, challenge, break, upset, trouble, and interrupt to explain their intention and action in causing disruption. As Christians, we are expected to follow the example of Jesus when “*he drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple.*” In this example of Jesus’ action in the temple, Jesus upsets the status quo; he troubles the routine; he challenges the system. Jesus stood up for what is right, even when it was unpopular. Sometimes we know what is right, but we may feel afraid or embarrassed to stand up for it, especially if it will cause a scene or draw attention to ourselves. Jesus practiced disruption when he challenged the status quo. Jesus knew that there was a better way. He disrupted the religious leaders of the day by challenging what they taught versus the actual words of Scripture. Jesus practiced disruption when he called unqualified people to follow. Disruptors have the ability to see what others cannot see or refuse to see. Jesus did not call priests and religious leaders, but rather called everyday people whom he wanted to become missionaries and preachers. Disruptive leaders are not deterred by people who have never done it before because they are looking for people who want to do it better than before. Jesus practiced disruption when he created new models. Disruption is about finding a new and better way. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He came to show a better way for people to have a relationship with God.



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Jesus came to give us a new commandment. In the book of John Jesus speaks these words, *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”* Jesus came to offer a new way.

Disruption may be defined by our actions: what we do or what we say. Disruption can also be defined by our presence: where we go or who we stand alongside. Disruption, though often expected to cause discomfort and upset, may also have great impact when we show up in quiet determination without interruption. If disruption is about disturbing what are currently acceptable systems of behavior or thinking, then we must discern the quality of the foundations we stand on to cause disruption. Jesus enters the temple expecting to see God’s people engaged in worship. What Jesus finds, instead, is abuse, extortion, mistreatment, greed, and deceit. Out of deep love for God’s people, Jesus disrupts the old system of corruption to reawaken the centrality of worship in the temple. We, too, are called to disrupt so that we might work to remember and recognize the worth and dignity of each person created in the image of God. This is the solitary goal of disruption. The prophet Isaiah reminds us: *“Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”* Our disruptive action, when grounded in God’s love, allows God to make a new way in the wilderness through us.

Consider what causes disruption in your life. Illness. Cellphones. Struggles in your relationships. Children. Flat tires. Racism. Job loss. Bilingual worship. Sexism. Grandchildren. Recognize that not all that causes disruption in our lives is perceived to be negative or bad. What I do believe is that disruption without purpose or redemption is just that...disruption. But where disruption can bring change to the glory of God, this is where Jesus invites us to follow him. Out of deep love for God’s people, God calls us to disrupt the systems born of corruption so that we might work to recognize the worth and dignity of each person created in the God’s image. God calls us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, to be disruptive like Jesus:

- When we challenge the systems that cause others to live in fear for their lives.



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- When we stand up when we see others denied the chance to be their authentic selves as God created them.
- When we break the rules that block others from experiencing the same freedom we already know.
- When we raise the question why our practices diminish or devalue another's worth or dignity.

Later that Saturday afternoon, long after basketball had finished, my wife walked into the house with our middle child after 7 hours of volleyball. I told my wife the story about the question of whether I was eligible for the senior discount at the basketball tournament earlier that morning. And then my wife placed the mail down on the counter. She began to laugh. I looked down at the pile of mail and there on the top of the pile, was my invitation to join the ranks of AARP. I cannot catch a break. What I do know, is that my AARP card will not bring glory to God – so that disruption will have to wait for another day. This day, I will follow Jesus out of the temple and open my eyes a little wider to the systems, the rules, and the practices that keep others from the fullness of life God has called all of creation to live. Perhaps today will be the day, we begin to look for the tables God would prefer we no longer sit at but instead turn over. All to the glory of God. Amen.