

Order of Service for July 11, 2021 - Pentecost 7

GATHERING

Confession and Forgiveness

P - In the name of the One who creates us, who walks with us, and who calls us, the Holy Trinity (†), we confess who and what we are, trusting in God's mercy and forgiveness.

[*Short pause*]

Loving, compassionate God

C - We come to you, admitting our need, admitting our lack, admitting our brokenness. We have neglected our responsibilities to you, to our neighbour, to your creation, and even to ourselves. Forgive us. Remind us of your love. Show us a new way, that we may trust your promise, live more fully, and follow more faithfully. We pray in the name of Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

P - God's mercy inspires your repentance. Therefore, as a called and ordained minister in the church of Christ, I declare that you are forgiven in the name of Jesus (†). May the Spirit of peace fill you to overflowing with the love of God.

C - Amen.

Gathering Song - 697, Just a Closer Walk With Thee

Refrain

Just a closer walk with thee, grant it, Jesus, is my plea;
daily walking close to thee, let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

I am weak but thou art strong: Jesus, keep me from all wrong;
I'll be satisfied as long as I walk, let me walk close to thee. *Refrain*

Through this world of toil and snares, if I falter, Lord, who cares?
Who with me my burden shares? None but thee, dear Lord, none but thee. *Refrain*

When my feeble life is o'er, time for me will be no more;
guide me gently, safely o'er to thy kingdom shore, to thy shore. *Refrain*

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Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with us all.

Kyrie

We give thanks for gift of being able to be together. Lord, have mercy.

We give thanks for the presence of the Saviour in our isolation. Christ, have mercy.

We give thanks for the guidance of the Spirit in our wilderness. Lord, have mercy.

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray. O God, from you come all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works. Give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey your commandments; and also that we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may live in peace and quietness, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

WORD

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia. May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our hearts,
That we may know the hope to which God has called us. Alleluia

Gospel Reading

Mark 6:14-29

King Herod heard of [what Jesus was doing], for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him.

But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother.

When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.
The gospel of the Lord.

Sermon

This week I was able to take part in an annual event sponsored in part by our Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, which is called the National Worship Conference. This year, because of Covid, it was held on-line, which means that we had 150 people across the country all sitting in front of their computers in their living rooms(!), talking about various aspects of what we do when we gather for worship.

The theme this year was wonderfully appropriate for us as we continue to struggle with Covid, etc. It was called "Disruption and Grace: Learning in Liminal Times." "Liminal Times" means boundary times, when we are crossing from one way of "being" into another, potentially very *different* way of "being." As I said, it was a good topic for us to think about!

The speakers who addressed us had several different ways of approaching this topic, and I thought I would share some of those, because I think they all apply to us and our situations.

The first way of thinking about Disruption and Grace is the most obvious: we admit that we are in the middle of disruption! A no-brainer, right? I don't need to tell you how Covid has changed the way we live our lives. We are wearing masks pretty much everywhere, we are much more aware of the space (2 meters!) in between ourselves and everybody else, we have had to change shopping patterns, we've had to change the way we visit with friends and neighbours, we've not been able to have funerals for loved ones, or visit them when they've been sick.... The list goes on and on.

And that's not all, is it? In the last 16 months, we've also been confronted with the pandemic of racism, the pandemic of hate, the pandemic of colonialism, the pandemic of the

Residential “Schools,” and the revelation of the graves that the Indigenous people told us were there, but which we ignored. We have gone through a very intense, a very *disruptive* 16 months.

And yet, in the middle of all, there *have* been moments of grace. There is some little elf in our neighbourhood who has, from time to time, left a little bag of food on the door, so when we go to let the dogs out, we discover a couple of muffins, or a casserole, or some pie. And there have been lots of little elves running around doing this sort of thing! People have organized drive-by birthday parties, or back-yard weddings. We’ve discovered the challenge, but also the grace, of technology which allows us to communicate with each other when we can’t physically get together. We notice bright blue skies a bit more, and the flowers, and the shape of the waves on the shore. So, even in the middle of a very disruptive 16 months, we have been aware of the grace of God’s love, coming to us in the middle of it.

As I said, that’s the obvious way of understanding the dynamic of disruption and grace in these days.

A second way of approaching the subject was suggested by a couple of our speakers, and that is acknowledging that sometimes the disruption is *caused* by grace. The love of God comes to us in the middle of our nice safe, stable *status quo*, and messes it all up. Frequently we find that taking the love of God seriously, forces us to re-evaluate some things, some cherished practices, some “normal” activities that we have stopped thinking about.

Our national church already has some experience with this! Most of you will remember 20+ years ago when the “Big Discussion” was about what we call Communion of the Baptized. Most of us had grown up in a church in which we were not allowed to receive Communion until after we had been Confirmed. We were told, over and over, that we couldn’t receive Communion until we “understood it.” And many of us grew up in churches which only allowed “Lutherans” to receive the sacrament. We loved for people to come to church with us, and so they could sit there and watch while *we* enjoyed the meal!

That was our “normal.” It’s just the way we had been doing it. Until we started really listening to our children asking, “If Jesus really loves me, why can’t I come and eat with you?” Or listening to our neighbours say, “I’m not coming back, because I’m clearly not *really* welcome.”

As hard as that was to hear for some of us, that was Grace speaking to us, coming to us, invading our tradition and *causing* disruption. And as we worked our way *through* that disruption, we discovered God’s call to let go of that part of our tradition which did not actually communicate Good News. We discovered a new way of being the church, a new way of following Jesus, a new way of serving our neighbour. But it was precisely *because* Grace caused disruption in our lives, and called us to a new way of being.

Zion’s Council experienced this kind of grace-inspired disruption this week as well. They had an on-line meeting with Pastor Mark Harris, who is our synod’s new “Redevelopment Officer.” He is now the one to whom congregations can go when they seem to be running out of steam, and need to ask some hard questions. As you might imagine, that is a difficult conversation to begin. But what we discovered, even after just one meeting, was some energy to explore new, different ways, not just of “keeping the building open,” but of looking for new ways to do ministry. There are avenues we have not travelled, there are possibilities we have not explored. The grace of being pointed to other options for being the church will undoubtedly cause some disruption for us. But that disruption just might show us something new.

Sometimes grace *causes* disruption. That’s the second was the disruption and grace are intertwined.

And the *third* way that disruption and grace are combined is pointed to in our gospel reading today. One of the speakers at the National Worship Conference pointed us to the reality that sometimes the grace of God, the love of God which is given for all, pushes *us* to *be disruptors*. Sometimes *we* need to be the ones who stand up and point out where things are broken.

This is a challenge! It's risky, and it's hard, and it's threatening. But if we are truly going to follow Jesus, if we are really going to proclaim God's love for *all*, then we are going to have to face up to the fact that, sometimes, we are going to need to be John the Baptist. We are going to have to stand up and say things that the Herods of our country and our world aren't going to want to hear.

This could take several forms. It might mean writing letters. It might mean asking questions at All Candidates Meetings. It might mean not laughing at a sexist joke that a relative tells, or challenging the casual racism of a dear friend.

Being a grace-filled disruptor is no picnic! But it is yet another way that disruption and grace are intimately connected.

We are experiencing disruption these days, and we are experiencing grace in the middle of it.

We see that grace sometimes *causes* disruption, which can be uncomfortable, but which, because it is *grace*, *also* leads us to a new way of living, a new way of being.

And we acknowledge that sometimes we are called to *be* grace-filled disruptors, so that the love of God can be more fully seen, especially in situations in which it has for so long been denied.

John the Baptist points us to disruption and grace. Being the church points us to disruption and grace. Jesus' very self points us to disruption and grace. They come together; a matched set.

May God continue to give us grace in the middle of our disruptions, that we may be agents of that disruptive grace in our lives. Amen.

RESPONSE TO THE WORD

Hymn of the Day - 513, Listen, God is Calling

Refrain

Listen, listen, God is calling, through the Word inviting,
offering forgiveness, comfort, and joy. Joy.

Jesus gave his mandate: share the good news
that he came to save us and set us free. *Refrain*

Let none be forgotten throughout the world.
In the triune name of God go and baptize. *Refrain*

Help us to be faithful, standing steadfast,
walking in your precepts, led by your Word. *Refrain*

Offertory Prayer

For all the gifts you give, generous Creator, we give thanks. For the desire and will to use these gifts to serve your world, we ask your blessing, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers of the People

A - Trusting Jesus' promise that we will be heard, we offer our prayers for the world God loves, the church God calls, and for all people according to their needs.

[*Short pause*]

A - God of disruption and grace, our lives, our relationships, our world has been disrupted by pandemic, by racial tension, by injustice. Open our awareness to the signs of your grace in the midst of our anxiety. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of disruption and grace, your presence *causes* disruption of our expectations, our plans, our normal way of doing things. Open our awareness to the changes you bring. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of disruption and grace, you call us to address the violence and hatred which infect this world with disruptive love and relentless welcome. Open our awareness to the possibilities around us. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of disruption and grace, your church has too often been a voice for the artificial stability of the status quo, but you call us to so much more. Disrupt *us*, that we may live with wild abandon in the full assurance of your grace. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of disruption and grace, we give you thanks for the love and welcome we have experienced in our full communion relationship with the Anglican Church of Canada for these 20 years, especially with our siblings of St. John's Anglican Church in Lunenburg, and their rector Laura Marie Piotrowicz. May we gracefully continue to disrupt each other's assumptions, that we may grow in faith, hope and love *together*. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of disruption and grace, you walk with all who are in the middle of upheavals. Bless us with the desire to touch the sick, the wounded, the lonely and all we name before you, with your healing love and acceptance.

[*Pause to pray for individuals and situations*]

God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of disruption and grace, in the face of disruption, you meet us with grace, and by grace you sometimes cause disruption. Open our awareness to your presence in the middle of it all. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

P - We ask all this in the name of Jesus, who continues to teach us to pray,

Lord's Prayer

C - Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

SENDING

Benediction

P - May almighty God,
The Father who created us to live in love,
The Son (†) who died and rose to bring us new life,
And the Spirit who brings both disruption *and* grace,
bless us all, now and forever.

C - Amen.

Sending Song - 712, Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service

Lord, whose love in humble service bore the weight of human need,
who upon the cross, forsaken, worked your mercy's perfect deed:
we, your servants, bring the worship not of voice alone, but heart;
consecrating to your purpose ev'ry gift which you impart.

Still your children wander homeless; still the hungry cry for bread;
still the captives long for freedom; still in grief we mourn our dead.
As you, Lord, in deep compassion healed the sick and freed the soul,
by your Spirit send your power to our world to make it whole.

As we worship, grant us vision, till your love's revealing light
in its height and depth and greatness dawns upon our quickened sight,
making known the needs and burdens your compassion bids us bear,
stirring us to ardent service, your abundant life to share.

Called by worship to your service, forth in your dear name we go,
to the child, the youth, the aged, love in living deeds to show;
hope and health, good will and comfort, counsel, aid and peace we give,
that your servants, Lord, in freedom may your mercy know and live.

Dismissal

P - Go in peace. The disruptive grace of Christ goes with you.

C - Thanks be to God!

Remember to visit our Facebook page and our Website, <https://zionlutheranlunenburg.ca>