

June 12, 2011

SCRIPTURE:

New Testament:	Acts	2: 1-21
Epistle:	I Corinthians	12: 3b-13
Gospel:	John	7: 37-39
	John	20: 19-23

MEDITATION:

Disruptive Way?

Which one of us likes the way of disruption? I would imagine no one! We humans like things to stay “normal”, to stay the way we have become accustomed to. We mostly want our lives to be “steady on”. If you have been watching the news of late you have like me, been somewhat in awe of folks all over our country and the world who have had their every day lives, disrupted in unimagined ways. Floods in Manitoba and Quebec have had their homes destroyed or badly damaged by water and wind. Right here in Saskatchewan we watched as a whole community had to be removed because of the threat of fire. And the people in Slave Lake Alberta had to run for their lives, and return to complete devastation for some as 1/3 of their community was levelled by fire. Most of us can not even imagine what that would be like to have our lives torn from us in these natural catastrophes. And then there are the people all over the Middle East who have had to run for their lives, not because of natural disasters but because of the actions of a few oppressive rulers who will not give up their access to wealth and power at the expense of their country men. These places are not plagued by natural disaster but by human’s grotesque ability to act in inhuman ways to each other. Who can make sense of these things? Water, wind and fire that change people’s lives for ever. I have been impressed over this weekend as I watched the images of thousands of people boarding buses to travel to Quebec to help the people there clean up the massive mess of the flooding. What impressed me was the people whose lives have been destroyed, comforted by the presence of total strangers who came to assist them. Over and over again people expressed how the presence and care of others eased their own sense of being alone in the disasters they faced. Having someone with them who cared about what had happened to them gave them hope for the future. Not being alone and abandoned in the face of water, wind and fire seemed to make such a difference in their ability to cope with the disruption in their lives. Not being alone, being supported and cared about seems to be the answer to all this pain. I think that is the very truth for all of us. If we know we are not alone and we are cared for, that others have empathy for us, no matter what is happening in our lives, then we too can cope with whatever “disruption” is happening to us. Don’t you wonder sometimes, why this seems to be hard for us humans? In major disasters we seem to come through for each other, but in the every day “disruptions” that happen to each other we more often fail each other? I wonder why?

When these disasters of water, wind and fire come we often call them Acts of God. Our insurance coverage does not cover us if it is an “act of God”. I have always resisted that notion. I do not believe that God sends us “acts” to hurt us. Most of these events can be

traced back to how we humans have damaged our home, the earth, or how we have acted toward each other. God never sends things to hurt us to teach us a lesson of life. A God of love ends us only good – it is our failure – not God’s failure that gets us into such trouble. In the scripture when God sent Wind and Fire, it was a good thing. The presence of the Holy Spirit that would never leave the people alone, that would be with the people no matter what the disruption.

In Acts 2, the people are gathered, as if at a church gathering. They didn’t know yet that they were a church. They had gathered, Jews from all over that part of the world, to celebrate together. It was Pentecost, the historic festival of their faith, the day of celebrating that God had sent them the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Into this diverse gathering, God sent the miraculous. Spirit. There was fire and a disruptive wind from above that shook the whole building. Jesus promised us just before he left us, that he would send us his Holy Spirit. He would be with us but now with us in a different dynamic, empowering, and disrupting way. He promised us not simply a vague spiritual presence. He promised us his presence. And you recall that when Jesus was with us, along the road to Jerusalem, he was often with us in a very disruptive way – disrupting our perceived notions of God, dislocating us from our accustomed locations, constantly moving us on to some challenging, sometimes even frightening place. That promised presence of Christ, that dynamic divine descent of the Holy Spirit could have occurred elsewhere, at another time and place than at a religious gathering. Isn’t it strange that it occurred here – at our own religious gathering? Do we ask ourselves very often about that Spirit present here with us in our own religious gathering? Do we believe it, or do we go about our “religious” acts believing that it all up to us? Do we know and feel the presence of the Spirit or do we go about the work of being the church in the same old way that feels “comfortable” to us I wonder about that. The Pentecost promise is that God refuses to leave us to our own devices. We don’t have to be church by ourselves. The Holy Spirit continues to inspire, prod, and birth the church in holy wind and life=giving fire.

I want to share with you something about your church that maybe you are not aware of. Almost everyday as your staff is working during the week, people come to our door. Most of them have been experiencing some disruption in their lives. As of late, no matter what the situation, we are sending them away without any tangible resource to help them. We are out of funds in our benevolent fund. We are too busy paying insurance, or lights or salaries for that matter. All we have to give is our Spirit of love and care and our empathy that we understand that they are mostly not at fault for their disruption.

This last week a woman called me asking for assistance with food. She had sent her children off to school that morning with no lunch because she had nothing. I could hear in the background the voices of other little children, obviously Pre School who were busy being children with no understanding of their Mother’s dilemma. I could hear the desperation in her voice but I had nothing to give to her except some suggestions of where she might go for a meal. .

Then later in the week, a young man came in and wanted to speak to me. He was at his wits end with a sister-in-law who was disrupting he and his wife's lives with her constant use of drugs and alcohol. He came to us wondering if any one in the congregation happened to have a house or suite to rent so that he and his wife could just "flee" the situation. I didn't know of anyone whom I could refer him to and so we just talked about what other things he might do to help both his family and his sister-in-law. Disruption in his life was making him frantic.

It isn't just myself who answers these moments of disruption. I think you would be very proud of each member of your staff if you could see how they encounter these folks with welcome, empathy and a desire to help in any way they can. In so many ways your staff is the face of your congregation that the public sees.

What often surprises me is that these folks are very understanding. They aren't angry that we can not give them something. They understand about not having enough. They are mostly thankful that we listen and that we care and that we do not judge. That has got to be the Spirit with us Otherwise we would just send them away, gruffly because of our own guilt. Sometimes folks tell me that is exactly what happens when they approach other churches.

The only thing that keeps our church from being just another gathering of another group of polite but uninteresting, congenial but boring people is the possibility of periodic disruption by the Holy Spirit. Believe it and give thanks to God that wind and fire can and does come to us as well, in spite of ourselves. Thanks are to God! AMEN