

3rd Sunday after Pentecost
June 5, 2016
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson
Luke 7:11-17

[Click here to read scriptures for the day](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Did you catch what Jesus did here?

- He interrupted a funeral procession,
- told the grieving mother to stop crying,
- then walked up and touched the bier, the coffin, of a man he didn't know.

Imagine the shock we'd feel if we were at a funeral and someone interrupted it like that? If some strange man walked into the church, said "hey, don't be sad", and then walked right up to the coffin and laid his hands on it? What a terrible disruption.

We know Jesus had compassion for this widow and intended to help, because Luke tells us that, but none of the people who were part of that funeral procession had that insider information. No wonder the people carrying the coffin stood still, no wonder everyone was afraid. Jesus was really disruptive. It's a good thing Jesus' mother Mary wasn't with him that day - she would've been shocked at how he was behaving at a funeral. Of course, it all worked out in the end because Jesus disrupted not only the funeral but death itself and restored the man to life. **Sometimes disruptions can be good.**

There was a wonderful disruption at the very complicated funeral for my step-grandfather, Don.

- Don had been Jewish, but he converted to Christianity when he married my widowed grandmother and adopted her son, my dad.
- Don and my grandma then had five more kids and they raised all the kids in a Lutheran church.
- But when the kids were grown, Don divorced my grandma and left the church.

When he died, his kids struggled to plan a funeral. The family dynamics were pretty complicated and the religious issues were really difficult. Some of my aunts and uncles are still Lutheran and wanted a service that spoke to them; others have been turned off by church. They all thought, "maybe a Jewish service?", but had no idea how to do that and he hadn't really returned to Judaism. It was a pretty tense time.

The only instruction Don had left was that there had to be bagpipes at his funeral. He even left the name of the guy who had to play. Everyone wondered, why bagpipes? Don had no Scottish ancestors and had never mentioned liking bagpipes. But it was the one thing his kids knew he wanted so they called the piper. As our family processed down the aisle of the large funeral home chapel on the day of Don's funeral, the bagpiper began to play and we discovered that not only had Don wanted bagpipes, he'd wanted a really bad piper - the music was just horrible. We all began to laugh. At first we tried to hide it, we were at our father's and grandfather's funeral after all, but soon we were laughing so hard we were shaking. Everyone else at the funeral probably thought we were sobbing, but we were actually, as they say, rolling in the aisles. It was tremendously healing. We now all think that Don chose bagpipes to make us laugh, to bring us joy in a difficult time. Whether he intended to or not, he gave us the gift of laughter even after he died. The bagpipes and the laughter were so disruptive and yet so wonderfully healing. And, I believe God was in that disruption.

Sometimes disruptions can be good. Sometimes disruptions can shake things up and bring new life. Sometimes they can cause a change of course. When you're stuck in painful family dynamics and one family member finally says, "something needs to change, we need help," that can be disruptive and yet life giving. When you're trying to manage a chronic illness, depression, anxiety, dementia, or addiction and a friend keeps showing up to help, despite your objections, that can feel invasive and uncomfortable and yet it can also be healing. When circumstances make it impossible to stay in a demoralizing job, that disruption can be life changing. When we as a country persist in ignoring systemic racism, disruptive protests can be transformative. When we let fear prevent us from enacting laws to protect people who are transgender, the disruption and discomfort that arise when we talk about bathrooms can be eye opening.

When suffering is disrupted and new life arises, God is there. Sometimes God works to bring comfort and peace; sometimes God works to disrupt the cycles and patterns that cause suffering. Of course, disruptions themselves can be painful and many of them do not seem to lead to life. Yet Scripture and its witness to Jesus help us see that God is at work in the midst of all the discomfort, chaos, and struggle of our world. In Jesus we see that God does not desire suffering but in all things works for good. In Jesus we see the compassion of God, the compassion that led Jesus to disrupt a funeral in order to disrupt death.

And God still is at work to disrupt the power of death in our own lives to bring us new life. God does this for each of us and then God sends us out to be disruptors - to ask the difficult questions and raise the hard issues. God sends us out to disrupt hopelessness, homelessness, fear, isolation, prejudice, despair, poverty. Sometimes we are called to comfort and soothe but other times we are called to be disruptive. As we're discerning what is needed in each situation, God is with us to guide us and bless.

A fourfold Benedictine blessing captures how God disrupts and comforts us and asks us to do the same, so I offer you this blessing now:

May God bless you with a restless discomfort
about easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships,
so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart.

May God bless you with holy anger
at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.

May God bless you with the gift of tears to shed with those
who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish,
so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.

May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that
you really *can* make a difference in this world,
so that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.

And the blessing of God the Supreme Majesty and our Creator,
Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word who is our brother and Savior,
and the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Guide, be with you
and remain with you, this day and forevermore.

Let's take a few moments to rest in that blessing and to let it become our prayer.

