

Peace in the Middle of Disruption

John 14:25-27

First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, IL

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Our lives are filled with disruption.

I've told many of you this true story before.

One Sunday, years ago, after church I was in my bedroom taking off my suit to put on napping clothes—because that's what ministers often do after church, turn on a golf match or football game and take a nap. I saw a State Trooper pull up in front of our house. I watched him get out of his car, and then, looking at his reflection in the window of his car, he adjusted his uniform. I figured he was headed for one of our neighbors. But he wasn't. He turned to our front yard and walked to our front door.

My mind immediately launched into assessment mode. The statute of limitations surely had run out on anything illegal I had ever done in my teenage years. Rachel and I were friends with the State Police chaplain; I wondered, has anything happened to Eric? Are we being recruited into some needed service? I thought of my family. Rachel was home. My mom, who lived with us, was home. But all of my boys were out. They had gone for lunch with their various church friends. Had something happened to our boys?

I called out to Rachel, but she couldn't hear me.

I struggled to put my pants back on, but I was shaking too much. Our boys, our boys, our wonderful boys. O God, O God, O God.

The doorbell would ring any second, and I was shaking too much to get those pants on. I dropped them and headed to our glass front door, pantless. The officer was taken aback to see me. I opened the door before he could reach for the bell.

Besides being half naked, I was terrified, and I guess he could see that. The first thing he said was, "Sir, everything is all right."

I welcomed him in, got dressed, and he was able to talk to us about what he came to talk to us about. It was a routine matter. All was well.

Disruption. Our lives are constantly disrupted.

Not all of the disruptive scenes in our lives turn out as well as my Sunday afternoon visit the State Trooper.

Our lives are sailing along comfortably, but a gust of wind tips our boat over. The water is cold. We're in over our heads. The ho-hum has turned to a frantic prayer: O God, O God, O God. I'm sinking. Help me.

The cheery nurse calls and says, "We've got your test results in. Can you come in this afternoon to talk with the doctor?"

Our teenager calls and says, "I need you to come get me."

The tornado rips apart our neighborhood.

Our children go off to school and not all of them come back home that afternoon.

Disruption.

Chapter 14 of John's gospel is one of the most comforting chapters in scripture. Jesus' words bring us peace. "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

But Jesus shares these words of comfort with his disciples to prepare them for the disruption that is coming. He's leaving. The cross looms. Crucifixion is imminent. *Where I am going you cannot now go.* Hards times are bearing down. *I'm going to prepare a place for you. In my father's house are many rooms. I will not leave you orphaned.* But trouble is coming. The disciples' lives are going to be disrupted.

Jesus wants his disciples to know peace. *I am with you always*, he'll tell them later (Matthew 28). And now, he explains, God will send the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit will comfort, will teach, will encourage, will guide, will settle every anxious storm, will remind you that God loves you muchly and holds you fast.

This peace of God which Paul says passes all understanding (Romans 8) always accompanies life's disruptions.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled," Jesus says, "and do not let them be afraid."

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Not all disruption is a bad thing. But disruption always means change, and change is usually a little scary. Nothing disrupts one's life like graduation, or marriage, or a new job. These are good disruptions, but they can still frighten us. Not all disruptions are bad. But God can bring good things even from awful disruptions. God's grace does, indeed, abound.

The very presence of God is a disruption. On Pentecost, God spent the Spirit as the Great Disrupter. God disrupts broken patterns. We accept greed and arrogance as part of life; God calls the greedy out and topples the arrogant. We are content with living in fear; God insists on wholeness. We feel resigned to the fallow winter; God provides a cycle of seasons, including the blossom and fragrant bloom of spring. On Pentecost, the church was equipped to bear witness to God's radical, disruptive, trustworthy, unexpected grace.

To be alive is to know disruption.

In John's gospel, Jesus doesn't prevent life's disruptions from coming. Jesus doesn't show his disciples how to hide from disruption. Jesus doesn't teach us how to avoid disruption. Jesus doesn't give us a pass. Disruption is part of life—of *our* lives. What Jesus gives us is a way to withstand life's disruptions. Jesus is eager to ease our fear. Jesus surrounds us with the presence and power of God in order that we can prevail.

Very soon, Jesus' dearest friends would watch everything Jesus worked for crumble. The following he had gained would disappear. The forces of evil that had always been on the fringe of Jesus's story would take center stage. We would become our worst selves. Judas would betray him. Peter would deny him. Thomas would doubt him. The crowd would turn against him. The Romans would crucify him. Passersby would taunt him. Mary and a few brave others would stand by and mourn him.

Disruption. Jesus knew all about disruption. It's a fact of life. *To everything there is a season*, after all. Jesus doesn't want his disciples to freak out about it. Take a breath. Be attentive of my presence with you/in you by the power of the Holy Spirit.

After his crucifixion and death, even as the disciples are getting used to a new normal without their friend, God disrupts their lives again. As if they haven't lived through enough! When it rains it pours! Another disruption: *On the third day, he rose again.*

Glory turns everything upside down. Disruption.

And these exhausted, frightened, weary, over worked, and over joyed disciples would remember what Jesus had told them. John would go to the trouble of writing it down. Jesus' words would make deeper sense in a new way.

As the clouds of disruption gather, Jesus says: *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."*

AMEN.