

Pentecost Sunday, 2020  
Bishop Paul Erickson  
Greater Milwaukee Synod, ELCA

Acts 2:1-21  
John 7:37-39

Holy Disruption

Grace to you and peace, from the God of all our days; amen. As we gather, in the midst of what may come to be called the Great Disruption, I need to begin with a word of deep, deep gratitude. Just think back to the early days of March, a few short months ago, when we were slowly coming to the realization of how significant this pandemic would be and just what the ensuing disruption would entail. Few of us could have imagined all the pain and uncertainty and confusion and fear and discord that we have experienced. We have been forced to find new ways to worship and connect and serve; we have had to learn new technologies and embrace a spirit of experimentation and innovation; we have had to learn how to be nimble and not hold on to any decision or practice too tightly as information and circumstances evolve; and I have experienced the pastors and deacons and leaders of our congregations doing this in way that fully embraces the core values of our life together that we adopted a year ago: curiosity, courage, compassion, and collaboration. I am filled with gratitude and pride when I take stock of all that you have done and all that you are, dear church, and I am humbled by the opportunity to serve among you.

Now, as we enter into the next phase of this disruption, and we try to sort through the varying opinions and ideas of when and how we should return to in-person worship and other activities, and what that will all entail, my hope is that we will do so in a way that reflects deep clarity about why we exist as God's people in the church. As the what and the how and the when of our common life continues to shift in the days and months and years to come, I pray that our mission, our *why* is clear, firm, and unwavering. We exist to follow Jesus, form communities, and love all. That was true before this pandemic hit, and I pray it will always be the case.

As we look to those who were present for that first Pentecost experience so many years ago, we could say that they were also going through a time of great disruption. Their religious and political and economic systems were all in flux, and when the Holy Spirit blew through their gathering with a fiery wind, she did not bring order and calm, but rather increased change and uncertainty. Even as the text describes people speaking in an amazing diversity of languages, and the words of the prophet Joel are used to describe the coming of prophecies, dreams, and visions, we should note that very little detail is given about the content of these prophecies, dreams and visions, there is no clear picture of just what the future will look like, for the church or for the world. The only clues we have is that the people who were speaking in various tongues were describing "God's deeds of power," and the result of all of the prophecies is that "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

God's power, our salvation; that's all we know, and it's all we need to know. Even as we are in the midst of so much concern about what we are going to do and when we are going to

return to our buildings and how we are going to shape our ministries moving forward, we need to take a deep breath and remember that the most important actor in all of this disruption is God. Not that God has caused this pandemic or is dictating our response to it, but God is ultimately in charge, and God's power is made perfect in our weakness and confusion and doubt. And the purpose and direction of God's power is to bring about the salvation and healing and restoration of all people and all creation.

I don't know what the future of the church or the world is going to look like, but I'm pretty sure we're not just going back to the way things used to be. And I know is that God's Holy and disrupting Spirit is planting visions and dreams in people of all ages and identities, all races and ideologies, all languages and experiences. It may take a while to sort it all out, because it's likely that these visions and dreams will be as diverse as the people from whom they come, but let's find a way to trust in God's power and ride the winds of the Spirit. Let's recognize that God is in charge, and the long arc of God's universe, in this time of pandemic and always, bends towards justice, healing, and salvation for us all. Thanks be to God; amen.