

“Holy Disruption?”

Acts 2

Preached from the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois
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Abbi Heimach (*Keeping Faith in Education: Caring Enough to Quit*, Minneapolis: Avenida Books, 2013), writes this about her first year spent as a special education teacher in the classroom:

“On a winter Monday morning, I found myself wondering how my life turned into shepherding hyperactive children into straight lines. I walked through the hallways picking up six-, seven-, and eight-year-old children from their classrooms to take them to my class (for differentiated support as their Individual Education Plan (IEP) indicated). What will happen today? Will Andrew’s interruptions prevent me from finishing my lesson? Will Trevion hit someone? Will my kids learn anything I try to teach them? While I waited for five of my students to form a line, Rodell, a sweet, hyperactive first grader, turned to me and said, “Ms. Heimach, I am just filled with so many questions!” There I was, anxiously expecting the worst, and Rodell’s words humbled me. His words gave me absolute joy, and I hung onto them praying he would never lose that deep desire to question and think critically.”

Thank God for Rodell’s interruption. You’re supposed to be quiet in the hallway. You’re supposed to stand in line silently, eyes forward. There’s time for talking in the classroom, but not in the hallway.

But Rodell couldn’t contain himself. And it was his disruption that that rocked Abbi’s day back on track. Rodell reminded her that she was doing a noble thing as a teacher. And while she might have been worrying too much about polite children standing in straight lines, she was working to make the world better.

Disruption is seldom welcome.

In the Emilio Estevez film called *The Way*, Tom is a successful, comfortable, not very happy, sixty-something eye doctor in California. He gets news that his thirty-something son Daniel has died in an accident on the Camino de Santiago. Tom goes to France, where the trail begins, to recover his son’s body. While there, he decides on a whim to take his son’s supplies and to walk the 500-plus-mile trail to honor his son. He plods angrily along, sprinkling his son’s ashes at milestones along the way. And in all the walking, in all the rage and pain, in all the glimpses of friendship he finds along the way, he finds a miracle: he discovers himself. He discovers that he doesn’t need to be angry, driven, closed, and cold. He doesn’t need to stay locked onto the path that he is no longer called to be on. He can be something else. And what he becomes, is a person who is able to give and receive love. After untangling himself from a lifetime of expectations and duties, he becomes more fully alive. It took the terrible disruption of Daniel’s death to bring Tom back to life.

Everyone in Santa Fe, Texas, suffered a terrible disruption last week. A teenage shooter armed with his father’s legally purchased guns, walked into a high school and shot the place up, killing 14. Let me be clear here: I do not believe God ‘caused’ this disruption. I do not believe God

somehow sent that shooter into that school so that the people of Texas might learn a lesson. I'm not saying that at all.

I am saying that God will work through this disruption. God's grace will flower through this terrible, sickening travesty. God's will will be done. While I cannot comprehend this shooting, I am certain God stands with the students and families of Santa Fe, Texas, and God's grace will flower. Shalom will come.

Life and disruption go hand in hand. Growth cannot happen without disruption. For the brain, disruption means new neurological pathways are opened. For the body disruption means torn and stretched muscles are repaired stronger than they were before. And for the spirit disruption means broken hearts are forever scarred but mended and transformed by love.

One reason we parents and friends weep at graduations is because we are, of course, joyful and proud and hopeful. Another reason is that our lives have been disrupted and graduation bears our sons and daughters one step farther away from life as we knew it. Things will be changing. We weep because we grieve and fear the swift uncertainty of tomorrow. We trust God to lead both us and them, but for just a second we're stricken with the willies.

Walter Bruggemann characterizes the psalms as scripture that orients us to the way life is, disorients us, then reorients us to God's deeper, less obvious reality. The message of scripture may be that God is always at work through the disruption that buffets our lives, reorienting us to God's deeper, less obvious reality.

So it is in Acts when the Spirit blows through the church. Those in the crowd are "Amazed, astonished, perplexed." Others, "sneered" and said that everybody was drunk.

From the eye of that windy, Spirit-whipped storm, Peter tells the crowds, *Hey look, these folk aren't drunk as you suppose. No, a time of fulfillment has dawned. Something new and wonderful is happening.* The disruption of the Spirit, stirs people through fear and wonder and awe to joy. The church is born.

The likes of Peter and Stephen will be compelled to preach to the Jewish world. John Mark will help. Philip will visit the Ethiopian. Cornelius becomes a believer, even though he's not a Jew; and Peter begins to see that the kingdom of God is for every one not just for the Kingdom of Israel. James goes to Spain and, as legend has it, walks along the Camino de Santiago, a trail that pilgrims still walk. Surprises abound in the book of Acts. One of the biggest surprises is the persecutor named Saul: Even Saul, "breathing threats and murder against the disciples," will be changed; God will disrupt his life with a flash of light and a divine visitation. Saul/Paul and Barnabas will travel together to the gentile world.

Disruption after disruption will constantly reorient God's people to God's reality. Shipwrecks, jailings, getting beaten, run out of town, stoned. These disciples are on the ride of their lives—and so are we. Thank God that we can count on God's surprises. We can count on a God who will continue to disrupt our lives with his call, his purpose, his peace.

Abbi Heimach was grateful for Rodell's interruption. It was a God-thing. In it, she rediscovered her purpose as a teacher:

“...to capture my students’ desire to learn and facilitate their growth, push them when they lost hope, love them when they felt excluded, and celebrate with them in their successes. I am convinced that teaching is one of the noblest professions. It is not a job for those looking for recognition, money, or easy solutions. Instead, it’s a job for servants to the unknown future, for people with hope and belief in children and how the world could be.”

Today is our organist Richard Rossi’s last Sunday. For most of us, his departure marks an unwelcomed disruption. But this change (and I say this not because I have a crystal ball but because I trust God)—however unwelcome and painful—will bring growth and new life for him and, eventually, for us.

And as we part ways, God’s ways will be served in brand new, unexpected, and glorious ways...

Thank you Richard—and thanks be to God.

AMEN.

Notes:

Keeping the Faith in Education, Avenida Books, Minneapolis, 2013, tackles problems in education from the angles of faith, hope, belief, and redemption. In a time when teachers are under attack, they tell the world why all of us should continue to believe in their soulful, worthy work. It is a collection of essays and poems written by teachers and students that will inspire and restore anyone who works in education. Each page serves as a reminder of how and why teachers bare their souls to help their students shine.

Acts 2:1-21 1When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power." 12All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

14But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 16No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. 18Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. 19And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and

smoky mist. 20The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. 21Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."