

Gospel & Sermon June 2, 2024
Second Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Jaime Larson-McLoone
“WWJD: What Would Jesus Disrupt?”



“Make no mistake, Jesus is a disruptor. Disruption doesn’t just happen TO us. Disruption happens FOR us. Jesus doesn’t disrupt the status quo to point out how bad we are. He disrupts the status quo to point us to something better.”

Pastor Jaime

Gospel: Mark 2:23-3:6

Jesus challenges the prevailing interpretation of what is lawful on the sabbath and tells his critics that the sabbath was made for humankind, not the other way around. Healing the man with the

withered hand is work that cannot wait until the next day.

One sabbath [Jesus] was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?” And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.” Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come forward.” Then he said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand

was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Sermon by Pastor Jaime Larson-McLoone
“WWJD: What Would Jesus Disrupt?”

What would Jesus disrupt? The more common WWJD question is probably “What would Jesus do?” Maybe you remember that question and those WWJD bracelets people used to wear - or maybe still wear.

What would Jesus do? Well, sometimes what Jesus would do is disrupt whatever it is that we are doing, even if we are pretty sure that what we are doing is holy and good.

Like keeping the Sabbath.

God’s people in Jesus’ day took the commandment to keep the Sabbath a lot more seriously than we do now. Sabbath-keeping was a primary part of their identity as Jewish people. Keeping the sabbath set them apart from the surrounding people and the gods they worshiped.

And the Pharisees were particularly dedicated not just to sabbath-keeping but to practicing their faith in their daily lives - every day. In Mark’s story, they come across as a monolithic bunch of hardliners who care more about rule-keeping than their neighbors’ well-being. But in reality, they didn’t all agree.

They debated. Some were stricter than others.

What qualified as work on the Sabbath? What kinds of work were allowed? Certainly, saving a life was allowed. But what about improving the quality of someone’s life? Apparently for these Pharisees in Mark’s story, that was not part of the Sabbath-keeping tradition. Healing could wait a day.

And along comes this new guy, this upstart teacher Jesus to disrupt their tradition. Sitting here today, we might agree that this tradition needed disrupting. God intended the sabbath to be a gift, not a burden. A day of rest and delight, not obligation. A day for liberation, not captivity to a list of prohibitions. But where would we draw the line?

The Pharisees are not the only ones who draw lines and grumble when others cross them. What if Jesus busted into our worship space today? Started asking questions about our traditions? What would Jesus disrupt here? Make no mistake. Jesus is a disruptor. In just the second chapter of Mark's gospel, Jesus is already stirring up controversy. He is already disrupting traditions.

Jesus has already cast out a demon on the sabbath. Actually, that was way back in Chapter 1. He has claimed the authority to forgive sins, even as some scribes complain: No, no, no. Only God can do that.

Jesus has dined with tax collectors and sinners - without even asking them to straighten up their lives first. Doesn't sound very holy, does it. And his disciples - they don't follow the local fasting traditions. John's disciples do! The disciples of the Pharisees do!

And what's more, Jesus has the nerve to equate himself with King David. He declares himself the lord of the Sabbath. This new teacher is disrupting everything!

And it's like he's doing it on purpose! Just look at what's happening in the synagogue. Nobody presented the man with the withered hand to Jesus to see what he would do. Nobody shoved him to the front. The man himself didn't ask for anything. Jesus summoned him. Jesus created the controversy.

I'll confess, this provocative side of Jesus makes me a little uncomfortable. I'm all for Jesus pointing out where those other people have put rule-following and purity and tradition ahead of loving their neighbors. But I also know that what Jesus does unto others, he might just do unto us, too.

He might disrupt us, too. And that makes me a little nervous. I want the Jesus who smoothes out the bumpy roads of life or at least helps us navigate them. Not the Jesus who points out the bumps and steers us right toward them.

I do want Jesus to challenge and change me. I want to be more Christ-like. But I'd like Jesus to fit that transformation into my personal schedule, and my personal comfort zone - and I'd prefer to keep the major disruptions to a minimum. Maybe you can relate.

What would Jesus disrupt here?

I'm not sure. If I were, it would feel less like a disruption and more like an agenda or list of chores. We struggle to see how our traditions or structures or words exclude or harm others. They work for us. We are used to them. Those things Jesus would disrupt are probably things we don't think about because we don't have to. Not until something or someone disrupts us.

Would Jesus disrupt our liturgy or hymns? Our church budget? Our personal budgets? Would he tell us we are not as hospitable or welcoming to all people as we like to think? Would he disrupt some of our conversations? Would he point out our quickness to judge and our missed opportunities to love?

And would we listen? Or would we plot ways to destroy or discredit him?

Or ... I wonder ... could we dare to pray for holy disruption?

I'm in the midst of a devotional right now that challenges us to do just that - to pray for the Spirit to show up in powerful ways – to disrupt everything. This week I went back and looked at some of the daily prayers. They are filled with disruptive language, asking God to break through, dismantle, clear away, replace, shift ... demolish.

They are bold prayers. But our prayers for holy disruption, even those we might speak with trepidation, acknowledge that Jesus' disruption is a gift. Disruption doesn't just happen TO us. Disruption happens FOR us. Jesus doesn't disrupt the status quo to point out how bad we are. He disrupts the status quo to point us to something better.

Jesus' disruptions are not designed to shame us and make us feel bad. They are designed to lead us to new life, to abundant, kingdom-of-God life. When we settle for less than that, Jesus will disrupt us. Jesus disrupts even the power of death. And that means disrupting death-dealing forces wherever they are found, even if they are found in a holy place like a synagogue or a church: forces like injustice, oppression, consumerism, racism, heterosexism, ageism, bullying, gossip.

Death-dealing forces that cause hard, unyielding, judgmental, broken hearts. Jesus disrupts the power of death and makes way for new life. Jesus comes to disrupt anything that defines any one of God's children as anything less than human, anything less than beloved.

Jesus comes to disrupt whatever keeps us - and our neighbors - from the full, free, flourishing life that God intends. Can we be brave enough to pray that Jesus would disrupt whatever needs disrupting in our lives, and in our church life? Can we be brave enough to pray that Jesus would disrupt whatever we can't see that keeps people from knowing God's grace and love and welcome?

If we did that, what would Jesus disrupt? We may have some ideas, but we don't know for sure. But we can trust that Jesus' disruption is never meant to break us. It is meant to make us whole.

Pastor Jaime

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