

This past week has certainly been one of disruption. I was conscious of it not only as culture shock returning to classes after a spring break spent with students on an environmental justice immersion, but also as meetings and gatherings were cancelled; as I received instructions on how to teach online should the decision be made to do that; and, finally, as the decision was made to go online next week (at the place I work, University of Portland). Numerous concerns this week arose disruptively as I struggled to consider how best to care for students, staff, colleagues, and neighbors during a stressful transition.

So, when I ran across these statements in books by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Ilia Delio this past week, they stuck with me. In *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer writes: **We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God** (99). In *Birth of a Dancing Star*, Delio writes: **My life was interrupted by the powerful love of God, who broke in unannounced, seized by God in a moment of chaos** (207). I wonder if we can imagine this time of “chaos” as one inviting interruption, even divine interruption. It has certainly allowed many to realize the vulnerability of certain populations to the impacts of the Coronavirus and to advocate for these people’s needs, a practice of solidarity that will be meaningful for us ongoingly in this century. I do not suggest the virus was sent by God for some such purpose; I do say that we make meaning of the events of our lives by looking at the good and bad that results, re-storying the tales of our lives to make the most sense and to understand the purpose(s) of our lives. Divine interruption feels like one invitation to consider as we make sense of new events. We might, too, disrupt our fears by recalling the reality of God’s love we share. *Thank you for being here to do that together!*

Our readings today express moments of divine interruption. The Israelites’ life of servitude was disrupted by liberation but then, as they wandered in the desert, they began to complain – to wish they were back in their former servitude because at least then there was certainty. They knew what to expect and what was expected of them. They dependably had food and water, even if they had to work hard for them. In the desert, their future *seemed* uncertain and so they asked, devastatingly: “Is God in our midst or not?” I hope you can hear the bitterness of that question following what the narrator tells us is going on: a testing of God. Will God help out or not? Such a question presumes that help is evidence of God’s presence; help withheld is evidence of God’s abandonment. They are certainly dictating their terms to God! And are we tempted to do the same?

In the gospel Jesus offers good news to the Samaritan woman, disrupting her expectation that his gift of living water means an end of her coming to the well. Indeed, she initiates disruption, too, as the conversation veers away from the uncomfortable implications of her social life to discussion of places of worship. That discussion feels timely for us today, doesn’t it? Jesus seems to say location doesn’t matter: true worshippers worship in Spirit and Truth, wherever they be. It is these worshippers God seeks. Disruption to her expectations! Again she veers and Jesus’ identity is revealed. *I am* speaks with her. Could “I am” be speaking with us as we face uncertainties, as we uncover uncomfortable truths about how our privileges may keep some of us more out of harm’s way in this crisis than others?

Jean Valentine has a wonderful poem called “Trust Me” in which this name [Trust Me] seems to be God’s. The poem has lines that say I would like to move like a fish through water, through life, and ends:

“And Trust Me said, There’s another way to go,  
we’ll go by the river which is frozen under the snow;

my shining, your shining life draws close, draws closer,  
God fills us as a woman fills a pitcher.”

“God fills us as a woman fills a pitcher.” I love that line and I love thinking of God with the name “Trust Me.” Could we do that at this time?

To be honest, I seldom appreciate the story of the Samaritan woman because it seems to show Jesus shaming the woman, focusing on her questionable social status and ending with what seems a triumphalist statement from her community members that they no longer need her words to believe the Truth (capital T) since they have heard from the source Itself. She seems dismissed in an uncomfortable way. Today I hear resonance though with the disciples on Mt. Tabor whom we heard of last week in their moment of divine encounter with their transfigured Friend: “Let’s stay here. It’s so nice and bright and safe. We feel good here.” It helps to be able to admit how the Samaritan woman might sometimes voice our desires: Jesus, we might ask, give us the means to not have to draw water from our wells day by day, give us a “convenient out” from the labor we have to do each day to sustain life. Spare us the pain of actively moving our bodies in the world, of taking us into public space where we might brush against a neighbor’s life, of requiring our interaction with and care for the rest of the world. Or, given the Coronavirus situation: Jesus, give us tests. Give us a vaccine. Give us ample social distancing room. Give us the supplies for weathering the worst of this recent outbreak. Give us a world in which pandemics don’t occur. *Are you in our midst or not?*

We know the vulnerable in our midst are most at risk: those who don’t have the luxury of taking time off from work to stay at home, who can’t afford childcare or the extra needed to stock up on supplies, who can’t afford a co-pay or doctor’s visit while uninsured. This period is an opportunity for us to acknowledge and work to change the injustices that remain in our world that allow some of us the privilege of not panicking, that allow some of us to consider this an extended holiday – forced leisure. Let us be disrupted from our complacencies. Let us help each other weather what will be for some a devastating period of disruption.

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I end with a guided meditation from the book *Rooted & Rising: Voices of Courage in a Time of Climate Crisis* (pages 76-77, adapted). I believe we could all benefit from time to center down in sacred place, in sacred community, celebrating the gifts of life that unite us, so I invite you to find a position in which you feel comfortable, relaxed, and alert. If you like, go ahead and close your eyes.

Notice that as you breathe in, you are taking in oxygen, which is released by trees and all green-growing things. As you breathe out, you exhale carbon dioxide, which in turn is being taken up by trees. Breath by breath, you are exchanging the elements of life with plants... As you follow your breath, feel your connection to the air, and to trees, and grass, and everything green. Similarly, let yourself feel your connection to all breathing creatures, to your family here at Saint Andrew’s, to the citizens of Portland adjusting to changes in operations, to closures of public libraries and schools, to changes in workplace protocol. Breathe with all those who have fears about the future. Breathe the Spirit into all the places in our lives that have become dusty, in need of a fresh wind, or dry, in need of fresh, living water.

Feel the weight of your body... Notice your connection to the earth. You are as solid as the earth, and made from the same atoms of carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen that make up the earth. To the earth, in the end, your body will return, as we were reminded on Ash Wednesday... As you feel the weight of your body where you are seated, feel your kinship with the earth.

Let yourself also sense the inner motions in your body... Maybe you are aware of gurgling in your belly or the throb of your beating heart. Maybe you sense the circulation of blood as it moves through your body. Most of the weight of your body comes from water, just as most of our planet's surface is made of water. Your blood is mostly water, and the salt-water content of your blood's plasma is the same as the saltwater content of the sea. It is as if within your body you are carrying rivers, lakes, and the ocean. Savor your body's kinship with all fresh waters and with the sea.

Our bodies connect us to the air and to plants, to the earth, to waters and the sea, to animals, and to the stars. Appreciate the goodness of the amazing body that God has given you and feel your kinship with all of Creation.

May this experience of kinship interrupt our feelings of fear & prepare us for days ahead. Amen.