***Lutheran Church of the Epiphany***

***Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York***

***Marianne K. Tomecek, Interim Pastor***

*The Third Sunday after Pentecost A Proper 7A – June 21, 2020*

*Jeremiah 20:7-13 Psalm 69:7-10, 16-18*

*Romans 6:1b-11 Matthew 10:24-39*

*Grace to you and peace, from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.* ***AMEN***

Disruption.

That’s what Jesus does in our lives. He disrupts them. But this is in a great tradition – that’s the same thing Jeremiah was complaining about God having done to him hundreds of years before Jesus was born. “O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me.” (20:7-9.) He feels foolish before his friends because of his call to be righteous and his commitment to the needy.

This is the tradition of the person of faith – and what an appropriate taste of scripture today, as we live through the greatest disruption our lives have ever experienced, having to cope with the novel coronavirus. It’s such a disruption because we don’t know how this virus behaves, since it’s “novel” – new, and our elected officials didn’t want to take it seriously at first, so we fell into the vortex of tens of thousands of people becoming ill, all at once. But we came around more, got control of ourselves, if not of the virus, and slowly, the number of cases has begun to fall – at least here in New York, when we began to do the things that would protect the vulnerable in our society.

But I’m not sure that everyone is on the same page on this. In the states that opened up for business more quickly, the number of cases has been increasing – in some instances, doubling. But we finally have reached the point where we have the supplies and personnel to carry out the process that’s been promoted for keeping track of the increase of infection, a high rate of testing, and then tracking and tracing people who were exposed to others who are newly positive, so that they can be isolated and taken out of the general population, to stop the spread. And yesterday I learned that, the President is calling for a stop to testing, because it’s making clear just how insidiously this virus moves and grows. He doesn’t want to know the truth, because it’s unpleasant – like the so-called “inconvenient truth” of climate change. This is the method of pandemic control that we might call the proverbial ostrich approach, of covering one’s head so as not to learn the unpleasant truth. If we don’t test people, then we can pretend that they aren’t sick. Even though they are developing symptoms, increasingly going to hospitals, being put on ventilators, and increasingly dying. But if we haven’t tested all the people who have died – or who will have died – we won’t know for sure that they had COVID-19, and we can say that they didn’t die from the pandemic. More ostrich thinking.

Disruption and being unsettled.

What is this about Jesus bringing a sword to the earth? Isn’t he the Prince of Peace? Yes, but he knows that his call to peace will result in people being violent. They – or we – just can’t seem to stop beating and killing and maiming one another. We’ve been living through that experience again and again, too, with the murders of so many Black and Brown men and women continuing this spring. Jeremiah comes into life: “For I hear many whispering: “Terror is all around!” (20:10.)

But it seems that there is a call to make a change in society – to bring an end at last to the beating and killing and maiming, under the banner of “Black Lives Matter,” by taking away from the police some of the social responses that require care and understanding of a different sort, and giving them to people who are trained in social work and clinical care. I pray that the openness to speaking the truth about racism that we seem to be experiencing will make a difference.

Jesus tells us, “nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. (Matthew 10:26-27.)   It has long been the case that we must speak truth to power. And the former whispers are now shouts.

Now, Jesus knows that when he calls people to follow him – to be faithful first and foremost to God – that it will cause people to decide between him and their families. And when his followers choose him, that sword may come down in the followers’ families and cut them apart from their most intimate relationships. Can the breaks be repaired? Sure – through the love that Jesus teaches us. But it’s a hard life, being a disciple. And it takes a lot of work. Over and over again, day after day.

And Jesus also says that we should remember that, when we follow the life of the Way, as children of God’s family, God is intimately and minutely aware of what’s happening to us, because God loves us. Jesus is in on this, too: “Stand up for me against world opinion and I’ll stand up for you before my Father in heaven.”

This is our mission. Is it “Mission: Impossible,” like that old TV show? Well, the thing to remember about the impossible missions Mr. Phelps was sent on is that they always were possible – he and his team accomplished them all.

So that’s how it is with us, too – Jesus’ team – there may be disruptions in our plans, but ultimately, life turns out to be an exciting adventure. How could it not be? Remember what Paul said to the Romans? – That’s what baptism into the life of Jesus means. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Romans 6:3-5.)

That’s what we’re all about here today – although we may have been “sprinkled” with water, rather than immersed when we were baptized, it’s the same principle. Our baptismal sponsors and parents made vows on our behalf that they would teach us about our faith and see that we came to worship. When they did that, each of us was reborn in Christ as a member of God’s family – as Jesus’ brother or sister.

Our sponsors and parents did their jobs, whether recently or many, many years ago, and now we accept for ourselves the responsibility to be Christians. In fact, we accept that responsibility every day, over and over again. Will it always be as easy as saying, “ I will, and I ask God to help and guide me?” No, we all know that it’s not always that easy. And sometimes we forget to ask God to help and guide us. That makes it even harder to be faithful. And sometimes, even when we remember to ask for the help, we ignore it, and go on and follow our own advice. Sometimes we think that we know better than God how to live as Christians. And we know what happens then.

But then, Jesus’ death on our behalf comes into play again – and again, and again. When we repent, God says, “Come back, I’m waiting for you. Come back to the family.” And each one of us in the family has had that experience – and undoubtedly will have it again.

So, we live lives that are disrupted by Jesus, when he tells us to drop what we’re doing and go help someone who is vulnerable and in need of our assistance. That’s our call, our vocation. That’s our lives. That’s our purpose. That’s Christian love.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. **C: AMEN**