

**Meditation** “Disruptive Love”

Two weeks ago we celebrated Easter together – a story poetically expressed in Song of Faith, UCC recent poetic creedal statement,

*But death was not the last word.  
God raised Jesus from death,  
turning sorrow into joy, despair into hope.*

*We sing of Jesus raised from the dead.  
We sing hallelujah.*

Over the next few Sundays together we will come to a deeper understanding through the stories that followed Jesus’ death of this *risen Christ alive today, present to us and the source of our hope.*

What was hidden at first in the homes of the early followers began to shine out into the then-known world; a whole new faith, a new way of being and living took shape, casting a new light on everything this light touched.

The small group of Jesus’ followers continued on, determined and faithful and hopeful. Their message caused a disturbance then, even as their message continues to today!

Maybe today we see it in the form of disruptive messages for our consumer culture, maybe it means protest rallies for justice and peace. Maybe it calls on us to be part of support, emotionally, financially, for refugees seeking a safer place to grow and a chance to thrive. Maybe disruptive love means radical hospitality in an increasingly polarized world.

Maybe it's about a politics of care and courage to stand up to authorities and powers that ignore human rights even if it costs.

Maybe disruptive love today means speaking out against all forms of prejudice and harm that seem so rampant in our society and the world.

Maybe we as the church might find ourselves reflecting on the injustices out in the world, or right here in our own community and how and where we might speak up and speak out!

Hopefully, through our worship, our learning, our conversations together throughout the week we as a faith community are strengthened to go and let love disrupt through us!

The events that followed resurrection witnessed to a disruptive love; proclaiming the risen Christ was not popular then any more than they are now. The followers were faced with opposition and judgment from within as well as without.

There's much that could be said about the story from John - Thomas gets a bad rap, to start with. After all, the other disciples are the ones hiding away and Thomas seems to be moving comfortably out in public. He does finally join the gathering of followers, only to challenge, daring to question the experience the disciples share with him about the Christ. Yet, it is through that courageous questioning that Thomas comes to a new awareness of the risen Christ, a new confidence in life's fullness in Christ and the courage to go out and witness to love's story.

In Acts today, the Jewish religious leaders were under enormous pressure and threat from Rome to keep their people in line and quiet. By speaking out about the risen Christ, Peter and the other apostles created a disruption neither the Jewish leaders nor Rome want. How often today we too know situations where, out of fear for our own lives, jobs or

relationships, we become complicit in silencing those who would speak out about injustice, abuse and wrongdoing!

Examples: from Broadview this month: article titled “Barbaric Border” describes Trump’s proposed wall as an affront to all of God’s creation – the biological environment as well as the staggering human cost. Speaking out against this wall in many communities is risk-taking yet Jesus’ message was a call to care for the marginalized communities, including plant and animal life.

Immediately after this article in the section *Ethical Living* is the article “A Good Guy” who witnesses to the many times in his life he ignored the injustices against women and his growing awareness that we need to do better. For him, he realized, it began with the courage to talk about the culture of sexual assault rampant today. *Since this is primarily...by speaking up. (14)*

People are being silenced for speaking out; they become a disruption to those who benefit from the way things are. (Take some time to invite sharing these.) Examples: environments concerns, unfair labour practices, the suffering of refugees, shortage of affordable housing, sexual harassment, racial and religious profiling.

In Acts 5, the disciples courageously refuse to obey the authorities’ orders not to tell others what they have experienced, proclaiming confidently that Christ is risen! They have seen, they have touched and they have heard the witnesses of others, and then with the breath of Spirit, they move from fear to bold witness - transformation happens - and what a transformation!

The early church began to grow, to move outward, spreading the Good News that was made known to them during all the years that Jesus was

with them and that was now being made known to them in new and surprising ways after Jesus left them. Theirs was a call to be bold and courageous in speaking of faith and justice. It was a call to not remain silent in the face of prejudice, harm and injustices. This is a call we need today.

Where do you find yourself in these stories – a Thomas or a Peter? A little bit of all of them? Consider a time when you have moved out of your fear into action or advocacy on behalf of others. What was it that caught your attention? What was it that helped you move to that place of confident determination to address a situation that was important to you?

There is another aspect within the John reading that holds an important message for us today, especially in light of the growing anti-Semitism in our world – 105% increase in US is the recent statistic! In Acts the story is set in conflict – tension between two factions – one part of a movement against another. At this point in the story no one has been called ‘Christian’ – everyone is Jewish. It is a part of our Christian story that has been terribly mis-read as an anti-Semitic rant and consequences in history have been tragic! Mis-read because we were not *really* there and as Christians have failed to see and understand that Peter and the disciples who gathered are Jewish and so are the authorities that seek to silence him. There is immediate contrast between two groups within the same religious faith: one open and responsive to God’s expression in their lives – another confined by their own bias and self-interest. Peter, when he points a finger at the authorities is not pointing to the Jewish people as being responsible for Jesus’ death – he is pointing to the institutional church of his day – to the religious leadership *within* the very church that Peter himself is a part of – to a specific faction within the church of his time. He lays it out on the table, accusing them of

violence, of refusing to see God as one who hears the cries of God's people and comes to their aid. He reminds them that they have been blind to injustices going on around them. He tells it like it is!

The problem Peter addresses is inflexible religious institutions and leaders who will not allow them or others to move with the freedom of God's Spirit. Today, we must discern within our churches too, the areas of our lives where we have failed to be open to this same creative Spirit who seeks to move in surprising ways in our generation! How have we been part of the inflexibility that is often part of religious institutions?

In the Easter season, we are challenged to move in new ways, ways we, like the disciples are not always sure about, yet be open new possibilities, ways deeply rooted in who Jesus was, what he taught and lived when he was among us. God longs for the rich and the poor to live more equally, for peace between all races, all nations, all faiths, all genders, all ages. Love longs to be reborn in each one of us. This was Jesus' message. The disciples encountered the God of good news and resurrection for all and by the spirit's power within, were unafraid of the consequences.

Is the voice of the faithful heard today? I wonder who is speaking out boldly to the issues that confront us. I wonder where some gain their strength to challenge the religious and political authorities of today. Would I have the confidence of Peter and the other disciples to speak and act boldly when a voice is needed, a word spoken? What message about disruptive love does the world need to hear most of all today? What message about God's love have you heard that needs telling, no matter what?

The disciples had been so profoundly changed by the presence of Jesus

they could not keep quiet. May we be bold, disruptive witnesses to love. And when others wish to silence us, may we shout it even louder! *Christ is always rising, always becoming manifest in this beautiful incomprehensible, mysterious world of ours...*(138 Bruce Sanquin The Advance of Love).