

Years ago, like pre-Covid years ago, Sue Moeslein suggested that we start using the Prayer of St. Francis during Walking Worship. It kind of became a thing for us, no matter the season, summer or fall, we began closing each walk with the words of St. Francis. Help me to not seek to be understood as to understand, let me be an instrument of peace, help me to sow love in the world. We began to know these words by heart, but this fall, we've changed it, because while there is hope and comfort in praying to be an instrument of peace and pardon, sometimes, it can become rote, to just say let me be someone who puts love in the world. Instead, during this round of Walking Worship, we've been closing with the *Reverse* Prayer of St. Francis, and this is how it goes:

**Lord, make me a channel of disturbance.
Where there is apathy, let me provoke;
Where there is compliance, let me bring questioning.
Where there is silence, may I be a voice.
Where there is too much comfort and too little action, grant disruption.
Where there are doors closed and hearts locked, grant the willingness to listen.
When laws dictate and pain is overlooked, when tradition speaks louder than need,
grant that I may seek rather to do justice than to talk about it.
Disturb us, O Lord. To be with, as well as for, the alienated;
To love the unlovable as well as the lovely.
Lord, make me a channel of disturbance. Amen.**

It hits differently, these words, calling us out from the complacency of just being people who love and into a world where we are called to be God's hands and feet, seeking justice and to not just go along with the status quo of the world. As we said it this past Wednesday and talked about it, Carol said

something about Martin Luther and it just kind of rang in my head like, yeah, praying to be a channel of disturbance would be right up Luther's alley and thus as we sit here today, 506 years after the Reformation, probably needs to be up our alleys too.

Luther was never what you would call a go with the flow kind of guy. From the very beginning, he was a bit of a rabble rouser. His parents wanted him to be a lawyer, he came home soaking wet from a thunderstorm one night and declared he was going to be a monk. He becomes a monk and spends the majority of his time chafing against the expectation that he needs to be perfect because if that's the expectation then God must hate him and he's never going to know the purity of God's love. He goes on pilgrimage to Rome and rather than being awed and amazed by the wonder of what the church has built, he wants to do his best Jesus imitation and flip over some tables and send the poor away fed rather than empty handed, their money jingling in the coffers, freeing their loved ones from purgatory. He sees gold and opulence and doesn't think, man, look how far we've come from a ragtag group of nobodies in Galilee, but instead thinks, man, we have missed the point of the gospel. He goes home and writes and writes and writes and writes and when the Pope threatens him with excommunication, he burns the letter in public. He gets called before the council at Worms and instead of

recanting his beliefs about grace and hope and God's unfailing love which comes with no expectations, he says, here I stand, I can do no other, knowing that it will brand him as a rebel, a threat, and someone to be eliminated. He looks at the church doors in Wittenburg and rather than using them to post regular old community notices like everyone else, he decides that this is the place to put his 95 grievances against the church and the Pope, on full display for everyone to see. If there was every anyone who was going to pray, Lord, make me a channel of disturbance, it was going to be our guy, Luther.

Amidst the pomp and circumstance, pops of red and echoes of brass, that is what we celebrate today, one man standing up and deciding that he wanted to channel some disturbance into the church because the way he saw it going wasn't the way of the gospel, of Jesus, of hope. He looked at a church that had gotten so caught up in itself, in how it presented to the world, in consolidating its own power, in being the only voice in the world, and he realized that it wasn't the church of the gospel. A church that was more interested in gilding its doors with the money of the less fortunate was not being God's hands in the world. A church that brought guilt and heartbreak rather than hope and grace was not being God's hands in the

world. Luther wanted hope and peace and love in the world and the only way he could figure out how to do that was by channeling some disturbance.

On our best days as the church, I think we love this, I think we embrace it, and we see it as our heritage. We are people of disturbance, called into the world to name injustice for what it is, to speak truth to power, and be a living, breathing place of hope for *all* of God's children. On our best days, we say, no the status quo is not enough and complacency isn't acceptable because that's not who we are, that's not the legacy upon which we were founded. On our best days, we know that God's justice being wrought in the world requires disturbance. It requires speaking up and out for the voiceless, not just praying for the poor but walking with them, doing tangible things to feed and care for them, not demonizing or denigrating them, but seeing them in the image of God. It requires saying that thoughts and prayers aren't enough, that the preciousness of life is more sacred than our commitment to weapons of violence and destruction. It requires saying that love, all kinds of love wins, because love when it is compassionate, mutual, and life-giving it has been blessed by God no matter who is sharing that love. On our best days, we know that in order to live out the gospel we have to disturb the waters, because we are descendants of a table-flipping Messiah and a thesis-nailing rogue monk.

But on our worst days...well on our worst days we want nothing to do with disturbance, we want to stay comfortable, wrapped in tradition and the way things have always been done, even if some of those things aren't working anymore. On our worst days, we say that new ideas are frivolous and worldly and if we just keep on keeping on then eventually something will change. On our worst days, we decide that we are the arbiters of God's love and that grace has a price, standing at the doors of God's kingdom acting like we've been giving the authority to be bouncers, saying who is in and who is out, because we are the ones that truly know who God loves and who God judges and it's up to us to decide who gets included. On our worst days, we forget that what sparked the Reformation was a desire for all of God's people to hear a message of grace, for them to hear that they don't have to do, be, or say any specific thing to be loved.

Luther could have given in to the worst days and said, ya know what, I'm just one man, one monk who once changed his life because he got scared in a thunderstorm, no one is going to listen to me, and someone else will come along and take care of this I'm sure. Luther could have said it wasn't worth the hassle, the trouble, the danger, the work. But he didn't because he believed that he had something worth fighting for, worth being a disturbance for, worth risking pretty much everything for, and what he had

was an ardent belief that's God love and grace was for all people. So he fought, he spoke up, he put it all on the line. He questioned and listened and refused to be complacent; he sought justice, he didn't just talk about it. And because of that we're here, on the cusp of the same kind of opportunity.

There can be no denying that the world has changed, the church has changed, obviously in the last 506 years, but even just in the last three years. Relationships are different, life is different, and we can rant and rave and rail against the machine about that or we can stop, pause, and ask, how can we be a channel of disturbance and grace in the midst of this? Where do we see complacency and disinterest and rather than pointing the finger at whose fault it is, ask, how can we bring the gospel into this moment in a way that is fresh, life-giving, and hopeful? Where do we see the need for God's justice to be at work, where in our communities do God's hands and feet need to be? And then instead of just talking about it, actually going out and doing something about it.

The Lutheran church has existed for this long because at the end of the day, we have a message that is worth proclaiming, that God loves you, exactly as you are, that Christ came to bring light and life and there is not one, single thing you need to do to earn that love and that salvation, that the Holy Spirit surrounds our moments and empowers us to move in this world

with confidence and hope that we can make a difference. That is worth shouting from the rooftops, but if we can't even get excited about it, how can we expect others to? If we can't see how that kind of grace breaks into the world to create spaces of inclusion, diversity, and radical welcome, then how can we expect anyone to believe that we actually believe what we proclaim? If we can't see where our faith empowers us to act in the world on behalf of the poor, forgotten, lonely, and rejected, then how are we any better than our ancestors who tried to make the church their own exclusive club where only some were welcomed?

We have the opportunity to spark a new kind of Reformation, to say this world needs a message of grace and a message of hope and we're going to ruffle some feathers to actually make that message known. It's all fine and good for us to put on our red clothes and sing *A Mighty Fortress* at the top of our lungs, but if it stops there, if the power of the Reformation doesn't drive us from this place to go do the work of the gospel, well...I think Luther would be disappointed we still use his name as part of our identity. The kingdom of God needs us, it needs our fire and our excitement and our love and our passion. Our siblings needs our fight for justice and our hope for the future and our willingness to disturb the stillness to bring the gospel. Lord...make us channels of disturbance...**AMEN!!!**