

## **“Disruption in a Distracted Age” Matthew 3**

The beauty with using my Iphone™ as my alarm clock that as I turn it off I can then go check Facebook to see any new posts in my feed, especially those that arrived overnight from friends “across the pond” who have a five hour jump on my day no matter how early I arise. Then I’m off to Instragram to see my favourite golden retriever pals and then only a click away from the Weather Network™ to see the outside temperature that helps me chose what to wear that day. My phone doesn’t leave my hand, even into the bathroom and especially down to the treadmill where I listen to yesterday’s PTI podcast as I walk. Music plays during my shower and then upstairs for breakfast to read a colleague’s daily devotional as I eat my eggs. A daily call to Mom is sure to follow then listen to music on my way to work and it’s not even 8:30am. Chances are I spoke little with Allyson that morning and even less to God. Emails, text messages, searching online for information on my upcoming sermon occurs the minute I arrive at the office. I’m busy, or so I think but it’s not exactly the word I am looking for. You might call me “focused” but in truth I am “distracted.” Chances are you know exactly how I am feeling as does Alan Noble who has written on this very topic I am presently reading. He writes, “There’s no space in our modern lives that can’t be filled up with entertainment, socializing, recording or commentary”. However, he continues, “this has always been the human condition,” and may I add, even as far back as our scripture lesson this morning. (Source: Alan Noble, “Disruptive Witness”)

Here were first century Hebrews minding their own business when someone entered their world to disrupt their daily lives. They were minding their own business when someone known as much for his fashion faux pas (camel hair was so last year) as he was for his “hellfire and brimstone” sermons, comes along. We’re not sure how long John (or as we’ve named him, “John the Baptist”) had been on the scene but word must spread quickly about him, as Matthew alludes, that not just those from one local area, (Jerusalem) had come to see him but “all of Judea” as well. They were coming to be baptized, but even more, we are told, to confess their sins. Now it’s one thing to request a baptism (especially if it’s popular or because everyone else is doing it or in today’s world – pressure from grand parents to get their grandchildren “done”) but its quite another thing to confess your sins to be baptized. Who of us here likes others to know “our business” especially when our business is usually done in secret. So who was coming? Well, good church folk like ourselves, would be the first to answer: “Those who aren’t here this morning but should be.” Like the person with the addiction, or the one known for their temper or those involved in “shady” business practices – in other words those who have little or no faith background. And

that's who was there but then another group began to arrive - those we may not expect. Let's call them, "the religious right," for that is who they were. They were both religious sects within Judaism who held an unattainable morality on "everyone else." So it may or may not surprise us that they also lined up to be baptized. Some might have been surprised, others applauded because although "church-going folk" they did the same thing as others – it's just that they did it in secret or what they believed to be in secret. You would therefore think that John would be happy to see these people who wanted a fresh start too. But John neither is surprised nor did he applaud. John was just angry! What was not visible, but what John somehow sees is the Pharisees and Saducees lining up in front of the tax collector and behind the prostitutes was the inward motivation for John to call them a name (that if updated to today's language) is not something I should say in a place of worship, if you get my drift. But as we read on we see it's not so much the inward motivation but the outward acts or what I would call "pre-repentance" that John is most offended. Maybe this might help. You know how parents taught or presently teach their child to say, "I'm sorry" when their child does something wrong? But parents are not simply teaching their child two words like, "I'm sorry" (said sarcastically) but an attitude of contriteness and a proven action, even before the words are spoken, that the child understands what they have done and will "try" not to do again. Well, apparently the Pharisees and Saducees had not been taught this as children. So John disrupts their lives.

There are few, if any such prophetic voices, in our world today. We know this for a couple of reasons. For one we are told constantly (especially by the world and believed to be backed by proof texting certain scripture) that we are not to judge. For example, how many times have you heard that very thing said, when maybe you have "confronted" someone about a lifestyle choice, they have made? And secondly such comments often "offend" and we live in a world where everyone seems to be offended. So for someone like John to arrive on the scene and share the truth (which doesn't sound like it was done "in love") we can only imagine how the "brood of vipers" might have felt: judged and offended. But notice John's words. They are not his. They are God's Words confronting not only the Pharisees and Saducees but us as well. And if you think the standard John sets is disruptive, you haven't seen anything yet.

John introduces a further disruption when he says to those thinking "his" baptism was disruptive with water and repentance because the One to follow him would baptize with "fire" rather than "water," the Holy Spirit and not just repentance. Fire to me sounds far more painful, and the Holy Spirit (although we might think as either a "friendly ghost" or a gentle angel-like figure on your shoulder giving advice, we know to whom John was referring. The One to come after John was

none other than his cousin Jesus, who by John's initial refusal to baptize Jesus, makes us aware that John knew exactly who this Jesus was and Jesus' demands on our life. But he doesn't seem to be "the Jesus" we are familiar with. I mean if you are a good church kid like me you grew up with the glow in the dark Jesus (holding the sheep) nightlight or sang hymns that proclaimed Jesus as "meek and mild." But John's "Jesus" seems so much more... disruptive. And maybe that's the real lesson of our text this morning. Jesus is not what we expect. So maybe it's not John the Baptist who comes to disrupt our lives but Jesus himself.

Someone asked me a great question recently about membership and where it can be found in scripture. I thought for a minute and answered, "It's not there." Membership is really a "human made institution" that has welcomed some and left others out. But that does not let anyone of us off the hook because although membership might not be present in the Bible, community (or the goal of membership) is. We need to read only Acts chapter 2 for example to see that community involves much more than voting rights in the church but the way in which we sacrifice for the sake of the community, put aside our wants for the wants of all, and make being "together" our priority. Or what about another that told me that because Jesus never spoke on a certain topic it means Jesus doesn't have a problem with it. It's these kinds of areas where the church is often labeled as "out of step with the rest of the world" or archaic in our beliefs. Yes Jesus may never have spoken about \_\_\_\_\_ (and you can fill in the blank) but like membership vs. community, all Jesus' words when put together are even more disruptive. "Don't overlook those the world overlooks." "Be generous with what you have." "Don't forget the widow, the orphan, the refugee." And closer to home and even more disruptive to the very core of who we think we are, "Deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me."

This is how Jesus' ministry began. And this is what the Kingdom of God looks like. It is not something yet to be fulfilled, yet to come, yet to be demanded of us, but is here and is now. And that "Kingdom" comes to disrupt our otherwise distracted lives. This Kingdom life, that you will hear many times over the next number of weeks, is not an "invention" of Matthew but a reality that came to fruition with Jesus' arrival. And if you think it costs us nothing, that we need not have our lives disrupted because we are doing just fine (thank you very much) then consider again this meal before us. It can be seen as simply a meal of remembrance but in truth it is a sacrificial meal for the bread is Jesus' body broken for us and the wine represents Jesus' blood poured out for us. If Jesus would demonstrate such a love, go to such an extreme to get our attention, then He alone is deserving to disrupt our distracted lives.

Let us pray...