



“A Disruptive Invitation”
A Sermon for Ash Wednesday
Psalm 51:1-17
March 1st, 2017
First Federated Church, Peoria, IL
Rev. Zachary Lysdahl

As a boy, I liked getting invitations. It was always exciting to get a birthday party invitation, a sleepover invitation, or a pickup baseball game invitation. To me, invitations meant fun times were ahead. The same was true for me as a young adult. I was excited to get invitations. Wedding invitations were happy occasions because I was invited to be a witness to my friends profess their love in the covenant of marriage. Housewarming party invitations were joyful events because friends of mine were nesting into a new home. Invitations were something I liked to get because of the thrill and excitement.

However, a couple of years ago things began to change. Invitations began to lose their luster. I had graduated from seminary and my classmates and I had started looking for our first “call.” Whenever any of us received our first call an ordination service would be held shortly thereafter so invitations would be sent out. In the ordination service the soon-to-be pastor is asked a series of questions regarding their pledge to follow Christ, walking in ways of righteousness, and leading the church to fulfill its call to serve the community with joy, peace, unity, and love. Sitting through many ordination services I began to see how and where I have failed to live into the vows I made at my own ordination service. My shortcomings, my disobedience, my sins were on my mind as I heard the ordination vows being made. In those services I clearly saw where I have failed my calling as a follower of Jesus. Now, when I receive an invitation postmarked with a classmate's address, I have to take a couple of deep breaths before I open it, because I know that the invitation will lead me to examine my own mortality, sinfulness, and need of a savior. Instead, of getting excited about invitations I now find them to be disruptive.

My trouble over disruptive invitations extends to the very reason we have gathered here tonight. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lenten Season, which is 40 days long. In this season all followers of Christ are invited to prepare their hearts and repent of their shortcomings, disobedience, and sins, while at the same time eagerly anticipating Good Friday and Easter Sunday. As it stands, Ash Wednesday is another disruptive invitation.

It calls us to think about our mortality, our sinfulness, and our need of a savior. At the same time, it calls Christ's followers to renew their commitment to daily repentance. This invitation, Ash Wednesday, also reminds us, with confidence and gratitude, that Christ has conquered death and sin. So just like the ordination invitation I receive, Ash Wednesday is another disruptive invitation. One that invites us all to examine our mortality, sinfulness, and need for a savior.

In Psalm 51 is yet another disruption. David, the ascribed author offers a prayer of repentance. One that has been used by the church as a cornerstone for the Lenten season for centuries. In his prayer, David recognizes and names his sins and the sins of the nation he leads, Israel. The prayer is an honest examination of David's brokenness and acknowledgement of his inclination to sin. Although, as with all of scripture David's words aren't just his own. They are our story too. His prayer is our prayer, His honest self-reflection is our self-reflection. That is no clearer that's in verse three "For I know my transgressions, my sin is always on my mind." Always on my mind... This is the disruptive invitation given to us on Ash Wednesday. We are to more carefully consider the areas in our lives where we have sinned and then daily name them before God. In other words, we are disrupted. Called out from our places of comfort to name the areas in our lives where we have disobeyed God's will in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. When we have not loved God with our whole heart and mind, and strength. Psalm 51 is an invitation leading us into this disruption.

Naming our shortcomings, our disobedience, our sinfulness is not easy, but it is part of preparing our hearts for Good Friday and Easter Sunday. In David's prayer, Psalm 51, he doesn't stop praying after he has told God about the sins that are always on his mind. He continues to pray, asking God for mercy and forgiveness. That is a critical part of the Lenten Season we mustn't overlook. When we name our brokenness before God we then also are appeal to the God of superabundant mercy and love. This is a thoughtful process, the Lenten season calls us to a deeper, more intentional reflection of our lives.

Yes, we are sinful people in need of a merciful savior. We aren't left in our misery - only ever thinking about our brokenness. On Easter Sunday we remember the most spectacular moment in history, ever! God, in God's everlasting love for all that God has created sent his only Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ to pay the wages of our sins and win victory death. In Jesus Christ's death we were crucified with him. In his resurrection we have been raised to life with him. Through his life, death and resurrection Jesus has imputed to us his righteousness. That is to say, Jesus took our place on the cross, gave to us his righteousness and now we stand before God redeemed and restored.

Yes, Ash Wednesday is a disruptive invitation, like those ordination invitations I keep receiving. For it invites us to think about our mortality and sinfulness and to confess our shortcomings, our disobedience to God. Psalm 51 leads us in this disruption. It calls us to name our sins before God. It also gives us the words to pray during the Lenten season. A prayer that appeals to the God for mercy who has readily and abundantly offered to us forgiveness through Jesus Christ. During this season our sins and need to repent are on our minds, disrupting our thoughts, and leading us into prayer. And so we eagerly await the coming of Easter, the day Jesus rose from the dead, knowing that we have been raised to life with him. In 40 days we will celebrate that truth so in the meantime take this disruptive invitation to heart and know that we have been forgiven.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.