

That Girl, That Boy, That God: Disruption as a Spiritual Practice

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[0 : 0 0] All right. All right. So welcome into this place. My name is Tonette. I'm one of the co-pastors here at the Table Church. And one of the things we're going to do today that is a little bit different is Anthony and I are going to co-preach, which is always a fun adventure.

So I am. Yeah, always a fun adventure. So I am going to get us started by reading our passage for today. You're welcome to pull that up if you desire. It is in John, John 2, 13 through 23.

It will also be on the screen. The Passover of the Jews was near. And Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple, he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves.

And the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple with the sheep and the cattle.

He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, take these things out of here.

[1 : 1 2] Stop. Stop making my father's house a marketplace. His disciples remember that it was written, zeal for your house will consume me.

The Jews then said to him, what sign can you show us for doing this? Jesus answered them, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.

The Jews then said, What sign the Jews then said, this temple has been under construction for 46 years and will you raise it up in three days?

But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remember that he that he had said this and they believe the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing.

[2 : 1 5] Have you ever had an encounter that made you profoundly realize that something...

I'm going to start again. Maybe that's better. Okay, so have you ever had an encounter that made you realize something profound about yourself that you did not know before?

Maybe a conversation or you encountered a piece of art or a passage in a book. And when you experienced it in this split second, something inside of you leaped out.

Something that was preexistent and true but was finally coming to articulation in your heart. That happened to me when someone gave me a copy of a book by a guy named Thomas Glaive called Words to Our Now.

And in it, Glaive, who is a Jamaican-American gay man, speaks of the fear he carried as a young man at the received hatred of other young black men.

[3 : 4 5] Then he writes, When I read those lines in my 20s, something exploded inside of me that I have never had to feel afraid at all.

When I read those lines in my 20s, something exploded inside of me that I have never forgotten. And I realized that I, too, carry this immense fury and shame that I have allowed others to make me feel afraid because of things that are fundamental to me about how God has made me.

And then I felt that same sense of explosive realization when I read a short paragraph in a book that is now well-known, well-praised by Austin Channing Brown called I'm Still Here.

And in a chapter fittingly called Creative Anger, Brown says this. In moments when I was angry, I used to wish that I was that black girl.

You know the one, the one who snaps her gum, who claps out every word when angry, the one who rolls her eyes and you feel it in your bones.

[5 : 12] Somebody knows, somebody knows. Yes, some of y'all are that, y'all already got it down, okay? It's the one who always says what she thinks, who begins her sentences with, first of all, and what you're not going to do is.

Y'all know what I'm talking about, right? Some of y'all did that this morning. That's what I'm feeling, okay? And then she goes on, I wanted to be the black girl who white people are afraid of making angry.

Hmm. Those few short sentences, a split second after I finished reading them, made me realize that I, too, have always wanted to be that girl.

The one with the brilliant comeback. It's perfectly timed and confidently delivered. Basically, I've always wanted to be the black girl who could read anyone deserving for filth.

Right? We know this girl. Or sometimes the her is a him. And usually, he is queer and brown and flamboyant and confident.

[6 : 27] Hey, asshole. Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness.

We are having fun in here. Okay, so. But the thing is, I'm not like any of them. That boy, that girl, that person.

Even as I maintain this desire to become like them. Y'all probably already guessed this. I'm the one who remains well-mannered and level-headed in the moment.

And then I go home and sit in the kitchen with my wife and tell her hours later what the perfect comeback would have been. You know what I'm saying? That's who I am.

And that can be helpful in certain situations if you stand to lose something meaningful. But it doesn't create the kind of disruption in the moment that calls everyone present to account.

[7 : 33] And I think that that's why I really love this passage from John. Because Jesus is that boy. The one who creatively uses his anger right on the spot to make a point.

To me, this weekend, as we honor Dr. King and have in mind tomorrow's inauguration, it seems the perfect time to meditate on Jesus as that boy.

See, what we sometimes miss when we see that person popping off in front of us in line or in some other random situation in daily life can be easy to miss that that person is engaging in a political act.

Politics is always fundamentally about relationships of power. And when we take a closer look, we realize that that person is often disrupting a relationship of power by demanding justice in the face of a perceived injustice, often committed by someone more powerful.

I've said more than once in this series that we're doing on John, that for the author of that book, to believe is to participate.

[8 : 54] And that includes to participate politically. To disrupt relationships of power that uphold the status quo of injustice.

It includes following this Jesus who is very willing, it seems like more than willing to be that boy. This gospel, the gospel of John, is like a coming out story.

Jesus of Jesus revealing himself to be God. John is intent on showing us who this Jesus is and what God is like. And unlike the other gospel writers, John doesn't put this story at the end of Jesus's ministry.

As one writer really perfectly points out, this is not the final straw that leads to Jesus' execution in the gospel of John.

Instead, John chooses to place this story in chapter 2 right at the beginning of the gospel because he thinks it is essential to understanding who Jesus is and thus who God is.

[10 : 03] It is the first straw in understanding that as Damon Garcia so brilliantly puts it in his book of the same name. This is the God who riots.

For John, the actions of Jesus flipping over tables in the temple, this is his inaugural sermon. These are the actions that are parallel to the announcement of Jesus in Luke 4.

For the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. And isn't it interesting that in both Luke and John, such prophetic words and such prophetic actions begin in the temple?

And I absolutely love that this story, the story of this riotous God, that right after or right before it, we get the story of Jesus turning water into wine, which can serve to remind us that God doesn't just call us to survival, but to abundant joy.

The wedding of Cana and the cleansing of the temple reminds us that as John says in chapter 1 of Jesus, he comes with grace and truth.

[11 : 27] And far too many of us have been formed in a domesticated discipleship that is emphasized, gracious living to the exclusion of telling the truth.

But Jesus comes bearing both. And I want us to remember that at the start of the new year, during this weighty weekend, that any new beginning requires both.

All right, so I'm going to give some quick context on this passage and then just get into two quick points. So Jesus goes up to Jerusalem, probably close to 100,000 people.

Pilgrims would have come for this religious observance, the Passover. He steps into the temple. He's so disturbed that what he sees that he starts driving out those selling and changing money.

He makes a whip right on the spot and scatters the money changers. The anger of Jesus is palpable in this passage, but the passage, it's not actually the anger that is scandalous here.

[12 : 33] The scandal is much more in the details of the story. The temple complex is the spiritual and national and psychic heart of the Jewish nation. The cattle, sheep and doves were these unblemished animals necessary to offer sacrifices in the temple.

Those who traveled to Jerusalem would not have been able to bring such animals along with them. So they needed to buy them in the temple, but they also would have had international currency.

So they would have had to change their money. They would have had to change it over. And they needed to change it from money, particularly that bore the sign of the emperor, to money that did not to get these animals.

So when Jesus, when Jesus commits these actions in the temple, he is undercutting a system. And what is necessary to that system.

When you read other versions of the story, and I encourage you to do that, it's going to be an interesting week. I encourage you to do that. Store up, get nourished. Those gospels assume that what Jesus was criticizing was the abuses of the system, kind of distortions of the systems, things that could be corrected by reform.

[13 : 47] But in John's version, the system itself is the problem. And I want to be clear here. The system is not Judaism. It is not anything fundamental to Judaism.

If Jesus wanted to upend Judaism itself, he probably would have gone inside the temple to where the actual sacrificing was and the Holy of Holies was. But he doesn't do that. He stays outside in this area of transaction.

The priestly order had this long history of collaborating with imperial powers. And the prophets constantly called that out and called out this privileging of worship, kind of the rituals of worship, over justice.

So Jesus calculates and chooses disruption. He methodically, and I'm going to be honest, this detail came out to me as I was prepping the sermon.

He methodically braids this whip together. Not a temper tantrum. It's not. He has to think about this. He demands the animals be removed.

[14 : 54] He pours out the money onto the ground. And in an act that this one scholar, this is still Damon Garcia, he calls looting. Because looting is removing goods from the cycle of exchange and profit.

It is enacting a different relationship to property. And that's Vicki Osterwell. Think about that. And then Jesus flips over tables, engaging in, today if that happened, what would be considered property damage.

These are not actions that are about reform. They're about dismantling a corrupt system that had at its heart leached from the practice of genuine religion.

This is the Jesus that God reveals. And this is your God and mine. So this weekend, this weekend in which we stand inside the tension of MLK weekend and the inauguration, I want us to take two simple things from this passage.

And they are the call to embrace zeal and the call to embrace anger. The first time I ever preached on this passage, the line that stood out to me was this one.

[16 : 20] His disciples remembered what he had said, zeal for your house will consume me. Or what had been written, zeal for your house will consume me. Another way of saying that passion for your house will be my undoing.

And I wonder if many of us hold that fear in our hearts that the passion needed for these times will be our undoing.

That it will take too much respectability from us to become that boy or that girl or that person. That it will threaten our vision of the good life.

And the truth, and this is the truth I don't want to hear, is that it absolutely will. But we enter into the passion of Jesus, trusting that there will be resurrection.

And we enter it knowing that as Audre Lorde, the poet Audre Lorde taught us, the erotic, which is just another way of talking about deep feeling. It is a vital source of information and power.

[17 : 32] Our capacity for deep feeling is part of what teaches us about the life of flourishing. It tells us what is possible because we know joy.

And Lorde highlights all of this in her brilliant essay, *Uses of the Erotic*, by saying that as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up of necessity being satisfied with suffering and self-negation.

And with the numbness, which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. To embrace the politics of Jesus means embracing the passion for the house that God wants to build and the world that God wants to build and then letting the chips fall where they may.

Because resurrection is assured. Yeah. But I also have to say that as a queer black woman, one of the main reasons that I feel tempted to disengage from my ability to feel is because I don't want to be angry all the time.

Y'all, you know, yeah, I'm so tired of being angry. Even as I was prepping the sermon, that's what I realized. I was like, oh, I'm keeping this all this emotion I feel over here because I don't want to be angry. I'm tired of being angry.

[18 : 57] I know I'm not the only one. But I do think that we have to find ways to embrace anger in these times, just as Jesus embraced anger in times like his.

I'm going to go back to Audre Lorde. I love that she has these two essays, the Uses of the Erotic and the Uses of Anger. And in that latter one, she challenges us to remember that focused with precision, anger can become a source of energy serving progress and change.

Anger is not the same as hatred and it is not the same as violence. But rather it is a source, she says, of illumination and laughter and protection and fire in places where there is no light, no food, no sisters, no quarter.

And my sense is that anger is more likely to be creative, to be focused with precision, as Lord puts it, when we share it and when we affirm it and when we show up to the actions that anger requires.

In the next few years, it seems likely that I'm going to lose the recognition and rights of my marriage on a federal level. And I'm going to need y'all to show up in anger over that and with action over that, even if it doesn't directly affect you.

[20 : 28] In the next few years, ICE could very likely target schools in our community and we will need to show up with anger to that.

The list like is much longer than I can even get into and y'all know that. And any fear that you feel as I mention these kinds of things, though it has to be turned into a deep feeling that leads to action and anger that disrupts.

Why? Because we follow a God who riots and riots for the sake of love and of justice. Y'all, I want to be passed over when it comes to prophetic sacrifice.

I do. I personally would love that. I just want to go out and try to be a poet and pick some flowers. That's what I want to do. Yeah. But Jesus shows us that that is not possible if you want to exercise systems of harm.

Jesus shows us that we have to become that person, that boy, that girl who says what we think, who begins our sentences with, first of all, and ends with what you ain't gonna do is.

[21 : 55] And for most of us, that is not going to happen all at once. Let's be honest. It's going to look different for all of us depending on our personality. It's going to be harder for me. Pray for me. Lay some hands and it'll come quickly.

And even as we commit to action and we commit to participating in our faith and following the Jesus, the politics of Jesus, following that, we all have these different roles to play.

But the trick is to know that in the economy of God, death is always followed by resurrection. The trick is Johnny Rashid puts it is to allow yourself to be motivated by the transcendent in order to enact the imminent.

The trick is to follow Jesus, the sent one of God, and to remember that she snapping her fingers is the one who riots.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.