

Friends, may grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and Christ Jesus our Lord.

There’s a Yiddish saying: “We make our plans and God laughs.” No matter how much we try to plot and control the outcomes of our days, at any moment life may take us in a very different direction. We’ll likely encounter unexpected roadblocks and detours along the way. But in the end, these changes of plans may well lead us to new, fruitful endings.

Something like this happened to Peter and his fishing partners, James and John. Now, Peter had already encountered Jesus in his hometown of Capernaum. Jesus had spoken in the synagogue there. While in the synagogue, Jesus healed a man with an unclean spirit. It was a striking, dramatic scene.

Afterwards, Jesus went to Peter’s house. Peter’s mother-in-law lived with his family, and she was suffering from a high fever. Jesus healed her. That evening, everyone in Capernaum who had a sick family member brought them to Peter’s house so that Jesus could heal them.

So now, Jesus comes down to the lakeshore of Galilee. A huge crowd of people pressed upon him. Jesus sees Peter next to his fishing boat. “Hey, can you row me out a little ways so I can speak to the people?”

Peter takes Jesus offshore a bit and Jesus preaches. After he’s finished, Jesus instructs Peter to row out to the deep and let down his nets. Peter and his fishing partners had fished all night long and had caught nothing but seaweed and flotsam.

Peter follows Jesus’ request, and the once empty nets are now bulging with fish. He hails James and John to come and help. The catch is so abundant, it threatens to swamp both boats.

Peter is overcome. He's seen Jesus heal the sick and cast out demons. He's heard Jesus' marvelous preaching. But this event tops it for him. He's in the presence of divine power and authority. Peter falls to his knees.

Peter has encountered what might be called a Holy Disruption. There are times when God breaks into our routine and shakes things up. From our perspective, these holy disruptions might feel like catastrophe and chaos. Our best laid plans are shattered. These moments might stem from some disastrous event, something you have no control over: the loss of a job, a health crisis, the end of a marriage. Or it might come from something deep within you, the realization of an emerging incongruity you can no longer ignore: an addiction, internal meaninglessness, an ethical compromise you can't deny one more day.

This isn't to say that God necessarily causes the chaotic event. But God definitely uses it and God steps into the gaps with dynamic newness. We believe in the God who says, "Behold, I am making all things new." That newness, first begun in creation, steps into and through the destruction of death to create new life, resurrection life.

These holy disruptions break in and toss our neat and tidy world up in the air. It might feel like chaos. We might experience them as the sheer destruction of everything we've known and relied upon. But from the cracks and between the pieces of our former order, God is going to create a new and vibrant reality.

Our whole world was embedded in one of these holy disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The worldwide epidemic definitely shattered life as we knew it. We separate our lives into two periods, before and after COVID-19. As people of faith, we trust that God is doing something new within this

interruption. We keep our eyes and minds open so that we might recognize the holy inbreaking of God's grace and life during this time of disruption.

These holy disruptions are associated with emptiness. Peter's nets were empty. Sometimes we are so full of ourselves that the only way for divine newness to enter our realm is to empty us out. A classic Zen story relates the tale of a wise Zen master.

People from far and near would seek his counsel and ask for his wisdom. Many would come and ask him to teach them, enlighten them in the way of Zen. He seldom turned any away. One day an important man, a man used to command and obedience came to visit the master. "I have come today to ask you to teach me about Zen. Open my mind to enlightenment." The tone of the important man's voice was one used to getting his own way.

The Zen master smiled and said that they should discuss the matter over a cup of tea. When the tea was served the master poured his visitor a cup. He poured and he poured and the tea rose to the rim and began to spill over the table and finally onto the robes of the wealthy man. Finally the visitor shouted, "Enough. You are spilling the tea all over. Can't you see the cup is full?"

The master stopped pouring and smiled at his guest. "You are like this tea cup, so full that nothing more can be added. Come back to me when the cup is empty. Come back to me with an empty mind."

Something like this happened to St. Paul. He reveals a little about his experience with Christ in our reading from First Corinthians. He was full of himself, full of his own self-righteousness, full of his religious purity, full of hatred. In all his fullness he followed his perfect plan to cleanse the world from Christians. But on the way to Damascus, he underwent a change of plans. The resurrected Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him with a blinding light. Paul fell to the ground. He desperately needed a holy disruption. He needed to be broken

open and emptied of all his fullness. And only then, blind and helpless, did he come to see the new life God had in mind for him.

In order to be filled with God's light and grace, he first needed to be emptied. Paul came to see this holy disruption as nothing less than God's good grace.

Peter and Paul both experienced the abundance of Christ's vibrant, new life. Peter's empty nets bulged with an abundant catch. Paul gained his sight and also new sight, the vision to see a new community of sisters and brothers in Christ. Both men left their old world behind them. They followed Christ's new path for them, pulsating with life.

"We make our plans and God laughs." Friends, wherever and whenever you experience a change of plans, look around you. Trust and believe that God will make a way where there seems to be no way. Divine resurrection power surrounds us. It will work something new into the broken places of our life.

Amen.