

FCCS Rev. Curran Reichert

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All or Nothin'

This has been a week of living with death. I have been with our beloved David (McCracken) every day this week and with each day passing day expected to hear that David had not made it through the night- only to be greeted by those bright blue eyes one more time.

I've been spending some time with Janice's dad Fred who is on hospice now, but still managed to make it to the earth care festival yesterday.

I like Fred- he makes me laugh.

Also, this week, I had the great pleasure of sitting with Garen Patterson and his sister Carol alongside their mother Lois to think through her memorial.

I asked Lois, as I ask anyone in this circumstance, if she had an idea of what happens when we die. There was a considerable pause... then one corner of her lip curled into a smile, "Well, no one has ever come back to tell us," she said.

Right she was, even Jesus in his post death appearances to the disciples was fairly ambiguous about where he was off to next. Yet Christians hold out hope that even though we can't exactly articulate it, we believe this earthly experience might not be the final frontier.

Some people think we die as we have lived, some believe we become the essence of our best selves, still others doubt that there is any reality beyond the veil of death.

Doubt is a funny thing: it can lead us on a quest for deeper truth and it can insulate us from coming to terms with truth. Doubt is a double-edged sword.

The word means to be uncertain, it implies a hesitancy to believe, but it also indicates a desire to believe and that describes Thomas the disciple we encounter in this morning's text.

He finds it hard to believe what in his heart he would truly like to believe- that Jesus is not dead to him, but alive in a new way.

Doubt also means to be in a state of suspense.

These days- I find myself vacillating a great deal between disbelief and suspense. I am looking for what **I can believe with certainty** and more often than not coming up short. These days, we are **all** living with a lot more questions than answers, more discontent than certainty.

I used to have a mentor who would ask that we imagine ourselves ten years into the future reaching back to who we are now.

Knowing what you know ten years from now, what would you say to yourself today?

Ask for things from the congregation...

I might steal a page from Richard Rohr's thinking and remind myself *that **all things are connected***- even if I can't see it.

In my doubting, but hopeful search, for **truth** I have been reminded of examples of connectedness from my own experience.

In my mother's family there were three children, she was the oldest, followed by her brothers Doug and Mike.

Their family came up in the Texas Church of Christ- no dancing, no card playing, but a whole lot a Jesus. And although my mother's theology has evolved quite a bit she remains one of the most devout Christians I've ever known. She has **never** wavered in her love of God and her conviction that faith will sustain her through thick and thin; as with any life, she has had her share of both.

When her brothers Doug and Mike were eighteen and nineteen respectively- they were drafted to serve in the Vietnam war. I do not know how my grandparents felt about it at the time. I presume as church going, patriotic, working class people from the south- they understood the draft as a necessary price to pay for the freedom of our country.

Having only one high school diploma between them, my grandparents were obedient to those they respected and they respected the office of the presidency- as did most of the people of their generation.

The war in Vietnam was inexplicably difficult on young, impressionable men like my uncles and when they returned home from their tour of duty- Doug and Mike were forever changed.

They had become cynical, addicted, and hostile. Their faith in God was dead, as was any hope of a normal future. Failed marriages and broken relationships with their children insured that the cycle of violence as an outcome of war- would live on into future generations.

Both men also returned from their service in the military with cancer growing in their bodies from exposure to Agent Orange- that cancer killed Doug ten years ago and Mike has lost both of his ears and parts of his face.

When I hear that our current government leaders seem hellbent on increasing military spending and decreasing support for education, women's health, foreign aid, and essential programs like meals on wheels- I am overcome with doubt- admittedly- riddled with bouts of despair.

For if we, as a predominantly "Christian" nation, believe that God is in all things- we cannot selectively destroy that which does not look like us, agree with us, or reflect our "values."

We cannot use violence as a means of control or course correction without a deep and abiding understanding of the **full** impact of our choices.

There are those who believe that the only way to keep peace is through violence- that is not a new thought, that is an empirical thought. That is the basis upon which the Romans sought to insure peace when Jesus was alive. Here is what Jesus said about Empire; "those who live by the sword die by the sword."

You cannot- with any integrity- hold a bible in one hand and increased plans for militarization in the other. That is not what it means to follow Jesus.

Jesus, the same one whose resurrection we all celebrated just a week ago, taught that tyranny was not the way to lead God's people. He believed that the dignity of all creation was made manifest through relationships and

respect. He taught that while we lived on this earth, our job is to recognize the beloved nature of the whole of creation. That is how we honor God!

We acknowledge God in all things, or we have lost the basis for seeing God in anything. (Richard Rohr)

On this weekend as we think about being stewards of this great planet, there are things we cannot afford to doubt. There is no doubt that the earth is in perilous danger, due in large part to the ways in which humans are living and misusing her gifts.

We cannot choose to remain ignorant that the US Department of Defense is one of the world's worst polluters, its footprint dwarfing that of any corporation both internationally and abroad. In this country alone military sites from Maryland to Sacramento are contaminated with all manner of pollutants, from chemical weapons to vast groundwater gas deposits. (Maureen Sullivan, who heads the Pentagon's environmental programs) Beloved we have got to wake up and face the fact that choices to increase militarization have devastating effect on landscapes, destroy ecosystems and insure not only the loss of life, but incredible human suffering for both those who die and those who survive.

You have doubt about the risen Christ, okay.

Doubt about what happens to us when we die, you are not alone.

But know this, and know it beyond the shadow of a doubt- for Jesus' life to have had any meaning at all- his followers... you and me...must acknowledge that God is in absolutely all things- all creatures great and small- all people, all places, all children, all religions and no religions- all things, no exceptions!

We must acknowledge that God is in all things... or we have lost the basis for seeing God in anything at all.

Amen