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“Time is on My Side”

In an article entitled, “Why Does My Life Feel So Hectic,” Sister Joan Chittister expresses the time worn reality- that no matter what our walk of life, whatever our spiritual maturity, or training, we are all susceptible to the demands of this world that feel beyond our ability to manage them.

Given the pace at which our society functions, most of us experience pressure to do more faster and better. It is little wonder, “We have forgotten, if we ever knew, that **everything** that **is** possible **is not necessary**. Great life decisions, significant life interactions, require a person to go down into the soul where noise is not a value.”¹

For seventeen years Katie and I shared our various homes, our bathrooms, bedrooms, and kitchen table with an enormous grey striped tabby cat named Diesel. I know everyone thinks their animals are special, but this cat really did stand in line extra for personality traits. He was a fierce defender of our home. So much so that we ended up getting reported three times neighborhood chat sites as the house where the vicious attack cat lurked in the bushes waiting to ambush unsuspecting dogs.

When Ellis Jane was born Diesel became like the dog “Nana” in the story Peter Pan. He followed her everywhere, slept at the foot of her crib and went for any walk with us no matter how long, never letting her out of his sight.

Recently Diesel started demanding to go in and out of the house four times a night- I took him into the Vet.

They found he had late stages of diabetes and suggested a rigorous course of treatment which we knew he would hate, and which may or may not have prolonged his already long life. We bought him medical marijuana instead and kept him as comfortable as we could.

¹ “Welcome to the Wisdom of the World” by Sister Joan Chittister

This past Monday when his legs became so weak that he was not able to walk more than a couple of steps. We knew it was time to let him go.

Joan Chitister poses the question, “How do you decide between what can be done and what must be done?”

Is it quick? Is it slow? In this case it was both.

It was a slow process to make the right decision, but when the time came. It was quicker, and harder than we thought it would be.

As with any significant decision, just because it has been made doesn't mean the experience is over. The effects of our decision about Diesel lingered throughout week and manifested in all kinds of ways some good some not so good- as grief does. But you see death, and loss are things that require a person to go down into the soul.

Yesterday, in downtown Sacramento at beautiful historic Lutheran church, I officiated the memorial for Paul Wilkinson. Some of you met Paul, he and his wife Loretta occasionally attended our first service and they were here the day their grandsons Gabriel and Edward were baptized. Paul was Racheal's step dad. He was the parent to five children and twelve grandchildren. He died very unexpectedly a few days before his 66th birthday.

One of the most remarkable things about Paul is that when his step-daughter Rachel came out as lesbian, in support of her his response was to start singing with the Sacramento Gay Men's Chorus. So, in addition to a church full of mourners, the pews were also full of all eighty members of the choir. They offered up some of the most beautiful music I've ever heard to memorialize their friend Paul.

I have been a part of lots of memorials, this one took people down into the core of their souls.

It is important to recognize the things in our life that matter most take time to digest, to reflect on, to pray about, just to be with. There is nothing wrong with taking time to be with our experiences. In fact, it a sacred act to do so.

Of course, not every experience is as weighty as the two I just described, but everyone in this room has recently had at least one, probably more than one experience that was deserving of some slow reflection. Have we given those experiences the time they deserve?

In this fourth week of Lent as we continue walk at a more reflective pace, I want to put forward the reminder that we were created, at least the Good Book tells us so, with limitations.

We were meant to do our work throughout the week and then engage in a period of Sabbath designed to renew our connection Spirit, with each other and ourselves. That is the Holy prescription for a regular week and it stands to reason that more intense periods of exertion require greater periods of rest. That is the ideal rhythm, God's Rhythm.

Here is a little story about the rhythm most of us are in touch with more regularly. This comes from the article I mentioned earlier.

Once upon a time, a merchant who was vacationing in a small village went to the village market. At one place he saw a man with a genie to sell and he asked, "What are you selling, my friend?" "My genie replied the man."

"Well, what does it do?" the merchant asked.

"Everything you want to get done," the vendor said. "It makes the impossible possible."

"Then why do you want to sell it?" the merchant asked.

"Because I have no ambitions left," the vendor said.

"It is the wish-fulfilling genie, but it is very exhausting. It cannot stay idle and all the time it needs a new job, or otherwise it destroys what it creates."

"I have lots of ambitions, lots of jobs to be done," the merchant said. "I'll buy it."

When they reached the place where the merchant stayed, the genie said, "Now, Sir, tell me what I can do for you. Your satisfaction is guaranteed, but before enjoying it you must tell me my next job."

"Your first job," the merchant said, "is to build boundary walls and mark my sites."

The genie clapped his hands and said, "All your sites have been enclosed sir. Now tell me the next job."

"You really are a wish-fulfilling genie. I am so happy to have you. Your next job is to create buildings on these sites."

The genie clapped again. "It is done my master. The factories, theatre halls, the swimming pool and markets are all crowded with people."

"Fantastic said the merchant. "Now I want you to make me king of the world. Build me a palace. Organize a coronation. Invite all the important people. Bring poets and musicians and let the dancers dance and the entertainers entertain."

The genie clapped again and said, "you have been accepted as the solemn monarch of planet Earth." Your crown is right here. Dress yourself up and enjoy being the most powerful and important person on planet Earth. But before you leave, please tell me my next job."

The merchant became numb. All of his desires were fulfilled. Suddenly he remembered the merchant's warning: if he could not keep the genie employed, everything he had achieved so far would be destroyed.

Drops of perspiration started dripping down his forehead. Only one person could possibly help him.

"Genie," he commanded, "before I become emperor of the planet Earth, I would like to get the blessing of my spiritual teacher. Please take me to the holy one's cave in the Himalayas."

So, the genie clapped again and there he was. "Bless me, holy one, bless me," the business man said. "I am in great trouble. I bought a wish fulfilling genie this morning and all of my desires got fulfilled. But I bought the genie on condition that I have to keep him engaged or he will destroy what he has created. And now I don't know what to do with him."

The holy one was sitting naked on a straw mat and greeted the merchant with a radiant smile. "Don't worry my son. It is very easy to provide this genie with a never-ending job. But first relax," said the holy one.

"I cannot relax," the merchant said. "I am agitated, anxious, excited, terribly disturbed and afraid. Save me."

“Listen carefully, my child,” the holy one said. “Ask the genie to bring you the biggest bamboo pole he can get. Then order him to plant it inside the ground firm and tight. After the pole is firmly fixed into the ground, ask the genie to climb it up and down until further orders. This will keep him busy and you will enjoy your life undisturbed and fearlessly.”

“How stupid I am that I could not think of such a simple solution,” the merchant gasped. “When one is obsessed by fear and anxiety one cannot think of such simple solutions,” the holy one said.

“First you were blinded by your ambitions and you bought a genie. When the genie became too fast in fulfilling your desires you got scared by the speed with which he carried out your orders. Then you got nervous by the imagery of fear and destruction. Go now and feel free.” The holy one paused for a moment.

“But before you go,” he went on, “know this. I too have a genie and I, too, have a pole for it.” Then the holy one opened his hands and showed the merchant his prayer beads.

What lessons might we take from the story of the Genie and the merchant?

Could it be everything that is to be had- we already have, if we but learn to embrace and savor it? Doing so is what will determine the quality of our lives. “Will we be busy? Of course we will. Reflection is not about narcissistic leisure; it is about the concentrated activity of being fully human, (and engaging) our gifts in ways that develop us rather than fragment us.”

It is not being busy that undoes us, it is simply “being perpetually busy with things that scatter rather than deepen us,” that leads to deep our unhappiness and constant anxiety. We are at a moment in time when our clarity is more necessary than ever before- we cannot indulge in being distracted from what really matters.

Kent Neburn- Do we really need much more than this? To honor the dawn. To visit a garden. To talk to a friend. To contemplate a cloud. To cherish a meal. To bow our heads before the mystery of the day. Are these not enough?

Amen

