

Rev. Curran Reichert “What has to go for good?” April 19, 2020

In the first couple of weeks of the pandemic one of our wise congregants mentioned that she felt like she was on an elimination diet, ridding herself of most everything that formerly constituted a full life.

Anyone who has ever tried to better their physical health by eliminating toxins can attest, the key to a successful recovery is careful planning and discernment about how and when to add back what has been taken away. We would do well to adhere to similar advice where our spiritual health is concerned.

In our various zoom gatherings, I have heard a number of people say that they have found they are happier with less. I had heard previous rumblings of this nature concerning the collective business of our lives, had heard a longing for less words and more silence, for less meetings and more meaning, pleas for less accumulation and more sustainably.

Aside from some physical downsizing and closet purging, deciding what needs to be eliminated from our lives for our own good is a daunting proposition and not one any of us really had to take seriously until now.

### **Potbound**

By Diana Chapman Walsh

He asks me a question I've never considered before.  
When is it that you know you have to go someplace else?  
At first I think I don't know, don't go, never have,  
just try to please, do what's expected,  
bloom where I'm planted.

But then the answer germinates in the soil of my mind.  
I see a potted plant, roots protruding from the drainage hole  
in the bottom, to go, bursting to grow.

After weeks or months or years of putting its root system down,  
of consolidating its power, husbanding its resources,  
it has reached a crisis point, lost its equilibrium,  
has to go, has to grow.

I run down to the cellar and root around for a larger pot,  
a little larger only, so my vulnerable plant won't wilt in the  
unstructured vastness of a new world without apparent walls.

I have to smash the old pot to rescue my restless plant,  
impacted root system now naked in my hand.  
A small sacrifice, but a radical operation  
to deliver the plant from death.

When is it that I know I have to go someplace else?  
When I have to grow or die?

We have some decisions to make about how much pressure we will put on  
ourselves and on each other to return to "normal" when "normal" becomes  
a possibility. [Diana Chapman Walsh's poem might help in our discernment,  
consider;](#)

**When do you know you have to go someplace else?**

**What roots extend beyond your current pot?**

**What shape might your new pot take?**

**How will you bloom where you are planted?**

I think we are slowly catching onto the idea that there are deep spiritual  
gifts available to us right now that we have not always taken the time to  
recognize. Now, with time and space to reflect, we have an opportunity to  
internalize time worn wisdom in new and deeper ways.

When Jesus appears to the disciples several days after his tomb was  
discovered to be empty, he entered the house where they were locked  
inside fearing for their safety.

John 20:19-23 Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be  
with you." <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then  
the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again,  
"Peace be with you. As the Creator has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup>When he  
had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy  
Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain  
the sins of any, they are retained."

The disciples were on lockdown, wondering where to turn in a world turned upside down. When would it be safe to return to daily life, could they return to daily life? Who and how would they be without their leader to guide them?

Jesus' first words to the disciples are to be at peace. "Peace be with you," Jesus says- because although much has changed, certain essentials remain the same. Jesus promised that God would be with God's people to the ends of the earth, and no matter what changes that remains a constant.

Jesus showed the disciples the marks on his hands and side, acknowledging that his suffering, their suffering had been real and then he said to them again. "Peace be with you."

Once they had collected themselves, he breathed on them the breath of the Holy Spirit and commissioned the disciples to go back into the world to heal divisions and be bearers of goodwill, to be bearers of God's will.

The text goes on to describe the disciple we refer to as doubting Thomas also known as the Twin. He was not present when Jesus showed up the first time and he could not believe what had happened until he had seen Jesus for himself.

### John 20:24-30

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Are there things you have had trouble believing until you saw them for yourself?

Are you willing to "smash the old pots" to deliver yourself to new life? How will you take what you have learned from this time unlike any other and create a defensible space for that which you have determined is significant and necessary for your own growth.

I am noticing two things in the midst of this global shutdown, the hunger for what is real is rumbling louder than ever before AND thought we desperately want to drink from the well of its wisdom, most days the message of God's presence and peace is still difficult to hear amid the clatter of the news, and clang of to do's and should's that have sprung up like weeds after a spring rain.

I am frustrated with myself that I cannot carve out more space, more silence, more time to hear the heartbeat of truth-especially now when it seems like all we have is time, but alas the empty tomb filled quickly with technological advances and advice from experts and I get repeatedly sucked into their siren song and away from the still small voice of God at a time when I know I need it the most.

It's a lot like SPAM — the square-shaped mash-up of pork, water, salt, potato starch, sugar, and sodium nitrate. During WWII Pacific Islanders were faced with a choice between starvation and SPAM, the salty food substitute. Out of necessity SPAM became a staple in places like Guam, Hawaii, and the Philippines because meat was not available. Today's Island menus still heavily feature SPAM even though this sodium laden biproduct of meat is devoid of virtually any real nutritional value.

Why is it that even after the real thing became available, people preferred the substitute? The answer has to be that we are creatures of habit, we ultimately put our faith in that which has become habitual even if it isn't good for us.

At the end of today's gospel lesson, Jesus says it is one thing to have belief because of what we can see- but an even greater feat to believe what we cannot yet fully see.

Returning to a healthy life post pandemic will require immense fortitude to resist the temptation to stock our spiritual shelves and the hours of our days with anything less than exactly what is essential and life giving.

Some things that have gone must remain gone for good, for our own good and the good of our planet. Jesus stands in the doorways of our locked houses and exclaims the message for which there is no substitute; God's peace is with us, God's spirit is upon us, and the breath of the Holy Spirit has blessed us to become a blessing to others. Amen