

Reflection - 03/21/21

Humans are thought to be the only beings with awareness of our mortality. It may be in our nature to be afraid of death, a fear of the unknown and whatever is next. Some of us may be more grounded and less afraid than others, but at some point, every human has probably been struck by fear at the thought of our life span being fixed and finite.

One of my siblings was struck by this around the age of 12. Up late one night, he was in tears, terrified. With our mom's help, between sobs, he was finally able to express what had him so worked up. "What if I get married," he asked tearfully, "and my wife dies before me?" Our family still reflects on this self awareness my sibling had at such a young age. He obviously thinks well ahead of time. He has always been, and continues to be, careful with his words and considerate of others. This fear also marked him from a young age. What is it that has each of us reflecting on our death and the death of those we care about - is it entirely fear based? Can we be open to possibility? Of life after death, of a final resting place, of peace where there has been challenge and strife?

I imagine Jesus spoke to death in this way in a comforting way, or a way intended to be comforting. By reminding those around him that it is within the nature of life to become anew again, he was promising some hope, some life, some comfort in a difficult world. Cities at the time were overcrowded with slums, and country life revolved around family compounds. Farming was difficult and there was not a promise of success in annual cycles. Crops could fail and scattering the seed from the previous year could feel like a leap of faith. In a land frequented by droughts and in which disciples and those following Christ were stepping away from the known structure of family connection to venture out into the unknown with a charismatic leader, Jesus offered those around him a relatable parable, which would be familiar. He made sure to remind them of the fruits to come, as they staked their lives on an emerging tradition.

This hope beyond death was being normalized by Jesus here. Today I wonder what renewal, what reset we might hope for beyond this current and ongoing pandemic. I have heard of the desire to connect more with family and friends when we are once again allowed to be together.

Jesus wanted his followers to feel seen, hopeful, and resilient. They needed this strength when faced with his death, and this hopefulness later, when hearing of the resurrection.

This gospel of renewal is part and parcel of nature. And like nature, it blooms beyond all expectation, into a cacophony of wonder and miracle. I love the idea of resurrection being so far beyond any expectation, and also natural and ordinary in a way, one with nature in rebirth.

This single grain of wheat sprouting forth multiple stalks from the ground speaks of an abundance beyond expectations. This growth could symbolize the new kin-dom, yes, but it also holds a promise of being sustained, renewed, and full from the products of

both labour and as the result of risks taken. Would those around Jesus cast in their seeds, their hope for tomorrow, in with him? Would listeners hear the promises of what would spring forth for them? That Christianity is a global religion speaks to the success of such proverbs. Like the wheat, proverbs are renewable and offer new life. These aural puzzles can be read repeatedly, with new answers and insights arrived at each time. This is why the Ignatian lectio divina came into effect. We repeat what we know to find what we do not yet know within scripture. By asking ourselves what we hear, what catches our attention or imagination, we can open ourselves up to wisdom beyond our understanding.

Ignatian practice of Lectio Divina:

Read. Pick any passage in Scripture. Slowly, thoughtfully, savor the Word. Linger whenever a word or phrase touches your heart.

- **Reflect.** What is God saying to you in this passage? Offering you? Asking you?
- **Respond.** Respond to God from your heart. Speak to God of your feelings and insights. Offer these to God.
- **Rest.** Sit quietly in God's presence. Rest in God's love.

This can tune our ears for God's voice in our lives, and help us to listen for God's Living Word in Scripture.

Like the wheat in this parable, Lectio Divina will turn up an abundance of new life in ancient text. We must put in work to receive these words anew. Like gardeners and farmers, this requires both patience and faith - to continue to tend to what lies dormant, and hold on to our beliefs despite evidence pointing to the contrary - that our fields will again be full of food and life, sources to sustain and, eventually, seeds to plant all over again!

This week I invite you to revisit a favourite passage of scripture. Try this practice, whether it is new to you or familiar. Remember to sit with it, allow the words to speak to you in their own time. Let the words wash over you, and let the rush of the world go on.

As we continue in this time of isolation and distance, I hope we can learn to keep ourselves company with our thoughts, scripture, prayer, and finding deep peace within ourselves. Making time to reflect can bring a nearly unbelievable bounty if we can remain open and patient, waiting for new life to shoot forth from the bones of our past selves.

I ask that each of us write down some reminders for ourselves for a time when we have achieved herd immunity and are more free to go about our lives, be physically closer to

one another and reconnect with all that lives beyond the walls of our homes. What lessons might we forget, in a world where, newly released from the captivity of the pandemic, we can once again see strangers, stand in a crowd, reveal ourselves behind the masks we have become accustomed to wearing and seeing? What still small wisdom can we carry forth from our months of quieter living?

If you take anything from this passage today - please remember that Christ promised that we will be fed with the bread of heaven. He conquered death, and though it is Lent we can remember the resurrection, for we are a community of resurrection. Our lives give birth to newness, for others to stand on our shoulders and look far beyond what we could ever imagine. Remember that hope, that death, that life beyond death, that Jesus is with us through all of it, that we are not alone. Thanks be to God!

Amen.