

When It All Gets Too Real

On the final Thursday of last month, our Bishop sent out on social media a pastoral letter. I bookmarked it to come back to. (note 1)

The bishop begins with a disclaimer...

If you are faring well & cannot empathize with the pain of another - please keep scrolling - this post isn't for you!

Her advice to keep scrolling because the post is not for you is in the social media equivalent of shouting: All Caps - Extreme Emphasis. Maybe I should say the same applies to this sermon, because I will be sharing her letter in a moment. I must leave it to you to discern whether the words are for you.

I think it important to share her letter, because, while it gave expression to something that I have been feeling, but struggling to articulate, over the next few days I saw similar themes cropping up from others, including The Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston. (note 2)

This tells me that there is a current that is moving us. The current should be named and then we can begin to address it.

*Beloved of God,
There is deep pain in our midst. So many are suffering, struggling, barely hanging on and mustering every bit of courage and faith to move from one day to the next.*

*Every
Step
Is
Hard*

I am aware of many who are battling disease - yes, there are diseases beyond COVID-19. So many have received challenging diagnoses and are in treatment for life-threatening illnesses. And, every time they step outside their homes to receive the treatment that may save them, they know they risk contracting a disease that may at best complicate their situation, or at worst end their lives.

There are many among us who are laboring under the trauma of the violence perpetrated in the public square. The endless loops of violence on the news and every social media platform challenge our ability to remain hopeful, calm and at peace. Yes, these are people of faith, and yes they/we struggle.

Others rise every day under the weight of secondary pain, harm and woundedness. And, because it is secondary, they do not believe they can name it. So, they smile and join the ZOOM call. They pull themselves together and look professional. They suffer through the bland, inconsequential conversations of their coworkers/peers. They laugh or smile at all of the appropriate moments - trying to suppress the scream in their throats.

Some are having to work their way through divorces placed on hold; abuse they cannot escape; financial complications that are being compounded by the day; mental health issues that have re-emerged. Vaccine appointments that are canceled or postponed.

*Disappointment is real.
Loneliness is real.
Isolation is real.
Anger is real.
Fear is real.
Pain is real.*

May we check on one another. Really check on one another. Not with the cliches that push people past their real, legitimate feelings to a place of false joy. No, may we check on one another with a presence that understands real, raw emotions.

A presence that can hold the tears.

A presence that can let us BE.

The beautiful art of lament is so foreign to us, even though it is laced throughout our sacred writ.

May we revive it. May we call it up.

How long, O Lord?

Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I take counsel in my soul

and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

May we be there for one another until "until" comes. And may we know with every fiber of our being - God is with us!

~ Bishop Easterling

Have things gotten "too real".
How is it with YOUR soul?

There are times I have difficulty staying focused, concentrating on my writing or editing. Diet, exercise and rest all have suffered. I suspect the same may be true for many of you.

I have scheduled and have shown up, nervously, for invasive medical procedures. They went well, and the medical team was diligent about safety... their own and mine. They have called several times since, to follow-up, to make sure I am doing okay. In their way, they are doing what the Bishop calls us to do... to check in, to check on, to be there for one another.

And here I am doing everything I can to make sure we have some quality material posted here, week by week for worship, for faith support, for spiritual direction in this time of need, and - I know I cannot do everything - but... the Bishop's call... and my internal critic work to tell me that somehow I am not doing enough.

I hope you are careful in how you hear this today... Nathan Hamm offered this on Wednesday this week... (Note 3)

Everyone you encounter is enduring a crisis.

So be empathetic with everyone.

Everyone you pass is a potential patient.

So be patient with everyone.

Everyone you see is concerned or confused.

So be compassionate with everyone.

Everyone you know is navigating chaos.

So be kind to everyone.

And don't forget to be kind, compassionate, patient, and empathetic with yourself.

It is similar to thoughts offered by John Pavlovitz on other occasions. Most recently he put it this way...

Life is stunningly short and it is eggshell fragile.

Most people are having a really tough time.

They are almost always in more pain than you think they are.

Don't be a jerk. (Note 4)

Things do get too real. It is not easy. Sometimes it may present like the person at the place of worship shouting at you that you are trying to destroy them. (Last week's Gospel).

Sometimes it may be someone wanting to go off by themselves so they can die, like next week's lesson from 2 Kings. Or as with the Gospel, sometimes it may be trying to help a sick family member after you already have been through a lot that day, and you'd like to just put your feet up and, by the way, the phone keeps ringing off the hook.

May we each do what we can, as we can, giving it our best and allowing one another to fill in wherever we cannot be. Together we are the church... the body of Christ. The body needs each of us. No one of us, nor any small segment of us can be the church, and do all that needs to be done. We each and all are needed. Kaze Gadway goes out daily, to distribute to those in need the supplies that have been donated for them. At 80 years old her ministry continues, helping people for whom life every day is all too real. (Note 5)

When things get too real, the Bishop calls us to remember how to lament. There are things we need to grieve.

Sometimes something will hit me unexpectedly and the bottled up grief will just overflow. Can you name the loss that you are grieving? Or is it amorphous?

One of my colleagues, serving in Texas, commented this week on survivor guilt, (Note 6) noting how his mom got the vaccine, but the mother of a friend had died from COVID. He, Eric Folkerth, had written a song over a year ago that he mentions, and shares again... This is just a bit of what he shared about it ...

If you have a heart, and any level of human compassion, you eventually asks the questions in the bridge:

"Why am I the one that fortune found?

Why am I the one who's still around?

Why am I the one who made it through?

Why am I the one...and why not you?"

The only true way to deal with the "guilt we survive" is to live well. We honor those who do not make it by becoming our best selves in the future they don't get to see.

I think that this is some of what Jesus was modeling for us. He took time away to recharge, and then eventually he turned his path to Jerusalem. That turn comes at the Transfiguration, the Gospel lesson for next week.

But before that, he had invited some to join him in fishing for people. People like the troubled man in the synagogue, People like the mother-in-law laying sick in bed. People like the crowds that showed up on the doorstep. He had invited those fishermen, he invites us, to join him in living well.

We cannot do everything.
 But we do what we can, as we can.
 And we lament.
 And we let Jesus meet us at OUR point of need.

Jesus did not stay cloistered in the home of Peter, his friend in Capernaum. He went out in to the surrounding towns and villages, and to distant points, like the Region of Tyre and Sidon, and the northern city below Mt. Hermon, and the area beyond the Jordan River, that today we know as the Golan Heights, and the nation of Jordan. Jesus went out, so he could preach the Good News of God's Kingdom "there" as well. There... He was a Jew going to distant places, among people who were not Jews. And everywhere he went he helped people. He helps us still.

NOTES

Note 1: <https://www.facebook.com/latrelle.millereasterling/posts/4165945540100243>

Note 2: <https://www.facebook.com/bishopstevencharleston/posts/259350758889598>

Note 3: <https://nathanhamm.blog/everyone>

Note 4: <https://www.facebook.com/john.pavlovitz/posts/10164801771990113>

Note 5: <https://www.facebook.com/kaze.gadway/posts/10223697638406112>

Note 6: <https://www.facebook.com/eric.folkerth/posts/10225491390496004>

Also shared by Clergy Coaching
<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00175-z>

and by the Episcopal Church
<https://www.episcopalcafe.com/fragments-on-fragments-32-being-human-in-a-pandemic/>

Extras:

"Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."

Praise to you, Jesus, my Lord:
 in the fatigue of living
 you are my rest,
 you are my peace!
 Praise to you, Jesus, my Lord:
 in the fatigue of the journey
 you are my rest,
 you are my support!
 Praise to you, Jesus, my Lord:
 in the fatigue of answering your call
 you are my rest,
 you are my reward!
 Praise to You, Jesus, my Lord:
 in the fatigue of the fight
 you are my rest,
 you are my victory!
 ~Lift thine eyes

It's okay if you thought you were over it but it hits you all over again.

It's okay to fall apart even after you thought you had it under control.

You are not weak. Healing is messy. And there is no timeline for healing.

Be gentle with yourself.

BY ENLIGHTENED CONSCIOUSNESS



Peggy T Luckman Epiphany
 In loving memory:
 As part of my honest journey of faith
 I need to reach out when there is a need
 for loving support and compassion.
 A patch of black ice,
 a trip home on a winding road,
 an inability to steer his truck,
 and in an instant my beloved colleague Jerry,
 a beautiful minister of peace and justice,
 compassion and love, died.
 My thoughts are full,
 remembering the wonderful years we shared
 as small town colleagues in ministry.
 What joy he expressed in his work,
 what a compassionate minister he was.
 So many friends and family
 have used the word "kind" -
 in remembering him.
 I would say "gentle and kind".
 My heart is breaking,
 for it was so sudden, so unexpected,
 and he had only recently found
 a new depth of happiness.
 Please offer prayer in honor of him, my friend Jerry,
 for comfort for his family and friends,
 so crushed by this loss.
 Pray too, for the other driver,
 uninjured, and
 through no fault of his own
 was involved in this deadly accident.
 Please join me in giving thanks
 for my blessing for having known
 Jerry, who lived such a beautiful life.

Deserted place

**In the morning, while it was still very dark,
 he got up and went out to a deserted place,
 and there he prayed.
 And Simon and his companions hunted for him.
 —Mark 1.35-36**

Go there.
 Place of quiet darkness.
 Sacred hiddenness.
 Where you will be unfound.
 Solely soul.
 Simply flesh.
 Be wide open as the deserted sky
 Disappear in the blackness.
 Let your self be there.
 There, let your self be.
 Let your self be found
 by the One
 waiting for you
 to come
 into the silence,
 emptiness,
 darkness
 of God.

Steve Garnaas-Holmes
 Unfolding Light
www.unfoldinglight.net

~ Spectacular courage ~
 Some days it takes all I have
 just to believe in one positive thing.
 Never mind all of the plentiful words
 that spring to life on reading,
 but a single promise to hold onto
 is what I am asking for today Lord.
 In more ways than one,
 it takes spectacular courage
 to believe for what we can't yet see
 and you have made us for that kind of brave.
 For blessed are they who do not see
 and yet believe.
 And faith being the substance of things hoped for
 and not yet seen.
 And write down what you believe, see the angels
 carry it across the world, swiftly it will come.
 And hope does not disappoint
 when perseverance is our anthem.
 Help me to flex my brave, challenge the no's,
 send them packing.
 Help me to lean into adventure
 and spread wide my spirit into your strong.
 Help me to grab the hand that is extended
 and whisper my prayers until I can sing them out, fearless.
 Jenneth Graser

Fragments on Fragments #32: Being Human in a Pandemic

February 5, 2021
 Jonathan Clark

32 Always having what we want may not be the best good fortune.
 Health seems sweetest after sickness, food in hunger, rest when
 we're weary

Heraclitus was probably writing this in opposition to the ideology of
 his time; it's equally uncomfortable in ours. I doubt if Heraclitus
 was expecting his readers to go out and try to get ill, any more than
 I would advise anyone to ignore the rules on avoiding coronavirus.

This saying isn't advice, but a reflection on the reality of our human
 condition. Anything we have all the time, we begin to take for
 granted. When something new and good comes into our lives, it's
 difficult – no, impossible – to keep on celebrating it in the way we
 did at the beginning. It's a law that applies to anything, to our
 material circumstances, to our relationships, to our health and
 well-being: we get so used to things being as they are that it's only
 their absence which makes us realize what we've lost.

Losses over the last few months have been of different kinds, but
 few of us have escaped without any sense of losing something.
 Living with loss is one of the hardest pieces of work for the human
 psyche. The loss of bereavement is the greatest, but at every level
 work needs to be done, not to 'get over' our loss, but to find out
 how we can continue to live with it and through it. Let us not
 underestimate how much there is to do, for ourselves and for our
 communities.