

Sister Who's Perspective

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue #144, June 2011, copyright

Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you. ---Sister Who

Overview

It seems that from the vibrating electrons of each atom to the waves of the largest oceans to the invisible shifts of fortune within the unfolding of our lives, life moves in waves, rising and falling, surging and receding—never with complete predictability. In reflecting upon God's evaluation within the biblical text of Genesis, that God looked upon creation and declared it all good, I generally strive to find the good within this peculiar oscillation all around me, yet without lying to myself or anyone else about how difficult it can sometimes be from our limited human perspective.

Perhaps it is this constant availability of questions and the constant presence of mystery that more than anything else beckons us to remember and to nurture that invisible spiritual part of ourselves toward genuine godliness. I hope that this month's words will be helpful in that regard.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Waves of Interaction

On the few occasions I've experienced walking on an ocean beach, the soft damp sand beneath my bare feet, the surging and receding of waves has always seemed welcoming, mysterious, intriguing, and threatening—all at the same time. I suppose it is the little boy within me that wonders about the possibility of chasing the waves edge all the way out and then turning and trying to run fast enough to keep the next incoming wave from splashing around my ankles. The distance from farthest out to farthest in and the speed of the wave, however, are generally too great. The wave, thin though it may be, has nearly always out-performed my limited human abilities.

I cannot comprehend the number of times that waves have advanced and receded from countless ocean beaches since the first human footprint in the wet sand was ever made. I suppose the number may be similar in nature to the number of times since the birth of my physical body, that my lungs have expanded and contracted, taking in fresh

air and releasing that which is in need of renewal by the larger atmosphere around me. The pulsing of life, whether measured by breaths or heartbeats, is virtually beyond comprehension, yet its abiding presence is obviously essential.

What is too often overlooked is that the pulsing of life within relationships is equally essential; that whenever we fail to listen, to look, and to love, some tiny part of ourselves dies. The miracle of life, however, is how often it is able to be reborn—again, generally, through the intervention of love.

The mystery of life's living, perhaps somewhat in contrast, is not so much the beginnings and endings of waves and pulses alternately maintaining essential activity, but rather the surging and receding of waves. Why does one method work within one time and place but not another? Why is a particular person at times extraordinarily compassionate and at other times astonishingly callous? Why do we sometimes find ourselves painfully alone and at other times surrounded by persons—sometimes even complete strangers—behaving as if we were members of the same family?

Embracing the question of why, however, ideally, is not about demanding answers but rather about being present with the question—perhaps like walking along an ocean beach, witnessing the surging and receding of waves without ever fully comprehending how it works and all that it means. The very action of such personal reflection and contemplation somehow seems to put us back in touch with the less physical parts of ourselves. For me, sitting upon a mountaintop and feeling the surges of wind, cloud, heat, and cold creates a similar experience and I somehow know that if I do not take time for such quietness, the less physical parts of myself may never be discovered at all.

So when the wave comes, dance with it, listen to it, and know both its joy and its sorrow. When it is gone, do your best to remember.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Waves of Isolation

I recall a canoe trip on the Wisconsin river during my youth when the I and the others with whom I was traveling chose to pitch our tents on a particular sandbar, not realizing that a severe thunderstorm was headed our way. Everything looked basically fine at sunset, but at about 3 a.m. we scrambled to hide under the canoes (with all of the mosquitoes) as a deafening and brilliant display exploded overhead. When daylight came, more than half of the sandbar was now underwater and virtually everything we had with us was soaked. Nevertheless, though covered with mosquito bites, we had survived.

From another perspective, the very act of surviving such a hellish experience had come like an unexpected wave and separated us from everyone else who'd not made the journey. All of our best descriptions could never effectively convey to them a full understanding of the experience of hiding under a canoe with a swarm of mosquitoes for four hours. Our perspectives of life, perhaps a little like the sandbar, had been changed forever.

In a similar way, large numbers (perhaps even the majority) of people live in isolation from such challenges and are therefore unable to effectively relate to those who have endured them. Like Plato's allegorical cave, they find themselves unable to comprehend the words and descriptions of life outside of the cave. As blessed and healing as it may be for individuals to step beyond the cave into the light, the common language they previously shared with people within the cave is now gone. They can only hope to find others who have similarly ventured beyond the cave and attempt to develop a new common language with them, but an added challenge is how much more diverse life experiences are outside of any cave.

To return to the current theme, however, because the caves within which we live are not always literal, we never know when a new opening to a different world will suddenly appear and challenge us with the simple question of "Will you come?" For perhaps a variety of reasons, I developed a habit many years ago of generally responding, "Why not?" Sometimes I do find good reasons for why not, but more often I've been willing to try things that others described as being too intimidating (which is perhaps why I've climbed mountains, won a medal in bodybuilding, self-published a novel, and created over two hundred

television shows during the past two decades of my life).

Yet these are waves of isolation that while empowering life, also set it apart—each step leading me further and further away from the interconnection with humanity for which I yearn.

The paradox which makes it all worthwhile, however, is that I've discovered over time that my best contributions to humanity can only be made from this place of individuation. To the extent that one chooses group association or collective identity over individuality, the best gifts that God has hidden within each of us will never come to light. It's as if God is whispering some new piece of insight, understanding, or ability to humanity through the sometimes very peculiar qualities that surface within individuals. Group voices can make it very difficult for those whispers to ever be heard.

The wave of isolation, therefore, is not truly a wave of separation, but rather a discovery that human communities function best as a network of bridges rather than as a group of frightened refugees huddled within a single lifeboat. Without a wave of isolation, we may not ever discover precisely what kind of bridge each of us is or what particular places we connect. A wave of isolation is therefore not inherently an adversary, but rather a moment of defining clarity with a gift of new understanding riding upon its crest. I, for one, am eager to embrace such gifts.

I readily concede, however, that some of the gifts which waves of isolation have brought to me over the years, required a certain industriousness and perseverance in order to create an understanding within myself of how the particular gift could be best utilized. Like any other tool, I had to learn how the tool would respond to various materials within various circumstances when handled in various ways. Learning how to cut a square corner with a jig saw, for example, was accomplished, but only at the expense of a certain number of broken blades. Learning to ski was accomplished, but only by innumerable moments of frustration, struggle, and falling.

Nonetheless, when the learning has been accomplished, when the wave has receded, and when generous amounts of wet sand are left behind, I may find within my reach a myriad of creative possibilities I'd never previously imagined; seashells, sandcastles, and other simple pleasures—simple and yet profound.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Waves of Expansion

As much as I appreciate the compliments I often receive for the unconventional ministerial work that I do, there is also a certain temptation to impatience with those who clearly do not understand that these accomplishments come at a high personal cost. I may be good enough to make "it" look easy, but it never is. Only recently, however, am I finding myself less willing to "throw pearls before swine," just because the "swine" do not understand the value of pearls or the amount of patience and hard work required to get them.

As much as I long for new opportunities and ways to expand both my life experience and my ability to contribute to humanity's personal and spiritual growth, individually and collectively, I am becoming more respectful of my human limitations also, struggling to acknowledge both the need to do what I can and the realization that I cannot do everything. What complicates this even more, is the ongoing human foible of competition for power.

I believe I am being truthful when I say that what matters most is that the particular job (whatever it is) be done well and that consequently it is more important to serve the work than to worry about either controlling it or being able to take credit for it. A perhaps curious corollary to this that I have observed is that those who seek to control a particular work or who seek to have as much power as possible within it, generally seriously compromise the quality of the resulting work. From a certain perspective, this makes sense

*"Internally,
engaging in conflict
requires one to be small,
rather than being larger
in awareness, understanding,
and compassion
than the moment itself
is able to contain.
So when conflict
knocks on your door,
answer it with love."*

--Sister Who

because forcing a work to be what one has envisioned means that the work can be no greater than one's self. By serving the work rather than controlling it, a wave of expansion is invited—that the work that we create will have ability to teach us about itself in ways we'd not imagined.

A wave of expansion within one's self may be as simple as going somewhere new—a hiking trail, an art museum, an alternative theater, an unfamiliar neighborhood, or a foreign country. Perhaps the journey can be made with one's imagination by reading a book or play that one has never before read, by authors such as Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, or Dante. Perhaps the journey can be more experiential—learning a new language, enrolling in a course offered by a local community college, or joining a social club oriented around book discussion, athletic activity, or some facet of urban renewal.

All of these enlarge our perception of the worlds within which we live, for which we may be the only common element. When my former life partner and I were preparing to move to another state a number of years ago, we invited everyone we knew to a farewell party. The diversity of guests who attended was rather astonishing and obviously resulted in unique individuals meeting other unique individuals, whom they otherwise would never have met. What many of us forget within such circumstances, is that such meetings are rare opportunities to build interpersonal bridges that could literally change our lives.

In a very real sense, I am (at least partially) what I am because of every person whom I've ever met. Many of their inter-relational fingerprints have remained upon my life ever since. In most cases, I am grateful—sometimes immediately and sometimes only much later, after reflection and contemplation of who I have become by having met or known them for whatever amount of time our lives overlapped.

I remain mindful also, however, that as my life expands, I too am leaving inter-relational fingerprints upon the lives of others. Most of the time, I do not know the effect I have had, but this does not make the effect any less important. When all is said and done, the fingerprints of love upon the lives of others is the most important wave of expansion one can ever do, remembering that while we may touch we can never prevent the wave from being whatever it is.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Waves of Connection

Although there have been many times within my life when it felt like God was right there next to me, dealing with challenges that would have otherwise been overwhelming, there have also been plenty of times when the reverse seemed to be true. It was as if a glass ceiling separated me from the Divine and my prayers bounced right back to me unanswered. It would have been easy to conclude within such experiences that God had either died or left me—but later experience has always persuaded me that nothing could be further from the truth.

The principle evidence of connection is a sense of awe. Within its more subtle forms, one might call it respect or admiration. It is the ability to recognize a certain sacredness about a person, place, or thing. For myself, I often encounter this when serving others' personal and spiritual growth in ritual garb. A significant challenge along the way, is tolerating all of the moments when awe is not present, when in spite of all of my best efforts to serve the work, the genuine connection doesn't seem to be happening and yet I somehow know that it is very important to persist; to refuse to give up on the mysterious good thing that my intuition suggests is waiting to be accomplished.

More recently, feeling besieged by far too many problems all at once—sewer line problems, financial limitations, and betrayal within relationships—it occurred to me that specifically because life has always been a peculiar mix, an over-abundance of problems might suggest that a significant break-through of some kind was also in the process of unfolding. This realization did not make the problems any less real, but it did offer me a different point of mental and emotional focus, which may have ultimately made the difference in doing whatever good I could do, even when I felt too physically exhausted to continue at all.

Time and time again, however, just when I think there is no good reason to continue struggling against adversarial circumstances, a smiling face or a word of gratitude casts a very different light upon my generally rocky path. As much as some would have me believe that the rocks should be completely removed, I know from my many experiences of hiking Colorado's high mountains, that wherever the trail is steepest, the stones are what will keep my feet from slipping.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be!

On a Personal Note

Appearing at this year's People's Fair was an enormous amount of hard work, but many conversations of amazing depth and substance nevertheless occurred. Only one friend was willing and able to assist me. I cannot thank God enough for his presence, without which I'm skeptical that all necessary tasks would have been done at all (considering that Sunday turned out to be a twenty-one-hour day for me).

Unfortunately, this was not the case with the live television show two days later, which was to celebrate the accomplishment of twenty years of unconventional and ever-evolving ministry. An enormous amount of work went into preparation and performance of this event. Unfortunately, the one responsible for technical production arrived nearly an hour late and two-thirds of the production crew he'd recruited, didn't arrive at all. Numerous other audio and logistical problems within the studio turned the historic event of my first live call-in show into a complete disaster. It felt as if I'd been robbed of one of the most important days of my life. I am nevertheless extremely thankful for the one friend who assisted (the same person who was mentioned earlier) and two other friends who persisted through uncooperative technology in phoning me during the show to encourage constructive conversation. Regardless, eighteen more episodes of "Sister Who Presents" have already been planned and the production of six more is specifically possible.

With regard to my doctoral studies, I persist in spite of tense discussions with the financial aid office and ineffective communication with other administrators, hoping that, ultimately, my perseverance will be rewarded.

With regard to my house, problems with the sewer pipe continue. The foundation's integrity remains highly questionable, but apparently nothing can presently be done about that. The roof, thankfully, seems to be keeping out the rain.

May God's blessings, love, and peace be with you now and always, *Sister Who*

Subscription Information:

"Sister Who's Perspective" is a free monthly newsletter. If you have appreciated this newsletter, please consider making a donation to empower the work to continue. (Make checks payable to Denver NeVaar).

Sister Who a/k/a Rev. Denver NeVaar, MTS
3170 West Longfellow Place, Denver, CO 80221

Email: dn@sisterwho.com

Internet website: <http://www.sisterwho.com>