

Sister Who's Perspective

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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

Planting Flowers En route to Armageddon

Composing a newsletter each month is a curious task. My thoughts are as much occupied by the past four weeks as by the ones ahead. Using this title for the opening article of this newsletter persisted, however, so I decided to listen and to "serve the work" as best I could, instead of superimposing any personal agenda.

Before I begin this probably very challenging article, I do recognize that there may be some among those receiving or reading this text, who voted in favor of retaining George W. Bush because it seemed to be the best of the available choices.

I wish to respect that choice completely. A worthy argument could be presented in favor of each of the presidential candidates. Additionally, so many other factors contribute to any situation, that only time will tell what the outcome of any choice will be and no one will ever know for certain, whether the "right" choice was made.

More pertinent than the outcome of the General Election, is what we will learn individually and collectively by the national path which was collectively chosen and to what degree we will be honest with ourselves concerning the implications, qualities, and characteristics of those choices.

It is true, for example, that George W. Bush is now responsible for many times more civilian deaths and destruction of property than Osama Bin Laden and that by using fear to assist with his re-election he is by definition a terrorist--which once again supports the old adage of being careful about pointing a finger at others because of the consequent result that three more fingers are pointed back at one's self.

None of which suggests that John Kerry was necessarily the better choice. The implications of that choice, we will simply never know.

Creating healing within our world and building bridges of societal collaboration require us to be honest with ourselves about all of these things and more, but also to be gentle and loving with those of different opinions and perspectives. Mocking an adversary has never encouraged good communication and healthy productive relationship.

We must, therefore, move on to that time-honored strategy of listening to each other and seeking once again to understand and to work toward the common good.

One of my favorite biblical verses is found within the apostle Paul's letter to the church at Galatia. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap."

Part of what we continue to reap as a nation, is our choice to ignore the advice of the elder statesman Benjamin Franklin, given in January of 1784, with regard to selecting the eagle as the national bird. "The bald eagle...is a bird of bad moral character; like those among men who live by sharpening and robbing, he is generally poor, and often very lousy." The eagle is first and foremost a predator and a scavenger, which is why it sometimes suffers the same fate as the road-kill upon which eagles frequently dine.

While it is true that the eagle is merely a symbol and as with any symbol has no more significance than we ourselves give to the particular symbol, what is important to recognize is our collective action of self-definition, that we have chosen to identify ourselves as a nation using a murderer, a scavenger, and an opportunist.

Franklin's recommendation for the national bird was the wild turkey. "The turkey is a much more respectable bird and withal a true original native of America." Unlike its less-intelligent domesticated counterpart, the wild turkey survives by its wits, paying attention to its environment and interacting with its surroundings in ways which are appropriate to its abilities and limitations. In spite of being extensively hunted for two hundred years, there are still wild turkeys to be found in many diverse locations. With a little consideration and responsible behavior on our part, there always will be.

Nevertheless, it may be that the majority of humanity has decided that there will be another world-wide war, terrible beyond our

ability to comprehend it, which leaves us only with the decision of when and not whether such a war will happen. It would be easy and perhaps for many even desirable to forget this during the current holiday season.

I suggest we remember this possibility, but instead of responding with a fearful reaction (such as "playing ostrich") that we engage in distinctly positive and deliberate action. Let this be a season in which we express our love for others and demonstrate the principles of freedom, equality, and the valuing of each and every life, specifically because we will not always have opportunity to do so. Let us engage in positive action specifically because we know that life is finite, that we will not have the opportunity to relive any specific moment or occasion ever again, and that we cannot guarantee that we will all still be here the next time the calendar brings this holiday season to us again (several of my friends are reinventing their holiday celebrations this year, due to fatal auto accidents and other unexpected tragedies involving loved ones).

I recall seeing a refrigerator magnet which displayed the words, "Some days I feel like I'm rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic" and perhaps the title of this article is a version of the same, reflecting my emotional experience of the General Election last month.

Everything suddenly seemed futile and meaningless and I needed to first deal with my own grief and then find a way (no matter how long it might take) to regain a sense of hope and purpose within the world context within which my life continues to unfold. It is not helpful that the local news media has seemed obsessed with military activity ever since the election, completely ignoring actions and events related to peace and international understanding.

So I wondered whether I was simply rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic or planting flowers along the road to Armageddon.

Being Sacred Clown, I pondered the question instead of dismissing it.

What would be accomplished by rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic? Isn't everyone going to die anyway? Perhaps, but I may be able to send a soul to eternity on a peaceful rather than terrified note.

No unavoidable disaster which has not yet occurred, has the ability to prevent me from filling the last moments of someone or something's life with unconditional love. The existence of war within the world has never, in fact, categorically disallowed

actions of love from continuing to occur. (It may even turn out that some form of divine intervention will reward such actions in some way, but the actions will not be actions of unconditional love if they are performed merely as an attempt to bargain with the Divine).

So when the disaster has finally come and gone, who will remember? God will remember. I believe I will also remember. I cannot believe there will be no positive divine response to any expression of unconditional love.

All that being said, I feel frustrated that by being unable to say (except in extreme examples of course), which decisions are right, which are wrong, and how to distinguish one from the other.

Yet I must go on and do what I can to make the day before me as beautiful as it can be, usually without a mentor, guide, or precedent to follow. Only by doing so, do I offer any support whatsoever for better things to happen.

I must go on, in spite of whatever personal troubles I face.

I must go on, in spite of many people who neither experience nor understand such challenges.

I must find the strength to try once more, no matter how many times my efforts have failed.

I must, like any farmer, plant a new crop each spring no matter how bad the previous year's yield was.

I must move ahead in some way, especially when I don't really even know what "moving ahead" looks like.

Often when I do so, nearly everything around me is gradually transformed.

Problems seem less omnipotent; adversaries' words move toward becoming idle threats; beauty is seen where it was previously invisible; and (metaphorically) warm sunlight shines in through a window on a cold winter's day.

Life does go on, as does love and everything which tells me there really is something that is divine and that in the midst of the current confusing transition, I am not forgotten.

As offensive as it is to me that some speak the words "everything will work out" as a way of dismissing any part in that solution, I am equally encouraged by rediscovering a sense of deep spiritual faith that everything will indeed "work out", because in ways that I cannot yet understand, God is still there, still loving me and wisely intervening within the unfolding of each and every individual life--including mine.

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

Maintaining Me

For many days following the General Election, I wracked my brains trying to think of ways to survive mentally and emotionally within oppressive societal situations. Then I received an email within which I found a most wonderful detail, just a couple of sentences, almost at the very end.

Apparently during the Vietnam War, there was a man named A.J. Muste who appeared for a time in front of the White House each night with a single lit candle. Finally a journalist skeptically asked whether he expected to change anything by his nightly vigil. His response was that no, he did not expect to change the policies of the executive branch of the federal government, represented by the building behind him, with regard to the Vietnam War. Rather, he maintained his nightly vigil so that neither the policies of that administration nor the events of the war itself, would change him.

When local, national, and world events, sensationalized by the American media, scream for attention, it is a formidable challenge to remain unassimilated by popular opinion.

When local, national, and world events have unfolded as one hoped, it is an equally formidable challenge to remember those who may be experiencing the dark side of those events, possibly even being victimized by them.

Where this became especially apparent to me, was within a discussion with a very good friend of mine who is a rancher in Wyoming.

*"Taking time
to 'smell the flowers along the way'
is not just a trite little phrase
used by members of the "happiness cult"
(who believe that every moment of life
should be happy, regardless of the cost).
Taking time to truly smell the flowers,
genuinely hear the music,
and do a spontaneous little dance
whenever the opportunity arises
are among the ways
that we keep our souls alive."*

--Sister Who

He commented that the industry of Agriculture generally prospers under Republican administrations. Considering carefully what he had just told me, I then responded that both major political parties had fallen short, since Democratic administrations generally take better care of citizens who are employees rather than business owners or those who are self-employed.

The goal, therefore, we agreed, is that the American people must find a way by which we are not confronted with the choice of which of us will be the winners and which will be the losers. The goal must be that we find a way by which everyone can win, by either providing or allowing for legitimate and effective ways to meet all basic physical, emotional, and psychological needs. Obviously this recommendation bears little resemblance to current American civilization.

I could digress into an endless diatribe of how to fix America, but first of all I'm not at all certain that I have such an answer and secondly (to the best of my knowledge) no one within any key administrative position is listening to me.

The idea of creating a personal ritual by which to maintain my own presence of mind and heart, however, (such as A.J. Muste's nightly candlelight vigil) was inspirational.

So that's what I intend to do and I would like to pass along the same suggestion to you.

I've been saying for years that rituals are for illustrating one's beliefs and prayers; that rituals need not be mindless repetition of what thousands of others have done a million times in the past.

Perhaps now is a very good time to put this idea to work, creating a personal ritual which I do pretty much every day, not as a superstitious intention to manipulate the world around me, but as a simple gesture which reminds me of who I am and the specific relationship with the Divine which fills every moment of my life and guides me toward better choices and outcomes.

I believe as I always have, that there is a divine spark within each of us, which must continue to shine in whatever ways are possible, if any glimmer of unconditional love or divine presence is to remain within the world which humanity collectively creates each day.

I may not be able to fix anything around me, within those moments when it seems like the entire world has gone crazy, but I can continue to shine whatever light I possess. This, for the sake of my soul and also of the world around me, I must do.

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

"The Sister Who Holiday Special"

Within hours, literally, of sending out the last newsletter, an opportunity to proceed with production of "The Sister Who Holiday Special" more or less dropped out of the sky and into my lap.

Unfortunately this was not enough reason for everything to unfold perfectly.

For those who gathered at the studio during the time of actual videotaping, the moments were magical and the insights shared were inspirational.

Four guests more or less representing spiritual perspectives of Christianity, Paganism, American Indian, and Earth Literacy maintained a delightful and fascinating discussion for the majority of the show, followed by a gift exchange.

The show concluded with a candlelight vigil for peace and the studio audience and guests singing the chorus along with myself, of a song I'd written just for the occasion: "Light that is love, light that is peace, within and all around--may it shine in you and me."

I have no regrets, except that I am uncertain of whether I was able to do my best.

Arriving at the studio, I was told a scheduling problem had occurred and needed to be resolved before production could proceed. Then I was told that the green gels I had requested so that lights aimed at the curtain behind the set could project that color there, had been forgotten, not purchased, and were thus unavailable.

"Then use any color," I instructed. Of five lights available for such purposes, however, four had burned out bulbs and only one spare bulb could be found.

Other lighting equipment had been installed within the studio in a way which interfered with production and the staff member who said he would fix the problem, forgot to do so and left.

Of seven people who had presumably received the appropriate training and volunteered to help with production of this show, only five showed up and two of them were an hour and a half late.

All of those who did show up, informed me that their training had occurred within a different studio control room and that they therefore did not know how to operate the equipment of the control room of the studio which we were using.

All but one of my five-person production crew left immediately following actual videotaping, neither assisting with returning the studio to its prior setup nor informing me they were leaving nor even telling me where the master tape of the show was, which we had just recorded.

By the time actual recording commenced, I was stressed, to say the least.

Most of which, may not be obvious within the finished videotape.

As suggested immediately following production, however, none of the struggle may be important to the future ability of the recording to bless people's understanding and lives.

Often, an artist has presented a work executed with perfection, only to have the audience smile, applaud, and go home unchanged.

Just as often, a work filled with stumbling, mistakes, and flaws, has touched hearts and lives and opened doors of understanding.

All of which suggests to me the basic truth, not at all confined to Christianity, of the biblical verse found within the book of Psalms, "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain."

Success or failure ultimately depends upon things beyond our control. We can only build the bridge halfway across an expanse. The other half of the bridge must be built by those on the other side.

We do well to bring our very best to every task, but as a more comical plaque phrased the idea, "no amount of planning will ever take the place of dumb luck."

I suppose luck is as good of a word as any, to describe from our limited human perspective, the actions, outcomes, and choices of what is beyond our comprehension.

The Divine has never been completely predictable within any system of spirituality humanity has ever created, but just as the first biblical Christmas gathering was a meeting of Jews and Zoroastrians which gave birth to Christianity, people of faith can continue to hold hands, raise our voices in unison, and pursue the manifestation of unconditional love and peace on earth, no matter which star may guide us in that direction.

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

Happy holidays, everyone!

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