

Sister Who's Perspective

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue #106 April 2008, 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 has often been said that "Life is not a journey, but a destination." As an ongoing process, life contains various modes and phases--times when we experience newness, transition, closure, reorganization, down-sizing, and so forth.

Ideally, we move through each of these phases at an appropriate pace and in an effective way. I don't think anyone needs to remind any of us, however, that life is more often than not less than ideal.

This is not a devastating problem, however, if one remembers that like ugly gray clay, even the worst moments of our lives can be transformed by diligence, hopefulness, love, and wisdom, resulting in perhaps an especially beautiful piece of fine porcelain. Similarly, the primary difference between dirty carbon and a fine diamond is the amount of pressure and heat the latter has endured.

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

Stuck in the Beginning

As with everything else, there are many kinds of beginnings. If it is merely the beginning of one's participation within an established work or pattern of behavior, difficulties may be relatively minimal, but only if one is tolerant of patterns which are often not a perfect fit. A set of blueprints may describe everything that is necessary to the construction of a new home, but it may not include certain additional necessities such as wider doors and ramps which are necessary to people who use wheelchairs as a primary means of personal mobility.

Beginning a new non-profit organization intended to assist individuals and groups in meeting this or that basic need, on the other hand, may be intensely difficult because of a lack of precedents; a lack of any established pattern to follow, such that a new pattern must be created, sometimes through a process of trial and error which is at the very least tedious and slow.

It is widely reported that Thomas Edison

made one thousand attempts to create a working lightbulb filament which could be efficiently mass-produced and thus viable within America's capitalistic economy. It is important to note that while those one thousand attempts were occurring, he had no guarantee that he would succeed. He simply believed enough in what he was doing to keep trying. Once a formula for a reliable lightbulb was finally discovered, however, a virtually infinite number of variations could be manufactured.

Perhaps for some of us, life is like a tedious period of one thousand attempts to make things work, with no guarantee of success. We are, in a sense, stuck within a world of beginnings, like albatrosses trying desperately to take flight but experiencing extreme difficulty in getting off of the ground. Because we are attempting something which has never before been done in this way or under these circumstances, we honestly don't know whether we will succeed--but somehow we persist in having enough faith to keep trying anyway. To some degree or another, we know who we are and because we know who we are, we know what we must do.

If beginnings is where we are stuck, perhaps that is what we need to learn and, like Edison, take careful notes to avoid attempting the same thing in the same way, which will of course only yield the same failure as it did last time. Perhaps there is something about the world around us or the people within our lives which we are failing to perceive or to understand, so that it may guide our next attempt in a more positive direction. God often uses our enemies to tell us what our friends, for whatever reason, cannot.

Whether surrounded by friends or by enemies, by allies or by adversaries, by abundance or by poverty, today is a day in which we can once again begin something wonderful, using all of the strength and wisdom we have gained along the way. Today is, at the very least, a new and wonderful opportunity. Let's make it count.

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

Stuck in the Middle

The original manuscript of my novel, Troll Steps, took five years to write. In a sense, I allowed it to take that long because I was very concerned that I create true quality literature and not merely best-selling pulp fiction. Once the manuscript was finished, however, the tedious middle ground of innumerable attempts to find a publisher for the work began. The initial phase of composition was finished and the final phase of publication had not yet begun, leaving me stuck in the middle between the two for, in my case, seven years.

I recall reading somewhere a number of years ago that Madeleine L'Engel tried for ten years to find a publisher for her book, A Wrinkle in Time, which went on to win the Newberry children's literature award. Only after she had more or less given up, if I remember correctly, did a publisher approach her at a party one evening and ask about a manuscript. She was surprised but consented to send the work to the publisher the following week. A couple of weeks later, the publisher asked permission to enter the work in the competition for the Newberry Award and the rest, as they say, is history.

Sometimes, it seems, we must wait for the world to catch up or to somehow prepare itself for the gifts God wishes to bestow upon the world through each one of us. We are, in a sense, stuck in the middle and struggle in anguish to know what it is that we are supposed to do. "Wait." "Wait? For how long and what do I do in the meantime?" God's silence during such times can be positively unnerving and it is perhaps only in retrospect that I am able to appreciate it.

My current experience of all of this is the idea of holding God Space meetings within my home. The synchronicities which inspired the launch of such activities were positively astonishing, but attendance since then has remained extremely minimal at best and (from my perspective) nothing seems to be happening--so I am struggling with my great enthusiasm and dynamic proactive personal energy to wait, to be still (well, more still than usual), and to trust.

Using the metaphor of a doctor's office waiting room, I suppose one could say that God doesn't necessarily leave mentally distracting reading material in the magazine rack or on a low table in front of a comfortable couch. When we're stuck in the middle, we may have nothing available except ourselves and whatever was accomplished

within the first phase of beginnings. Most especially, we may have no idea of where or how things are going to wind up.

The story of Job within the Old Testament section of the Christian Bible is mostly about someone who was stuck in the middle, trying desperately to make sense of his circumstances, not knowing that he would again be blessed with prosperous and happy times which would be even greater than anything he had known in the past.

Please note that there was nothing Job could have done to prevent the experience of the middle from happening--no precautions, insurance policy, or preparations of any kind would have made the middle experience any less painful, objectionable, uncomfortable, or adversarial than the middle experience turned out to be. If anything, denying the reality of the experience would only have made it last longer and have made it more difficult for Job to adapt and constructively respond to whatever happened.

With regard to God Space, the supposed first steps of development toward a genuinely interfaith spiritual retreat and conference center which has been available since last November within the livingroom of my house, I find myself stuck in the middle; the beginning formation was remarkable but it is now in the past and the ultimate outcome is presently no more than the imagination of possibilities within my mind. For the moment, I am waiting and wondering what to do and no guidance has yet made itself obvious.

I am committed to serving the personal and spiritual growth of others in any way I can, but find myself regularly plagued by doubts, discouraged by limitations, and depressed by circumstances which seem beyond the reach of my adaptive, inventive, and proactive nature. For all of the riches I could give to the world's people, I am instead pressed for more of those qualities and objects which I do not have.

Specifically because of all of this, it becomes that much more important to me to remain solidly within truth, love, and wisdom (at least to the very best of my ability). It becomes that much more important to me to have faith, to nurture hope, and to pray for healing, understanding, and wisdom to come even to those who may act like my greatest adversaries, but who are nevertheless people who remain as loved by God as I or anyone else is. How could I wish anything but good upon one whom God loves?

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

Stuck in the End

Throughout my years of formal education, much reference was made to the fall of the Roman Empire, which was often clarified to have occurred over more than a hundred years of time, even though it is most often represented by a single victorious attack by the Goths upon the city of Rome itself. Many people were born, lived, and died during this time of decline. Similarly, whether due to illness, poverty, or accident, numerous people within the United States were born, lived, and died within the approximately two decades of the Great Depression of the earlier half of the twentieth century. A third and much broader example within history is what we now often refer to as the Dark Ages of early medieval Europe, a time of tragically extreme religious persecution, widespread violent uncertainty, and the Black Plague. Current descriptions of this time suggest it lasted hundreds of years and was thus the backdrop for the entirety of many people's lives.

All of these three are examples of living within a world which was, in a sense, stuck within the end of familiar forms; struggling for new beginnings, but having great difficulty accomplishing them.

The current age in which we all live has perhaps much more in common with such times than most would like to admit, but the advantage of this is that these historical examples may have guidance and insight to offer, which could be helpful to our own struggles.

The other thing we have in common with such times, however, are numerous anomalous individuals of vision and conviction that the world can be beautiful, that unconditional love and lasting peace are still possible, and that life is still worth living. Most of these people struggled intensely every moment of their lives, which were often relatively short in relation to expectations of life within our own time. To imagine humanity finally rising out of its darkness without these individuals, however, is very difficult at best.

Would the Renaissance have ever

'A moment of sadness is only exclusively sad if one's awareness becomes small enough to fit exclusively within that moment.'

-- Sister Who

happened without Leonardo da Vinci, Saint Francis of Assisi, Michaelangelo, and a long list of other mystics, philosophers, composers, writers, and artists? Is it even conceivable that the world we know today would exist at all, if the Renaissance had not occurred? How often do we remember the sacrifices made by these individuals and whisper a prayer of thanks for their dedication to something good within the most adversarial of societal circumstances?

Within our own individual lives this pattern is sometimes repeated, seasons--perhaps even decades--which in spite of all of our best efforts seem unwilling to shrug off some form of darkness or oppression. It is encouraging to me that many voices of late are calling for societal reformation and renewal, calling for a new Renaissance although using other names for it. It is not life, God, beauty, wisdom, love, or truth which has changed and thereby created this time in which we are living; it is our perception, our experience, and consequently our response to this time which has created circumstances analogous to a harvested field in late autumn--all the bounty stripped away according to selfish purposes and intentions and the field itself left barren and dead, waiting for the passage of winter and the return of spring.

If the current time is a time of decline in various ways, as with such times in the past, there is great strength (individually and collectively) to be found within valuing, loving, and supporting one another; remembering that if we work together and know in our hearts that everyone matters, we will find ways by which we will all not only survive but also thrive, even within the most adversarial of circumstances and challenges.

Rituals of closure, prayers of gratitude, and rededication to empowering both individuals and society to collaboratively join hands and remember the basic truth of life that "we're all in this together," can once again create a Renaissance within our individual souls and lives and a vibrantly empowering renewal throughout our world. The end of any phase of life or history can therefore be a time of positive closure rather than of negative and depressing termination. If it is time for letting go and we do it with grace, God's unmerited blessings may open the door to a much better world yet to come; a world waiting for us to wake up, wash ourselves, and change our clothes as we prepare to embrace a new day. By gratitude, love, honesty, and wisdom, it is all within our reach.

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

Stuck in Motion

There seems to be no argument that nearly everyone is very busy these days, that moments of stillness are increasingly rare and at least for now a luxury that few can afford. I wince at referring to such moments as luxuries, however, because I understand how necessary to psychological, emotional, and spiritual health such moments are. As described by Madeleine L'Engel within her book, Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art, human beings need to take time to just be. If we do not do this, a continuing increase in psychological and emotional dysfunction can be reasonably expected--more violent outbursts within schools, shopping malls, and any other place in which people under stress can be found.

It's as if some deeper part of us knows that if we just keep busy enough, rushing here, rushing there, surrounding ourselves with endless distraction, and attempting to satisfy unreasonable requests for productivity, we will not have to face or deal with how unhealthy the patterns of our lives have become. Like a gerbil wheel that spins faster and faster, we go nowhere, exhaust ourselves while doing so, accomplish nothing of any lasting value, and don't even know how or why to stop.

Being stuck in motion is a form of slavery, a situation in which we can no longer choose whether or not to continue, because the world we've collectively created for ourselves will collapse like a house of cards if we don't.

Perhaps there is no way to build a better house unless we first allow the current one to collapse and the space it occupied to be cleared and prepared for new and better construction. A significant concern, of course, is to somehow step aside so that we are not crushed beneath the resulting pile of rubble.

Then again, perhaps if we work together, we're smart enough to carefully disassemble our house of cards, to place the pieces to the side so that they can be recycled, and to begin more solid construction. This will take time, however, and will most likely not occur at the current unhealthy pace required by the common drive for "instant gratification." Without patience, wiser practices of construction and cultivation will be impossible.

Like the purple ash tree which adds only a single ring to its diameter each year, we too must allow that motion of life which is undetectable to anyone unwilling or unable to be still.

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

On a Personal Note

This has been a difficult month. The good news is that two more episodes of *Sister Who* presents were recorded and are being edited.

In relation to the February traffic accident, my new-used vehicle is wonderful, but I continue to wrestle with five different companies squabbling over various paperwork related to the disposition of my previous vehicle. The court appearance was peculiar, most especially in that after belaboring the point that I suffered the greatest loss, the judge doubled the amount of the fine I was encouraged to expect and then hurried on to the next case, leaving no time for any response.

Various self-employed entrepreneurial activities which I've devised as ways to keep the mortgage company happy, have experienced a devastating drop in demand. Hopefully a corresponding increase will happen soon.

The six days during which I was blessed with personal rest and relaxation with a friend in another state, were easily the most wonderful days of the spring season and passed all too quickly.

My studies are proceeding well, but it is likely that the challenges will become more difficult. Nevertheless, somehow, I will persevere.

On a more difficult note, my house seems once again determined to fall apart and, in addition to all of the above, I am having to engage in activities very close to emergency repairs and alterations, mostly because inadequate funds do not allow me to use the more common method of phoning appropriate repairpersons to take care of numerous pressing problems.

It's rather bewildering: plumbing and roof repairs, bureaucratic paper-shuffling, adjustment of expectations--all while income is diminished, cupboards are getting bare, and seasonal yardwork is pending. Perhaps the fact that against all odds (and with the significant help of friends) I do succeed in handling all of this, is an indication that I am--for now--more capable than I thought.

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

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