

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

Trusting Good to Come

Sometimes I've been told to expect what I want, because my expectations will dictate what I get. Sometimes I've been warned against expecting something I didn't want, because my expectation will draw that misfortune to me. At other times I was told to avoid expecting too much because doing so leads only to disappointment.

Sometimes God seemed to agree that my whimsical wish would really be a good thing to make happen. I have no doubt that miracles are absolutely real. What their precise pattern is or whether a specific miracle will happen within a specific context, however, seems to be a complex matter only known and understood by God.

Yet in those moments when it seems so much easier and even so much more logical to become cynical and shrug off all extra-ordinary possibility, I find myself challenged by what has every appearance of being divine intervention. Even more challenging than such moments themselves, are the implications and developments which follow.

In January, I listened as several students (including myself) individually related how God had in some way or another "called" us to become students at the school of theology which I am currently attending. Only six weeks later, the general nature of our experiences had so radically changed that it was easy to question whether God had ever been truly involved. If God wants us to be happy, then God most certainly did not want us to become graduate students, since whatever happiness we had once had, had been thereby taken from us.

Perhaps God wants something different for us than the experience of continuous happiness. Perhaps there's something more important than mere happiness at stake.

Like waves of the sea, sometimes reaching far up onto the beach and at other times reaching only a short distance, the mysterious presence and intervention of the Divine within my life is sometimes comforting and at other times threatening--especially if I decide to build my house on the

beach, so that I can live within the waves' reach.

Why would anyone want to live within reach of such waves? For all of the erosion and undermining of land-based forms which such waves do, the waves also bring gifts which could be acquired by no other means. Am I most aware of the erosion or of the gifts? Regardless, waves of the sea will keep right on coming. I could move further away and thereby escape the erosion, but doing so would cost me the sea's gifts.

The mysterious watery deeps, molding my shores, decide without asking my permission, what should be washed away. Sometimes my specific plans, dreams, and expectations are among that which is lost and I must simply let them go.

The whoosh and splash and thunder of the churning waves, leaving behind all sorts of treasures to stir and provoke my imagination, move me toward new ways of being and living which were previously impossible and are yet so unfamiliar to me that I do not even know how to begin or what will follow.

Either way, I can trust the waves to keep coming, to keep shaping, and to keep revitalizing the shifting sands of my mind and heart with a wisdom which is beyond my current comprehension. Either way, love and destruction are equally available, the former through living in harmony and the latter through living in opposition to the unstoppable waves and cycles of the world within which I live.

Perhaps, in time, I will finally learn these new ways of being and living and I will finally understand how to begin--if I am willing to continue living where the waves of the sea, the waves of divine mystery, and the waves of God's presence, wisdom, and love can reach me.

Perhaps such waves move between people as well, inviting us to live within reach of each other and to trust that when we do so, challenging waves can be followed by those which bring new life.

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

Trusting Good to Go

I remember the first time I climbed Longs Peak, just south of Estes Park, Colorado. A friend accompanied me as we left the parking lot with flashlights, having been advised to begin the ascent at midnight in order to have reached the summit before noon and be on our way back down before any afternoon thunderstorms might begin gather overhead.

For perhaps four or five hours, we walked through an exceptionally dark forest with a narrow band of star-filled sky directly above us. Neither of us had ever climbed this particular mountain before but we knew that many other people had and therefore could easily trust that the unknown trail would continue to go before us, well beyond the reach of our small flashlights.

Many a gardener or farmer in the past has been faced with the challenge of planting a seed which could otherwise have been directly eaten. Each and every act of planting a seed, is inherently also an act of faith that good will go with the seed, initiating within it the powerfully expansive force of life by which the seed will ultimately be exponentially multiplied.

Each month I compose a newsletter, distributing some by electronic email and some by postal mail, I must trust and hope that like literal seeds, something good will go with each copy of the newsletter and bring to each reader the expansive and miraculous power of life and growth.

Every act of kindness or love in any measure, requires a trust that good will go with the action and exponentially multiply its effects within the lives of others.

Within all of these examples, all of these acts of faith, more often than not, we have not been disappointed--which is one of the main reasons why we continue.

We need there to be love within the world. We need seeds to be multiplied so that hunger can fade. We need words to remind us that solutions are just as real as problems and that love is just as real as hate or apathy. We need all that is good to continue to go before us, as we journey through a darkened forest, trying to avoid stumbling over stones and exposed roots of trees that lie in our path.

Like stones and exposed roots of trees, we need good to go before us, not to threaten us with stumbling but to make the path firm against threats of erosion, of loose sand which would allow our feet to slip, and of soil that gives way instead of

supporting our upward progress. Even the smallest of stones may support the next step of my journey, if I am able to see it as a friend in disguise, rather than as an adversary.

Like words within a letter, we need good to go along also, that our love and encouragement will be effectively communicated, that words of insight and new understanding will be understood, and that words offering a new vision of positive possibilities succeeds in doing exactly that.

We need good to go out from each one of us like the rays of the sun reaching across the vast distances of space to warm the earth. We need good to go out from us like the moon's gravity which regulates the cycles of the ocean tides, invisibly but relentlessly instilling harmony within cycles of life all around us. We need good to go out from us through time, because future generations depend upon it.

I smile and offer to make eye contact with strangers whenever I can, trusting that some small measure of good may be thereby communicated. I often choose not to honk my car horn when someone drives past me in a reckless manner, knowing that it would only add to negative feelings within the world--and there are too many of those already. I try to really listen even when I'm tired and frustrated, trusting that somehow this may add even a small measure of love to someone else's life experience and thereby heal them to some small degree or in some small way.

Every attitude of tolerance, each act of kindness, and even the simplest gesture of love, has within it the expansive and miraculous power of life and healing and growth. In extending such things to the world around me, I demonstrate that in spite of all contrary persuasive arguments, I am trusting good to go forth and accomplish its best possibilities within each person and situation I encounter.

Within each of these is also the opportunity for the love of God to become that much more real to whomever the attitude, action, or gesture touches. We all have the opportunity to make the love of God real to those around us, each and every day.

Ultimately, we become the candles, the flashlights, and the stars, illuminating the good path which we can trust to reach all the way to the top of the mountain. The night may be long and the forest dark, but good goes before us so--hand in hand--let's journey onward together.

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

Trusting Good to Return

No difficulty is so long as the one which one is presently experiencing, which like every other difficulty before it will seem to have been shorter and shorter, the further into the past it becomes. Many painful moments become easier to carry when viewed in retrospect rather than as current experience. Then again, there are unfortunately certain memories which continue to see all too vivid. Was it really twenty years ago or was it merely--in some sense of the word--only yesterday?

No difficulty is so adversarial as the one with which I currently stand, nose to nose; staring into the eyes, perhaps even the very soul of that which opposes me.

No difficulty is so frustrating as the one which has absorbed without noticing, all of my best efforts to resolve and thereby remove its pain from my life.

Within such moments, it has sometimes been helpful for me to remember that "change is the only constant in the universe." No matter how loudly or ferociously an adversarial circumstance may bluster and threaten, it too is limited by time and does not possess the permanence which might be otherwise implied; nor does it have the ability to bring life to a screeching halt; nor does it have the sovereignty to dictate what my future will be.

All such things are subject to so many influences and contributions that they are in truth very "over-determined." This wonderful term found its way to me through a book by Scott Peck, entitled *In Search of Stones*, which I recommend highly. The central idea of the word is that there are so many causes for a particular described subject, that none of the causes can legitimately be considered

the primary cause or the legitimate recipient of blame.

With regard to resolving whatever difficulty I am currently facing, this says to me that assigning blame is a waste of time. What is important, is to figure out what enables the problem to be vanquished, future recurrences to be prevented, and greater understanding of relational dynamics to be achieved.

What is also important within the confrontation with any particular difficulty, is to remember that "this too shall pass." No storm lasts forever. No blizzard succeeds in preventing the occurrence of Spring. No hatred permanently prevents expressions of love. Realizing just how limited difficulties and painful experiences are, is a step toward trusting that good will return.

Realizing that once a storm has dropped all of its rain, that it will then have nothing more to fling down upon the earth, gives courage to our belief in a world that lives beyond the storm's reach.

Realizing that a current arduous task will either be completed on time or that it will not, but that either way the sun will come up tomorrow and new opportunities will be there to greet us, gives courage to our belief in positive alternatives which the current moment is unable to contain.

Realizing that when all of the hatred any person is able to contain has been vented upon others, that someone may still respond with love, gives courage to our belief in each other and in the Divine.

For many years (until it was finally worn off by seasonal weather) I used to have a bumper sticker on my car, which said "God is too big to fit within one religion." Because God is real, not only the possibility but also the probability of goodness returning to every area of life experience, remains a central building block of hope within my imagined future. Because God is big enough to both encompass and also transcend each and every human theology, I do not need to fear that any difficulty can arise, which is somehow beyond God's ability to constructively, wisely, and lovingly respond. Because of that divine combination of wisdom and love, I can trust that no matter how uncooperative the circumstances and events of life may be, God is in the business of rearranging the pieces of my life, of my community, and of my world, again and again if necessary, to create a more beautiful and loving world than any of us ever thought was possible.

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

*"The wings of love
soar from one person to another
on the breath of God's whispers.
Therefore,
whenever you are feeling loved,
remember to listen."*

--Sister Who

Trusting Good to Remain

"Teach us to remember and to Thy grace surrender," chanted the words of a particular danced prayer of the spiritual tradition of the Dance of Universal Peace, in which I participated some time ago.

Logically, there are as many diverse categories of memories as there are past experiences. Some I would forget if I could. Others I strive to remember always. That there is a peculiar grace, an expression of the unmerited favor of God within our individually unique combinations of memories, is a daunting possibility to consider.

Daunting, perhaps, but not unacceptable. I have often found inspiration and guidance within memories from which I had previously expected nothing good to come. Within such moments of mental and emotional transformation, I also sometimes found myself wondering why it had taken me so long to see the other side of the particular past experience and to thereby transform the memory from being one of bondage to being one of liberation--without adding to or subtracting from the historical details of the particular memory.

Similarly, I have sometimes had to struggle to retain the positive effect within my life of a particular memory, during moments when other historical details were presented to me, which accused my positive perception of being a form of self-delusion. Certainly self-delusion is possible within every moment of life, but possible is not the same as probable and definitely not the same as verifiably and historically true.

Can a moment, an experience, or an event simultaneously unfold both good and bad effects? I suggest that such has already happened more times than we can count. Can the moment, experience, or event be fairly judged and categorized on the basis of only one of its parts? Can any person be fairly judged and categorized on the basis of only one of his or her parts? A human society that functions in at least a marginally healthy way requires such judgments to be made, but I often wonder how conscious we are, of what making judgments in this way has cost us.

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of trust of any kind, is that we generally use this word ("trust") and proceed in this way, only when there is some sort of evidence not only suggesting that we do otherwise but suggesting that we have something to lose if we don't (do otherwise).

So deciding to trust is frequently an irrational choice. Nevertheless, it is sometimes the choice

which love has to make in order to, in fact, be love. Yet more than the continuance of love is at stake.

I have often suggested that in various ways, I need to "leave the welcome mat out for something good to happen." If I do not specifically create opportunities for things to go wonderfully right, regardless of the calculated degree of vulnerability which doing so inherently includes, then I must concede that I am throwing my support toward a continuing pattern of things going wrong.

If I only prepare for poverty and never for prosperity, the most common threads within my self-definition and self-expression will be an attitude of defensiveness and paranoia and the construction of mental, emotional, and perhaps in some cases even physical walls. I may thereby reduce my vulnerability to attack, but I will also reduce my availability to love.

Trust does include vulnerability. Trust is also a way for good things to find their way into my life. Additionally, trust is an invitation for good things to continue to find their way into my life.

Trusting good to remain, means that I must remain also; that I must not leave even when an entire season of adversarial circumstances seems to have settled over the land like a choking layer of freshly spewed volcanic ash. Sometimes, in fact, I am the vessel by which any form of goodness is enabled to remain within otherwise hostile and adversarial circumstances.

Sometimes I am the light which remains within a darkened world and others may be trusting me to remain, fearing an overwhelming darkness if I do not. Human hearts may be one of the best available containers of God's goodness. Holding God's goodness within our hearts, however, is an action which we can reject.

From generation to generation, light and goodness and love pass from one heart and mind to the next. I pray that it will always be so, especially in those times when circumstances are least supportive and it is most essential that this continue to happen. Nevertheless, when my strength fails, if I have done my best, I trust God to do the rest.

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

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