

GENESIS



MAY 2020

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CROSSWISE notes From The Interim Rector by The Rt. Rev. Martin G. Townsend

WHAT I BELIEVE

A few weeks ago I heard someone talk about “God’s plan” for us. For complicated reasons, I always bridle a little when I hear that term. What I hear in the idea of “God’s Plan” is the understanding that there is some kind of pre-destined path on which I am supposed to walk, if I can figure it out. I believe something rather different from that.

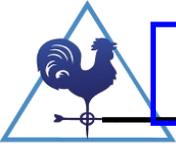


God’s plan is, I think, a matter for ongoing discernment. I do believe that the holy and life-giving I AM (*ego eimi*, Yahweh, G*d, Being)** that willed and still wills all things into existence continues to be engaged in our every action. I believe that G*d’s interaction with us is dialogical and co-operative, rather than pre-determined. In my understanding, that means that any plan is emergent, worked out as time and circumstances require. (“But,” you might ask, “isn’t God in charge of those circumstances?” And I say that in Jesus G*d gave up control in favor of friendly persuasion.) Because of the divine spark ignited in us, we are co-creators with G*d of that plan rather than predestined to fall in or out of line with a pre-existent and unknowable plan.

I believe that every fiber of our being, and of all being, has the inbuilt will to exist in the image and likeness of Love. And Love guides, giving up control. That is why Being became flesh in Jesus – to walk along side us as a companion rather than above, controlling us. That conviction is grounded in my own experience of being free to make variously good and bad decisions. No matter how hard I try to discern G*d’s will, I am still responsible.

We are unavoidably limited in our ability to talk about G*d. We are stuck with metaphors. For those of us who have children, parenthood is a natural image to use for our understanding of love, obedience, rebellion, freedom, restraint, relationship and alienation – all subheadings under the general title of “God and Theology.” Whether we experienced – or are – controlling or permissive parents, that might shape our understanding of the very nature of G*d.

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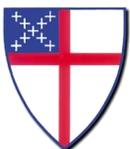
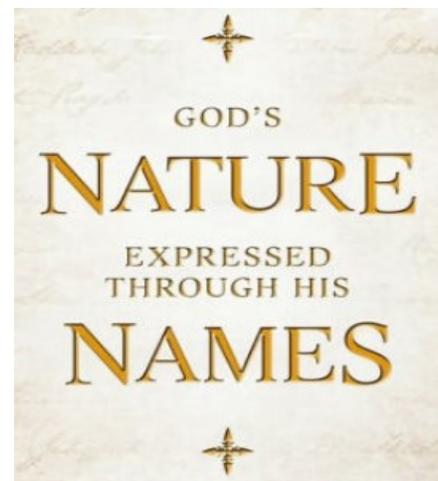


I loved watching my children grow, each taking their own very different rates and directions. I have loved watching them grow into independence even more. Yet more than once I have had people tell me of having had an abusive father; to speak of God as “Father” is a troubling and negative image. So Jesus uses lots of different metaphors to enable a more profound understanding. Although he addressed G*d as *Abba* (Father, but better translated as *Daddy*) he also images G*d as a brood hen, a shepherd, an unjust judge (!), a bridegroom, a woman who has lost a coin, and vineyard owner. These images are an open acknowledgement of our inability to nail down how G*d is. (That refusal to be nailed down is surely one understanding of the ultimate meaning of Good Friday.)

So does G*d intervene directly in human affairs? I have to admit the evidence is inconclusive, but I behave and pray as if yes, G*d is in charge. Do my prayers influence G*d? It seems presumptuous to say they do, but my own children’s requests influence me, so... And besides, I do know that prayer influences me. It opens my horizons, gives voice to dreams, acknowledges my own lack of control, expresses private grief and joy and gratitude. And I do believe that all of those things are part of any plan that G*d, *ego eimi*, Jahweh, I AM, Being has for me.

** The greatest single difficulty in speaking of God is the limitation of language that seems to require that we speak of G*d as *a* being. G*d is not a being but is rather, using the terminology of Paul Tillich, the Ground of all Being. Holiness is the core reality of all that exists. As Christians we affirm that that holiness is most concretely expressed in the person of Jesus.

The Rt. Rev. Martin G. Townsend
Interim Rector





In my last couple of Weekly E-Genesis, I asked folks to submit brief snippets of how they are coping during this Pandemic and glimpses of their lives during self-isolation. My hope is that by sharing uplifting messages and thanksgivings that we will feel hope and encouragement to forge on until we are back together again.

Shortly after the self-isolation order came out my husband Peter and I took a trip to Walmart. We ran into our daughter-in-law Amanda. After a short visit we headed home. Before we got back to the house, all 4 of our children texted us and told us we were **“Grounded,...Indefinitely”**. How the times have changed!

Their love for us and their determination to keep us as safe as possible is truly a blessing and not something we will forget. They keep us connected via weekly DUO sessions where we can see and talk with them and our grandchildren through a safe modem. It's not quite the same as holding them in your arms but for now it will have to do.

I hope you enjoy the articles and that they will lift your spirits. I pray that this time has led to special moments in your lives that you will never forget. Change is inevitable, we will never be back to the “normal” we were used to and that isn't so bad.

To quote an anonymous source, “If you do things the way you always did, the future will look a lot like the past”.

Connected by Prayer

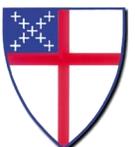
by Karen Hauswald

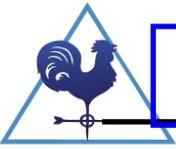
I have a few joys that have come from discovering that I am classified as elderly!!!! I moved from my beloved Upperville Virginia to Bend Oregon a few years ago. I still receive the newsletter which helps me feel a part of Trinity.

Soon after we were all Quarantined, I read that the healing ministry was having their usual 2:30 Monday meeting via zoom. I was a former prayer warrior with them in the past. I jumped right back into that special place of healing.

It is a joy to be part of our community again. I thank the Holy Spirit for giving me this avenue to return.

I have also enjoyed being back in church with Martin and Christian and all of you. I send you much love from Bend Oregon.





The Corona Virus and Me

by Penelope Yungblut

The image of Andrea Bocelli on Easter Sunday singing in the empty, magnificent Duomo in Milan captures my experience of the coronavirus pandemic. Despite the Judeo-Christian myth of man's dominance over nature, when face-to-face with a virus causing thousands of deaths within weeks across countries, I experience how small and fragile we are, like Bocelli in the immense cathedral.



I am one of the fortunate ones. I can carry on my work remotely from home. After initial cancellations and adjustments, the disruption to my life, compared with others, has been minimal. I have had the opportunity to reflect and the privilege of realigning priorities.

The image of Bocelli, one lone voice, singing in the empty cathedral has solidified in me the desire to be about what really matters, a call I believe we all have to answer to that which lies deepest within. I have a renewed resolve to focus my attention and energy on that "for which I was born." This focus helps me laugh more and fear death less.

Through The Eyes of a Parishioner

by Elizabeth Thomas

Just over a year ago, Ritchie and I were traveling in India. When the plane landed in Delhi, I looked out the window to what I had to believe was a sand storm. No, that was the air. This provided our first experience of wearing masks. Recently the Washington Post ran an article titled, "In India, Life Under Coronavirus Brings Blue Skies and Clean Air" (4/11/2020). It showed pictures of Delhi before and after a three-week lockdown. The difference is stunning. What once were sepia colored, grainy images of landmarks now showed colorful, crisp portraits. I urge everyone to take a look at the article.

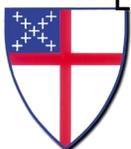


In addition to cows, which are sacred and therefore everywhere, Delhi is overrun with tuk-tuks, motor bikes, and all manner of creatively designed gas-fueled vehicles. What would happen if everyone were required to stay at home as protection from covid-19? Answer: Transportation would be brought to a halt, and the air would clear. And so, a three-week cessation of commerce, intended to curb the spread of a virus, also functioned

as an experiment in control of carbon emissions. It is a positive unintended consequence of the pandemic.

As we pray together from the Prayer Book, "For the good earth which God has given us, and for the wisdom and will to conserve it, let us pray to the Lord." May we take hold of the guidance of our faith, together with lessons of this virus, to preserve and protect our Mother Earth.

"Lord, have mercy."





The focus of all attention recently has been on the lockdown – the quarantine – the extraordinary stress caused by the COVID19 outbreak. But, please know that our Acolytes have been continuing their connection to Trinity in many ways.

Thank you to all the Acolytes who continue to visit the Outdoor Chapel at various times and various days of the week. There, on the grounds of Trinity, they recite the Lord's Prayer – and take pictures of their visit. I search my

emails all week to find those photos.

The congregation may know the Acolytes as they see them in their white robes every Sunday. But, I am witness to know them away from their duties on Sunday as well. This Assembly of Acolytes represents Trinity's youth doing the will of God, not from habit, but from learning the way of the Lord in our Children's Chapel every Sunday.

Praise be to God.
And keep those pictures coming.



Psalm 33:20-22 (NIV)

We wait in hope for the Lord;
he is our help and our shield.
In him our hearts rejoice,
for we trust in his holy name.
May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord,
even as we put our hope in you.

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord,
plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.





Life Goes On—And Then It Doesn't

It is calving season here on the farm. A smattering of newborns speck the back green like little black beacons of hope and promise. Their mothers, watching hawkishly over their offspring, graze and nurse and bond. This season however, like the world we live in right now, has not quite been like those of the past.

My husband has been in the cattle business for seventy years, give or take. He has seen it all. He has experienced devastating losses, from lightning strikes to toxicity. Many moons ago, Gordie kept a herd next to a church in Maryland. Some of the parishioners, unknowingly, pruned some yew bushes on the property and threw the branches over the fence for the cattle. The wilted leaves are highly poisonous. The outcome was disastrous.

There are more prosperous times. There are the successfully born twins. There are the bottle-fed calves who despite losing their mothers, grow up to glory. There is always much for which to be thankful. However, in a 365 days-a-year operation, we rarely pause to mourn or celebrate. We carry on. It is the farm way.

Presently, there have been several first-time heifers who have struggled. It has not been a good year. Most of the problems can be traced to a bull to whom we bred by artificial insemination. He shall go nameless. He passed every test, every genetic specification to which we adhere to assure easy calving. These are registered Angus cattle. Progress is measured through performance and we consistently draw on breeding histories and science to guide us along.

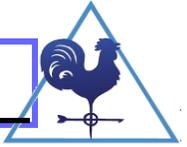
Our front-line responder is Jerry Crenshaw. Jerry is the man we call when there are problems. He never hesitates. He is family. Jerry is our brightness in this time of discontent. He is wise. Working on instinct coupled with years of hands-on experience, Jerry is measured. Jerry naturally knows what to do, similarly to his wife, Betsy.

It is to Jerry that we give thanks. Today's heifer is struggling. Her tag number is 40. A lone front foot protrudes from her birth canal. The calf is big. The heifer is working hard but nature is not taking her course.

Social distancing is scrapped when you are in trenches. Elbow deep, Jerry leads the effort to deliver the goods. The heifer's breathing is labored. Her eyes wonder back into her head. She pushes. She pushes. She pushes. The calf is not coming. Hand pulling and chains are not enough to guide the calf through her smaller pelvic area.

We up our game with a calf jack. We move slowly under Jerry's direction. Patience.





When the cow pushes, we apply gentle pressure at her hip with the jack and pull down, all together. With the head emerging, we know the calf is stillborn. It has been dead in her womb for some time. Jerry and I are side by side bent on saving this cow, to give her another chance. In birth, we have already lost a mother and her calf and too many other big calves to mention. The calves were never supposed to be so hefty. We take our time. We console the heifer. We urge the girl along. We will see this through the end.

At 8am Sunday, when normally I would be sitting in the fourth pew at Trinity Church, awaiting the start of service, the calf finally emerges. A sense of calm prevails, though Jerry never showed an anxious sign. The calf weighs 100 pounds at least. Still warm from his mother's belly and hushed. We already knew this would be no success story.

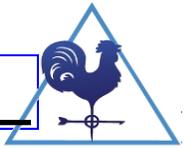
But the mother, in relief, pauses. Her breathing slows to normal. She eventually sits up, benefits from some antibiotic treatment, expels her afterbirth. She later chomps on some hay and starts to regain lost time. We comfort her as best we can while removing the calf from the barn scene.

In the far field she will join the other cows who have lost their calves this season. Before COVID, we may have grafted a dairy calf to the new mother. We save the hide of their calf and the cow will smell and think it is their own. But in these pandemic moments, that is not an option.

She may behave like some of the others, mourning the loss and crying for her calf for a day or two. One is atypically aggressive, chasing the black Labradors when they join me on walks, a pasture aside. Thankfully, sturdy wire separates us and we fall away. The cow stands and bellows, then walks the entire length of the fence row. She is still producing milk. She grieves.

Evening comes, and it is Jerry who returns to check on the cow we saved today. To assess her progress, he encourages her to stand and succeeds, albeit briefly. She needs rest. She will take her time before catching up to the rest of the herd.





As many of you may or may not know, the church phone has been directed to ring in my home during this time when all the church buildings are closed and locked. I have received the usual calls for assistance and I either redirect the calls or reassure them that Trinity will take care of their needs; be it, rent, electric bill, prescriptions, etc. since so many are out of work.

What I am also receiving is calls from Trinity parishioners who are home self-quarantined and are reaching out – How can I help? I have known some of you for 30 years now and this has always been your response to issues such as these. I am awed and overwhelmed by your generosity and concern for others. Thanks, one and all for your reaction to this crisis, it's an honor and privilege to worship and serve with you.

Since our Food Pantry is closed, I have suggested that you call Seven Loaves. The Seven Loaves Food Pantry is located on the lower floor of the Middleburg Methodist Church at 15 W. Washington Street, Middleburg, Virginia 20117. Entry is from the parking lot at Pendleton and Federal Streets, at the rear of the church.



Please give them a call 540 687-3489 and see what help you could assist them with. Tommy Breeden and I take food from Trinity's Food Pantry (very cautiously) to Seven Loaves every week. Many thanks again to you all, I miss you like crazy and cannot wait till we are together again.

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One of the salvations for Ritchie and me during this stay-at-home time has been taking walks on the beautiful Cool Spring campus of Shenandoah University. The area was once a golf course, now defunct, but retains the paved pathways formerly used by golf carts. One can walk easily along a mostly level path that runs by the lazy Shenandoah River. Often, especially in the early hours, one can see wildlife galore: deer, rabbits, fox, heron, and turtles. And of course there is flora in abundance: great swaths of Virginia bluebells and canopied Mayapple. It has been a beautiful refuge offering refreshment for the soul.

So imagine my surprise one day as I was driving to the river, confident in the pleasure awaiting me, only to run into a sign, “CLOSED – NO ENTRY.” What?! I immediately returned home and composed a letter to the President of the University, making a case for reopening the campus.

I mentioned all of the points listed above, and emphasized the importance of safe environments for exercise. I wrote on behalf of all the neighbors who benefit from this wonderful space. Within a day or two there came a reply from President Fitzsimmons, Yes, the campus would reopen and safety guidelines would be posted. Hurray!

So while stuck inside we may be, we can summon our instincts for self-preservation to include our mental and spiritual health. For as Gene Lewis, the site manager, states, there are “...benefits to mind and body that nature can provide.”

That is so true. And, I would add, to our spiritual nature as well.







NOTES from Christian

In responding to the query about positive experiences during the pandemic, it occurs to me that I can't possibly do so without being mindful of the many people who are struggling mightily with the very things that I am not. I have no immediate connection to anyone who is sick or on the "front lines". I have an understanding boss, am able to at least partially work from home, and, so far, my income is secure. Thanks to some Trinity Church angels, I have plenty of delicious food and am fortunate to live in a beautiful place with enough space that I can be outside and enjoy the Spring without a mask or fear of infection. I am very blessed in these ways as I imagine most of our Trinity Church community is as well.

However, I also have the possibly less common advantage of rather enjoying the isolation of quarantine. I have taken the Myers-Briggs test several times in my life and always come out the same. I am straight down the middle on three of the four dichotomies but all the way to the introvert side on that one, so not having to interact with so many people all the time suits me just fine. Actually though, it is even more than that. I have never fit in well with the conventions of normal society. Eight hours a night, early mornings, nine to five, three meals a day just does not work well for me. Relieved of the social interaction and schedule of everyone else's normal, I have found that I am thriving. I sleep when I am sleepy, eat when I am hungry, exercise much more, and am not constantly concerned about meeting everyone else's expectations. As a result, I am better rested, less stressed, have managed to lose a few pounds and generally feel more at peace than I have in a long time.

Of course, even my idyllic version of pandemic life is not without frustrations. I struggle greatly with the technology required to work from home and, of course, there is the toilet paper situation. I have tried not to question my spiritual calling but must admit that this period of solitude has made me wonder if God didn't get a little confused and some where there is some poor guy working in a remote fire tower or distant lighthouse with a crazy feeling he should be a church musician.

As we begin to see tiny glimpses of light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, and I feel the mild anxiety about returning to normal, I am reminded that there are many people for whom the world is just not a good fit and for reasons far more significant than my comparatively trivial ones. If something good is to come of all this perhaps it might be that we carry the experience of being out of our comfort zone forward into our new life and be more sympathetic to those who struggle in regular times. Perhaps we might have new eyes to see those who are in need and new minds open to those who are different than us. Perhaps we might welcome God's love into our hearts more fully and practice it in the world more completely. That would be a normal I could look forward to returning to.





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The Rt. Rev. Jennifer Brooks-Davidson
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