

Living In the Unknown (5.24.2020)

by Rev. Emilia Halstead

When everything and everyone is finally under God's rule, the Son will step down, taking his place with everyone else, showing that God's rule is absolutely comprehensive—a perfect ending! [...] It was sin that made death so frightening and law-code guilt that gave sin its leverage, its destructive power. But now in a single victorious stroke of Life, all three—sin, guilt, death—are gone, the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thank God!

[1 Corinthians 15:28, 56-57]

Much of my reflection this morning will be a dialogue between our current reality of the unknown brought on by Covid-19 and the unknown Reality that Richard Rohr talks about in his most recent book called "The Universal Christ." I know how "heady" that sounds, and I'm hoping to bring to the heart-level what I mean so that we can engage in thought and/or conversation on the topic of "the Unknown."

I'm going to start with sharing a bit of my own personal experience of the unknown during this pandemic:

- The only reason I sometimes know what day it is, has everything to do with the fact that I am still working, full-time, from home.

- This is my first sermon (well, sermonette) since April 19th, because this is the first week that I've been able to step out of my own way long enough for God to enter in and suggest a topic for us to ponder.
- Any future planning has come to a screeching halt, and the only reason some things make it to the calendar is because I was able to pop my consciousness into neutral, so there is a wee bit of inertia letting me slowly roll forward, centimeter by centimeter.
- Metaphorically, I've woken up on a boat in the middle of the ocean, where the horizon looks the same in all directions. I have no modern charting tools with which to plot a course. I have a vague sense of what I've learned from books and movies about how to sail by the sun and the stars. But really, none of that matters – because I haven't the faintest idea which direction I'm going. Because – I'm no longer sure of the “why.” Could I “move towards land?” Sure. But why? What if there is no land to be found? What if it's all water now, like in the story of Noah or the film Waterworld (1995) where the polar icecaps have melted and the Earth is almost entirely submerged in water? What if I'm supposed to be looking for a floating community of

boats? How can I find them in what is a seemingly endless sea?

Now I'm going to switch to reflecting on the experience of the unknown that Jesus' disciples and followers might have been feeling in their experience of the unknown in following the Way:

- We were raised to believe that obedience to authorities is the highest virtue – Jesus told us that's incorrect, that it's love, communion, and solidarity with God and with others, including the marginalized that is the goal.
- We were raised to recognize and put our trust in hierarchical accountability – Jesus told us that's incorrect, that it's lateral accountability, to one another, that is the most important thing and it is how God functions and is leading us to exist.
- We were raised on a system of justice which focuses on dominance, punishment, and retribution – Jesus told us that's incorrect, that it's about rehabilitation and reconciliation, through love and mercy, which is how God moves in, through, and with all of creation.
- Metaphorically, it's as if we'd spent our whole lives stretched out on the rack, in near darkness, with different parts of our bodies

being beaten regularly, receiving an eternal and unending plethora of tortures, all the while a voice is shouting at saying, "PROVE YOUR WORTH!" ... When suddenly there is no more pain. No more torture. No more shouting. We find ourselves walking through the most exquisite garden. Our needs for nourishment are met even before we realize that we are hungry or thirsty. All we hear is joy-filled laughter and music. And the love – [insert your favorite curse word here] – the LOVE is overwhelming in its gentle tenderness. Then the healing begins and it is excruciating in it's act of soothing...and our eyes hurt so much from the warm light all around us. All that any of us can say, repeating it over and over is, "we're not worthy, send us back, we're not worthy, send us back, we're not worthy, send us back."

Extreme disorientation that's were we are, and it's were the followers of Jesus were. We are hearing report after report of how the air around the whole planet is clearing, while we are all inside. I've heard SO many people lately say, "I had been wanting and needing a break for awhile, but I didn't mean THIS!" What do we do with this awareness and awakening?

In the past 10 years several Christian scholars have begun waking up to and writing about their heart-breaking awareness that 1000 years ago, Christianity chose to go back to the torcher chamber of the human way of doing things, instead of continuing to move in the Paradise of God's way of doing things. Richard Rohr is one of those people. He says:

"It's time for Christianity to rediscover the deeper biblical theme of restorative justice, which focuses on rehabilitation and reconciliation and not punishment. [...] Restorative justice, of course, comes to its full demonstration in the constant healing ministry of Jesus. Jesus never punished anybody! Yes, he challenged people, but always for the sake of insight, healing, and restoration of people and situations to their divine origin and source. Once a person recognizes that Jesus's mission (obvious in all four Gospels) was to heal people, not punish them, the dominate theories of retributive justice begin to lose their appeal and their authority."

The way of Jesus, verses the way of the Roman Empire. The way of God, verses the way of humanity. The disciples and followers of The

Way, through the life and teaching of Jesus, were being released from the shame and guilt of a punitive justice system, from the human choice of "towing-the-line" or death. Jesus led them, heart, body, soul, and mind, into a place of complete unknown for them – restorative justice and a reconciling love.

Right now, during this pandemic, we are being given a chance to take a LONG, HARD look at what the practice of Christianity has become in the past 1000 years. We are being given the chance to see, as Richard Rohr puts it:

[T]hat our current practice of Christianity is "the same old story line of secular society with some religious frosting on top." We have the chance to "go back" and choose the Full "Christ Option" which offers us a God who is in total solidarity with all of humanity at every stage of our journey, and who will get us all to our destination together in Love.

Following Christ can no longer be about "being correct." It is about being connected. Being in right relationship is much, much better than just trying to be "right." Amen.