

Reach out, people! Reach out!
Hold fast to stars!
To the elusive, the intangible, the never-fully-known.
For stars fall to earth sometimes.
And the Light of Love rises from the shadows of our broken dreams.
The Fire of Hope is kindled in the ashes of our unspeakable losses.
So reach out, people! Reach out!
Hold fast to stars! For by their light, we shall be led Home.

To what parts of summer's delights are you holding fast?

- The sight of a shimmering, silvery twilight fading into a velvety quiet night?
- The delicious a flavor of a succulent summer peach or juicy ripe raspberry?
- The silky fur of a faithful, long-suffering pet or the comforting touch of a loved one's familiar hand?
- The sweet aroma of a blooming rose surprising you with its fragrance reaching out to you as you pass by?
- The distant sound of a Red Sox crowd as you sit upon your stoop taking in the lazy summer night air? Or the bullfrog croaking out its night song of presence?

Dare we allow these sensory delights to slowly, drop-by-drop fill our weary soul's reservoirs? Souls depleted by the pandemics we have weathered and are weathering in our world crying out for justice, mercy, healing, and peace? Surely, there is too much to fret about to let ourselves take time for such a sweet "coming to our senses"!

Today's Gospel passage from John tells us that even the disciples were prone to fretting. Philip scoffed, "Six month's wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." Come on, Jesus, get real!

Fretting is a part of our human life both individually and as a community. Surely the Bible's many stories of a "fretting crowd" are not in short supply. Indeed, fretting about what was lost, how things are not like they used to be. "When will we return to the way it was?" (with the implication that somewhere in the past was the pinnacle and we are only headed downward to our demise). Hope seems to be in short supply these days.

Fretting is an aspect of the grief process which is an essential part of being able to eventually come to terms with reality and move forward. So it is that we may find ourselves fretting out our grief. Our grief is speaking:

- Denying that anything has really changed and it will all be fine.
- Raging at "those other people who have done this to us," distracting us from our own responsibility in the process which created this dynamic in the world.
- Making bargains with these losses, deciding if we only get this part of the life we had back, then we will be OK, saying "If this could happen, then we would be fine." We don't see it is a bargaining chip allowing us to live in illusion.

The theologian Paul Tillich reminds us that Christian Truth and the life of faith which Jesus teaches us says, “The new is created not out of the old, not out of the “best of the old,” but indeed the death of the old.” Jesus said it succinctly, “Unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, it will not bring forth new fruit.” His own path through death to life stands as a central part of our faith.

-In this process of fretting, we may fall into a deep state of despair at all our losses. All of our old ways of being must come up for review. I am confronted with the questions: “What are my true values for which I actually stand? What am I truly living out in my daily choices of time, talents, this gift of my life?”

All this exposes what we may have taken for granted in our lives. What we have assumed in our own privilege is revealed in its lack of hospitality and generosity of Spirit. What we have presumed we can control in our hubris and unexplored arrogance is exposed with its fault lines showing the cracks in the ways of inauthentic living.

So much releasing is needed in our spiritual maturity:

-Releasing our narrow assumptions so we can expand our boundaries to include what God is hoping and visioning for us: life abundant in our hearts, our souls, our beings.

-Releasing our prideful egos run amok attempting to ensure our own safety and security at the expense of others.

-Releasing our need to be admired and gain worldly success at any cost to our souls and our community.

We need to sit in the silence of release and wait. Waiting for the sprout of the “new thing” God has promised to us: a pathway through the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. These practices of release and listening open our souls in ways that we thought impossible.

We see Philip is convinced that what Jesus is asking—to feed the hungry—is impossible. Here, I can’t help but think of C. S. Lewis’s “Alice in Wonderland.” Alice says, “One can’t believe impossible things.” To which the Queen responds, “I daresay you haven’t had much practice. Why when I was your age I always did it for at least a half-hour a day. Why, sometimes I believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

Parker Palmer, the Quaker educator and spiritual teacher tells of having worked with Dorothy Day in the Catholic Worker’s Movement in New York City. Her biography, “A Harsh and Dreadful Love” is an outstanding tribute to her faithful life. Palmer talks of doing the work of feeding the homeless and destitute on a daily basis and becoming exhausted, disillusioned, depleted in body, mind, and spirit. He went to talk with Dorothy Day to ask how it was that she could do this work day after day and year after year. Her response was, “Well, Parker, the reason you are so exhausted is that you have not learned that just because something is impossible, it doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be doing it.”

Philip just fretted that it was impossible. Andrew looked around and said, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fishes. But what are they among so many people?” What are they among so many people?

Jesus saw beyond the impossible. He saw a young person (remember his saying, “Unless we become like a child, we will never know the kin-dom of God?”) offering his own five barley loaves and two fishes. Jesus took what was offered from the heart of that child, He received it. And took it into his heart.
He blessed it. And named its beloved place in creation.
He broke it, And opened it for the gathered to receive.
He gave it. Generously passing along what he had been given and gratefully received.

In the great “I Am” statements of Jesus, he says, “I am the Bread of Life.”
He would have us remember, “You are the Bread of Life. We are the Bread of Life, here to feed one another with what has been given to us.”

There is a story of the Banquet of God which speaks to my heart. People of all kinds arrived at the great banquet. Every part of the created order was there to celebrate this feast hosted by God. Never had they seen such beauty, smelled such culinary delights, touched such velvet on the chair cushions, heard such dinner music played with great joy, and they were anticipating with incredible hope the heavenly tastes of this banquet. They were all invited to sit at the tables with platters overflowing with delightful delicacies and cornucopia filled with exotic fruits from all corners of the earth.

Then, suddenly, they noticed something about themselves that had changed. They discovered their elbows had all locked into gestures of hand reaching out. They were unable to touch their mouths. There was much fretting and anguished fervor. Then a hush went over the crowd as they saw a child on one side of the long banquet tables, take a piece of a cantaloupe, cut it into a smaller size and reach across the table and feed the person sitting on the other side. The sound of delight and awe filled the great hall. His is how we feed one another at this incredible banquet of God!

May we take the gifts God has given us, small or large, for they are each beloved in the economy of God. May we recognize that gift, bless it, break it open to share, and offer it to another. And may we have the humility to be fed by the gift of another, an often unexpected or even “impossible” gift coming to us from the unlikely places of God’s creation. So it is I say to you:
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