



FROM OUR DIRECTOR

How do you describe these days? Challenging. Unprecedented. Unraveling. Anxious. Full of potential. Unnerving?

Maybe a little or a lot of each of those. I am aware of how much I like having a routine which includes going to the office at the Franciscan Center, even if I don't know what each day will bring. That routine brings a rootedness to face the challenges of the day. That routine includes listening to music on the drive to Milwaukie, some devotional reading and prayer when I get to the office and making a list of the goals, calls and tasks of the day. That routine helps me bring a Franciscan peace to my work and to bring a non-anxious presence to the meetings and challenges of the day.

I have not found a new routine for these days. I feel off-kilter, worried about the future, saddened about the cancellation of our pilgrimage to St Cuthbert's in Scotland, and anxious about the spreading virus and the devastation and grief that it brings. Plus the heart-wrenching personal stories of people in places where the Covid-19 has spread and the struggle of our medical staffs to care for unprecedented numbers of people without sufficient equipment. How does one find a routine in the midst of sheltering in place with hourly changes of statistics. Where does one turn? Many turn to their faith, to spiritual communities (even if not meeting in person on Sundays), to the support of friends. I am glad that the Franciscan Spiritual Center is able to accompany people in spiritual direction via Zoom or by phone. And that a few of our programs are continuing online.

I have also found it helpful to turn to poets and writers - both ancient and contemporary. Here are two reflections that give me some guidance for living with hope and peace each day. From Thomas Merton, wise monk and profound writer from the last century:

You do not need to know precisely what is happening or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and the challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope.

I am working on embracing the new reality with courage, faith and hope. From Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes, a pastor and poet in Massachusetts

After having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

—John 11.6, 21

Why did Jesus delay? So he could raise him? No, he wouldn't let someone suffer unnecessarily just to prove something.

In this time of imposed self-isolating it strikes us Martha's right:

if he'd been there it would have made a difference.

But he delayed. Sit with Jesus a minute in the waiting.

Let this time pass over your anxiety. Don't leave.

Lazarus is dying. Don't move. Wait.

What comes to you?

Consider. Maybe Lazarus would have died anyway, and Jesus knew. You are not in control

You can't save even your dearest. Life will happen to them.

You can't escape life and its suffering. Even faith offers no detour.

Unpreventable tragedy will strike. Illness unto death.

Believing "It shouldn't happen to me" is a burden.

Maybe Jesus took two days to accept what he could not control,

and to find God there in powerlessness, in making peace with what is.

Letting go of what he wanted, good as it was.

We are not in control. But God is here.

Sometimes it takes time to find God by not escaping what is.

I write these words waiting to hear who of my beloved is ill, knowing my part will be to wait at a distance.

Want what you want, even life itself. Do what you can.

And let go. Make peace with what is, and find God there:

the God who sits with you in your powerlessness,

the God who waits... the God who is already there.

STEVE GARNAAS-HOLMES - UNFOLDING LIGHT
WWW.UNFOLDINGLIGHT.NET

Though the Center is not physically open, we are very much in prayer for each of you and available for spiritual direction via Zoom and phone.

We look forward to the time we can meet again in person. God is still with us, even when we are not in control.

Director Larry J. Peacock