

Update from the Protestant Chaplain

April 19, 2020

Good morning,

I hope you are doing well, as we are going into the sixth week of the online semester during a global pandemic. Six weeks is a long time. It's long enough to put our lives on hold, but not long enough to forget what has been normal. I think this sense of being in-between the old normal and the possible pending chaos that precedes the new normal might be a contributing factor to the national discourse about whether or not to relax the shelter-in-place mandates.

At the heart of this debate has been a question about science and research. And part of this discourse has been people who have rejected the scientific research. Sadly, some people have rejected the scientific research in the name of religion. This is truly unfortunate, for science is not religion and religion is not science. As a person of faith, I am personally taking seriously what the scientists are saying about the coronavirus. I am a little dismayed by the behavior that has equated being true to one's religion as a reason for defying the shelter-in place order. I am fearful that such defiance will lead to more sickness and death.

While people may be using religion as an excuse to defy what scientific research is showing us about COVID 19, I would propose that there is a religious concept that we might want to revisit to help us cope with the coronavirus. That concept is patience. Patience is a concept in most religions. Dictionaries have defined patience as the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering calmly or without complaint. At the heart of most spiritual practices, and most practices for that matter, is patience. Patience has been considered a virtue in the Bible and has been described as one of the outcomes of having the Holy Spirit. Patience is not one of the seven great virtues in Roman Catholic Theology but patience is viewed as patience said to be the root and safeguard of all the virtues. Our understanding of patience is influenced by Aristotle's Virtues and Vices in Nicomachean Ethics.

Patience is not exactly a strong value in U.S. society. We are a society that values quick action and impulsive decisions. We view things that occur quickly as being organic and more authentic than decisions and actions that require patience. As a result, our definition of patience is skewed by our high value of impulsive behavior. To that end, sometimes we define patience as having to wait in line for a latte. Six weeks waiting for a latte, well, that's not patience, that something entirely different. Depends on how much you value the latte. Or normalcy.

Perhaps one of the reasons for the distrust in science is not so much the role of God or a higher being in the creation, but in the lack of patience. Scientific research takes patience and time.

Pharmaceutical scientists often work in teams and build on the research of other scientists. Some scientists waited their entire lives for results that were used to make cures for their grandchildren's generation. Fortunately, we will probably not need to wait another generation for a vaccine to COVID 19, but it will take longer than waiting for a

latte. So, as we are waiting for the end of the pandemic, we need patience more than ever before.

Patience is not just about sitting around and not complaining. Patience is about building the capacity to be able to accept and tolerate delay. Most spiritual practices are about developing the capacity for patience. There are some things that can only be learned in this midst of this delay. So much meaning and understanding happens in the delay. We will not be able to learn the lessons from our delays unless we approach these delays with calm and tolerance of the hardship that comes with some delays. Patience turns the torture of delay into space to understand and to gain meaning from that which interrupted our normalcy.

Instead of immediate resolution, our delays are often filled with silence. Our society is so resistant to silence. Silence makes us even more impatient. But what may sound like silence is actually our capacity expanding to embody more patience. Prayer is not just about sitting in silence or speaking to God verbally or in our hearts. Prayer is one of the key spiritual practices that not only connect us to God, but builds within us the capacity for calmly accepting the delay of that which may bring resolution to suffering, chaos or uncertainty.

Having said this, I went to Tunnel for the first time in six weeks. There was no line, I called ahead to order a latte so when I arrived in my mask and gloves and pocket hand sanitizer, there was no wait, no need for patience. It was a very nice latte and it was nice to see the staff, also wearing masks and gloves. I found that I missed the line and the wait. Six weeks ago, while waiting in line at Tunnel, I would see people I know, I would say hello to the staff, I would meet new people and hear useful news or a good joke. But now, during the pandemic, it's just a latte, without the extra meaning making and connection with people. Have a little patience and perhaps you may discover new things in that space we call delay. It is an uncomfortable space, and for some, heartbreaking and extremely painful or sometimes just boring. But I hope we can all grow in our capacity to live through these delays, which may not only save lives, but help us grow as people.

So, how are you handling the shelter-in-place mandate? I don't know where you are but I'm adding a line to the survey – how is your community dealing with the shelter in place? And I will print some of your responses in my next letter, with your permission.

And this week we celebrate Earth Day! Visit my weekly check-in time Thursday, April 23 at 12 noon EST (<https://zoom.us/j/5167356637>) this week and I will show a very short video and invite you to reflect on Earth Day 2020 (Earth Day is April 22). The video I will show is haunting and beautiful and a reflection on the coronavirus and climate change situation. The check-in time is 12 noon EST – bring your lunch or breakfast if you're on the west coast or a snack if you are in another time zone.

All are welcome.

Peace,

Rev. Valerie