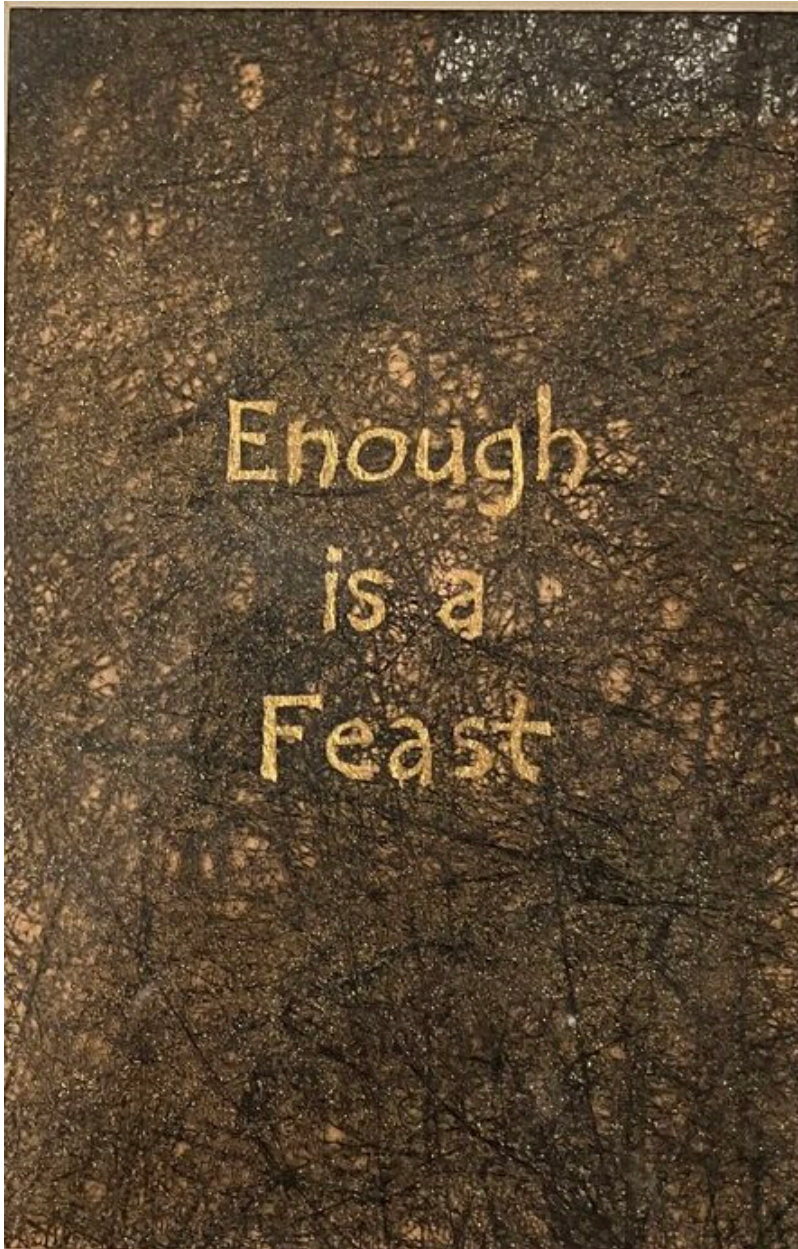


Reflections on Being Born Again-And Again

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First Sunday in Lent

Take a breath. Now take a deeper breath.

Close your eyes, and lay your hands open on your lap.

Take another breath.

Feel your feet on the floor, feel the weight of your hands.

Feel your heartbeat.

Clear your mind, just focus on your breathing.

You have joined this community to give you new life.

Can you let energy come in your lungs as you breathe.

Part of renewing your spirit comes from stopping your analysis of daily problems

And letting your spirit fly, flowing to where you need it filled, or where you can help to feed the spirit of others.

Ok, take another deep breath, open your eyes and look around the community. Notice the connections you have. Who checks on you when you seem low? Who gives you information and help? Who do you have fun with.

Some of this connection is how we are reborn every day. Finding a community that does that, and committing to build and support that community is how we bring our dry bones to life.

Ezekiel's Dry Bones

Our lectionary readings today talk about being reborn, first literally and then figuratively and spiritually. The term is

confusing, so I have generally not tried to parse out its meaning, so this is a first effort for me.

In the Ezekiel passage, Ezekiel prophesies to a field of dry bones, and the bones come together with tendons and flesh and come to life. In Ezekiel's vision, God announces that he will bring the people back to the land of Israel and put his spirit in them.

Ezekiel was a priest to exiles in a Jewish settlement on the Chebar river, which brought water from the great Euphrates to irrigate lands around Babylon. The book of Ezekiel recounts his visions and oracles from 586 BCE to about 593 BCE. His oracles can be ordered and dated as they refer to current events, including the fall of the temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel has an arc to his oracles, with many describing judgement on Judah and Jerusalem, then oracles against the nations which conquered Judah, and then oracles of restoration and visions of a new community, with God restoring the temple of Jerusalem.

A Dry Faith – Literalism

When I first heard readings from the Old Testament like this one, I first heard them in the snippets we now hear as our lectionary trips through the Bible, selecting key passages to rotate through the whole book, Old and New, over a three year span. A lot is left out, and we are also trying to look across Hebrew Scriptures, Prophets, Psalms and Gospel to find a meaning across books that did not exist at the same time. So I heard this story, and pitied the people who would fall for such a fairy tale. God picked up dry bones, revived them, and promised to raise all the dead from the ground. I had seen my grandparents die, and knew their bodies were still in the ground.

My first faith was literal and ethical. Until I was an adult,

I did not want to look too closely at the beliefs of people

who believed in miracles or resurrection or maybe even God as a holy spirit. I had a sense that believing in miracles or even any part of God that was not provable had to do with lack of education and opportunity.

I had a Christian faith based on Sunday School discussions and a confirmation class in which an indulgent pastor allowed us to question and challenge every line of the Apostles Creed before agreeing to be confirmed. My faith was in the fact that people had built churches agreeing to take care of each other, but when analyzing the Mayflower Compact, I wondered if it were bordering on Communistic during the Cold War times of my teen years. I had also been to Plymouth Plantation, where they enact the daily lives of Pilgrims, and heard about the harsh treatment and expulsion of those who disagreed with the minister in charge of the colony.

I argued with the other teens in my Sunday School class about whether dry bones could be brought to life, and did not consider the idea of metaphors, stories as expressions of hope and ideas too complex to analyze.

What is Being Born Again?

I think I was born again when I had my first child. Pregnancy was a miracle, childbirth was a miracle, and when Connor was born— from that first second, I knew he was a separate soul. I started to reflect on “what is a soul? Where does a soul come from?” And I began to have faith in God the creator. I began to feel like so much of nature and the amazing way we can connect in emotional and spiritual ways was not a scientific product—but that “God is nigh”, as we had sung in Taps each night in Girl Scouts. Having learned about God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, this was creator God, and what was in the world is sacred. I might have had glimmers of this feeling in Sunday School, but now I really believed. So I was born again.

We can be Born Again –Again

I was born again— again after I had my second child. He had many health issues, and then I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer, and then my father died. Through that dark year, unexpected people popped up to help me through fear and pain. When Christo was supposed to need heart surgery, the wife of my House of Delegates member, who had never been to my house, came and brought her daughter, undressed her, and showed me “this is what the scars will look like.” And showed me her daughter was fine now, and described the horror of seeing your child grey after such a difficult surgery, but that the color would come back, and knowing what it would be like in advance would help me bear it. (Christo’s heart suddenly healed before the surgery, but the appearance of this angel was stunning to me.) I got my second angel when my thyroid cancer surgery killed my parathyroids, and I started having calcium crashes which would suddenly and quickly begin to paralyze my muscles. I was afraid to be alone—fearing that I would be unable to pull the alarm to get the crash cart to come and get the major infusion of calcium solution that would unfreeze my muscles and I would be alert as my body shut down. I was afraid to go to sleep, but we had two children under 2 at home, and Ron could not stay with me. At night, a young phlebotomist came to check my blood, and decided she would come back at the end of her rounds and stay with me. I don’t know her name! And she let me sleep and they next day the doctors came up with the medicines I still take today. And when my father died, a few months later, after celebrating his 58th birthday, several immigrant clients, whom he had served pro bono, trying to learn basic Spanish, found their way to my house to thank me for his help. I knew of his work as Counsel to the Government Operations Committee of the House, and as President of the Harvard Club and Harvard Law School Club, but had never known about his pro bono work. And that was a gift to me to comfort me that he lived on in so many people’s memories.

The three angels I just described, the mother with her child with heart surgery scars, the hospital worker, and the immigrants, gave me a sudden and clear understanding of God as Christ—how we serve as the hands of God in the world. How when I finally prayed out of fear and pain, people came to help. Not people I knew, and not people I ever saw again, but who delivered the exact help I needed to move on. And once I started to notice this and understand that this is what God is—love delivered, love passed among us—I see it all the time.

Born to See the Holy Spirit

The last part of the trinity in our doctrine is the God of the Holy Spirit. This was the last and perhaps more difficult one for me to see and believe in. I think you have to be in community, or have a guide or elders to notice that patience and faith in those who have joined together may bring the Holy Spirit to “lite and rest among us.” I think I finally could really see the Holy Spirit as I learned to be patient with the consensus building process in Seekers. And, through living life—enduring hard times, and seeing the gifts that I received in those hard times. Seeing that my natural tendency to want to “hold a vote and move forward”—my professional training, could lose the gifts of allowing other people to show their pain, or their gifts, or for a better path for everyone to show itself. Building this church building was a big life lesson for me. My husband is not officially part of Seekers, but our discussions about how long it took to choose a place and build it were a constant time for me to find that new aspects of the decision were revealing themselves, and in this building, the way room was left for music and art were revelatory for me. The way help has been organized for people in need, the way leaders arise, the way activities have come back to life after Covid—now I see the Holy Spirit in so many times around me. And, I have learned to live with the unexpected: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it

is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

So many Seekers find their own particular ways to make the world a better place—through direct service, through advocacy, through teaching, through poetry, through acts of kindness to those within and without the community. And if we watch and listen, and if those of us within the community take the time to share our calls with each other, we can feel that wind blowing, and feel ourselves reborn.

Take a deep breath. Blow it out—maybe we can feel the wind blowing among us.