



Holy Ground

A Quarterly Reflection on the Contemplative Life

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Waking Up Is Hard to Do

She kicks away from tangled shreds of grasping seaweed. Straining against fibrous kelp ribbons, stirring seabed silt into dim choking clouds, she breaks free of the deep sea's grip around her ankles and arms. Now she moves easy through schools of slim dream slivers, shimmering fish – a milky way of teeming, iridescent fragments. Vague memories, stories, and images, like over-exposed film, trail behind her.

Swimming up beyond the fish through holozooplankton, who dwell in the waves of oceans their whole lives, she aims for the blue light and slips through the skin of the sea's surface in a splash of consciousness.

Snuggled in the covers, eyes shut, she lingers to savor the sweet comfort of her sea deep sleep. The dawn does not wait for her. Tipping over the earth like a great pitcher, sunlight pours across the seas and mountains and plains.

Molten gold runs over her window sill, down across the carpet, and up the wall igniting a photo of a mother with her two children.

Waking up is often hard to do for many of us. Like the dreamer in the paragraphs above, I am not an eager early riser. Dawn arrives as an affront, a pan of cold water dumped on my sleepy head. Before my cup of coffee, before my officious ego dons her apron and brandishes her to do lists, before I open my eyes, I shrink, fearful and small- a tiny heartbeat on this suffering, beautiful planet – a translucent Hyperiid amphipod adrift in the waves of a giant sea.

My unconscious has a way of breaking into my awareness by using long forgotten songs, which appear out of nowhere and always seem to address some current issue or challenge before me. "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do," Neal Sedaka's overnight success in 1975 has

been spinning on the turntable of my brain. The lyrics have changed slightly:

*Do do do, down dooby doo down down
Comma, comma, down dooby doo
down down*

*They say that waking up is hard to do
Now I know. I know that it's true
Don't say that this is the end
Instead of waking up I wish
we were living in a dream again.*

*Waking up is hard to do. Comma,
comma, down dooby doo down down*
is on repeat in my mental playlist. It plays as I listen to the news; as I read stories of struggle and suffering; as I am with others as they come to terms with truths about themselves and their lives that have been buried or hidden; as I see people pull off masks to reveal a truer self; and as I watch traumatized souls achieve the freedom to speak truth.

Part of the truth we are waking up to is dark, vicious, and frightening. Many people tell me that they limit their daily intake of news stories. As we open our eyes we may feel rage, despair, and disbelief. Others discover deep resolve forming within for some kind of saving action in response to the revealed truth.

The Holy Spirit working in my unconscious offered up a whimsical

reminder that if I was seeing other people's need to wake up, I ought to take responsibility to wake up myself. Waking up and becoming more and more conscious, aware, and alert are fundamental tasks of being a disciple and growing in faith and spiritual maturity. Some of us sleepyheads will resist such bold, open-eyed, clear seeing, tooth and nail. The call to consciousness rings throughout the scriptures and in the season of advent the wake-up call is sounded loud and clear.

But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.

Mark 13: 32-37

Real change and transformation is not a simple escape to a dream of a better place. Real change requires an honest

appraisal and engagement with what is so. This may involve getting our noses rubbed in some realities we do not like. It may require first creating enough safety for oneself to speak aloud truths long denied, forgotten, or covered up with various kinds of painkillers and band aids. Before our external reality changes, before the people, institutions, and conditions around us change for the better, we must change internally. Our inner reality conditions and shapes how we see, experience, and respond to exterior reality.

All historical experience demonstrates the following: our earth cannot be changed unless in the not too distant future an alteration in the consciousness of the individuals is achieved.

Catholic theologian, Hans Kung

A Box of Dread and Horror

Remember Pandora's box? When I was a child I was fascinated and horrified by the myth of the young woman created by Zeus, who was given special gifts by each of the gods. In addition, Zeus added the gift of curiosity to her other gifts of beauty and wisdom. Then Zeus sent Pandora to earth to be Epimetheus' wife. Zeus was still angry with Epimetheus' brother, Prometheus,

who had stolen fire from the gods. Pandora arrives on Epimetheus' doorstep with a wedding gift from Zeus. The gift was a box or jar with a lid. Zeus told her she must never open the box. Despite Prometheus' warning to never accept gifts from the gods, Epimetheus fell in love with Pandora and she became his wife. Of course Pandora's curiosity got the better of her. She disobeyed Zeus and opened the box. Immediately a host of horrors and human woes rushed out. Deceit, jealousy, greed, hate, war, poverty, misery, and despair swarmed over the earth.

"The slow creep of hate into new sectors of society should be of special concern," writes Peter W. Marty in a recent issue of *Christian Century*. Marty's concern is about "human adaptivity to dangerous environments, especially ones in which the toxicity has increased gradually." He went on to mention how Americans have grown accustomed to public school teachers spending significant sums of their own money to buy classroom supplies, our acceptance of high rates of juvenile incarceration, malnourished children, and violence.

A kind of Pandora's box has opened in recent years. Marty's slow creep



of hate is rapidly picking up speed and visibility. In an historic period of great change and chaos what has been hidden, denied, buried, and ignored is much more visible. One cannot escape the tumult and uncertainty. Everywhere we turn we see disaster, broken lives, suffering souls, and countless indications of hate, greed, and jealousy. A bright light is illuminating dark corners and revealing things many of us would prefer not see. What witnesses, what truth and knowledge lie sleeping in your unconscious mind, locked behind a closed door?

Each stage of life and each period of history offer opportunities for us to see anew and to see deeper. As we wake to a new day, we have an opportunity to discard old attitudes, prejudgments, and perspectives, which no longer serve us

or God's purposes for us. We have this choice. Yet in a culture, which numbs itself with consumption of products, alcohol, drugs, food, thrills, glamour, and constant distractions, the overall message seems to be *forget about it, don't wake up, deny or lie.*

May I just keep my eyes closed a little longer? Sure you may, but you will also remain trapped. As Jesus observed, painful as it may be, it is truth that sets us free.

Drooping Hands and Weak Knees

How do we avoid adapting to the toxicity of our time? The author of Hebrews offers some suggestions. Writing to people who had lost their way in extreme and affected religiosity and spiritual immaturity, the author calls the people back to simplicity and depth of faith over a tendency to slip back into old habits. He calls them to step into the full power and grace offered to us by Christ.

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

Hebrews 12: 12

How do we grow a spine?

About this we have much to say that is hard to explain, since you have become dull in understanding. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

Hebrews 5: 11-14

Our backbone is strengthened by continuous intimacy with God. Intimacy with God is more than a thought or an idea or doctrine. Intimacy with the Holy One is a living reality and relationship of loving communion. Spiritual maturity includes the ability to discern good from evil. Such discernment is learned through practice, and also from encounter with evil.

A task of spiritual maturity is to recognize and come to terms with the full consequence of the sins, the evil we have participated in, condoned, or benefited from – as individuals,

communities, and as nations. We must learn how we are seduced by evil, how the lies of evil insinuate themselves into our consciousness. We must learn how to respond to evil and how not to respond to evil. We must turn to scripture and educate ourselves on the nature of evil. We must become skilled in the word of righteousness. We must roll up our sleeves and get serious about deepening our relationship with Christ and fortifying our faith. The age of spirituality lite, and the gospel as entertainment is over.

What enables us to look evil in the eye and not flinch? What allows us to be face to face with the havoc sin and evil wrecks without turning away? How are we to be present to the suffering due to climate change and natural disasters? As I ask these questions of myself words from the prophet, Isaiah, come to me. Here the prophet describes the qualities of mature faith. Here are the qualities of one who eats solid food. Here is God's faithful servant:

*The Lord God gave me an educated tongue
to know how to respond to the weary
with a word that will awaken them in the morning,
God awakens my ear in the morning to listen,*

as educated people do.

*The Lord God opened my ear;
I didn't rebel; I didn't turn my back.
Instead, I gave my body to attackers,
and my cheeks to beard pluckers.
I didn't hide my face
from insults and spitting.
The Lord God will help me;
therefore, I haven't been insulted.
Therefore, I set my face like flint,
and knew I wouldn't be ashamed.
The one who will declare me innocent is
near.
Who will argue with me?
Let's stand up together.
Who will bring judgment against me?
Let him approach me.
Look! The Lord God will help me.
Who will condemn me?
Look, they will wear out like clothing;
the moth will eat them.*

*Who among you fears the Lord?
Who listens to the voice of his servant,
who walks in darkness and has no
light?
They will trust in the Lord's name,
and rely upon their God.*

Isaiah 50: 4-10

I do not know what Christ is asking of you in these days of darkness. I imagine it is your unique version of bringing light into the darkness. I pray for people

who will set their faces like flint toward the full realization of Realm of God on earth. I pray for people who are resolute and firm in the face of contempt, scorn, and suffering. I pray for people who will not flinch before the face of evil. I pray for people radiant with the light of Christ, who go boldly into dark places. In the words of I Thessalonians 5:6: *So then, let's not sleep like the others, but let's stay awake and stay sober.*

One more thing in the box

Pandora closed the lid, but not before all of the vilest sins of human kind had dashed out. As she slammed the lid shut, there was one remaining gift from Zeus. Hope rested in the bottom of the box.

*Hope. Soft as a voice of an angel
breathing a lesson unheard,
Hope with a gentle persuasion whispers
a comforting word.*

I believe many people today are ready to live from the place of resolute faith and eternal hope. I believe they have been prepared and taught over their lives for this period of history. I believe conscious, awakened people are increasing day by day. Over and over I meet people who have been taught by practice to distinguish good and evil. They have faced harrowing trials,

contempt, and scorn. They have a strength and faith beyond their awareness. It is time to take hold of the truth of God's power and grace within ourselves. It is time to put on our strength. It is time to radiate hope.

Much joy and peace to one and all in our awakening,

Loretta F. Ross

Remain true to yourself, but move ever upward toward greater consciousness and greater love! At the summit you will find yourselves united with all those who, from every direction, have made the same ascent. For everything that rises must converge.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

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The river of the water of life...flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb...On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit... and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Revelation 22: 2-3

*A*s you do all this, you know what time it is.
The hour has already come for you to wake up from your sleep.
Now our salvation is nearer than when we first had faith.
Romans 13: 11

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