

Dis-order Before New Order

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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Am I speaking truth when I say that chaos can be uncomfortable? Just think back just under a year ago – March of 2020. The heart-wrenching news story of a cruise ship docked, people getting sick, the evolving story about a virus; a story that is now the story.

Think back to the dis-ordering of our lives that came in March. Disruptive. Frightening, more so as time went along. It was not at all welcome. But, all these months later, we have survived. We are grieving many things, the loss of near and dear ones, we are grieving the loss of a sense of normality. But we are here. We have learned about our resiliency. We have discovered that we can be resourceful; some of you who dislike technology encroaching in your everyday lives – here you are, worshipping online.

Richard Rohr is an author some of you may know of. He believes that nothing is static, life, us, even God of the Bible is not static. In fact, Rohr makes the audacious suggestion that, maybe the spiritual journey inevitably takes us through an ordering stage – ordering our lives, universe – but perhaps life inherently moves into dis-order. A parallel situation might be the developmental stages of our children – they mature and move through stages or milestones. The spiritual journey, Rohr suggests, takes us through stages towards a new ordering that we cannot at all contrive. Does that agitate you to imagine not having limitations on the control you and I have over our development? Maybe it is a liberating concept. ¹

Spiritual Development thinking of Father Richard Rohr; the suggestion is that we begin our journey with a drive to order things, manage, perhaps even try to control. Then, life happens. The spiritual journey takes us to another stage, dis-order. We are shaken, we are startled, our presumptions destabilized. Had periods in your life like that? I have. At several points in my life I had things figured out. More friends than I can count have had very lucrative careers, then, one day, suddenly they “pivoted” – changing careers from law to carpentry, acting to painting homes, being a dedicated at-home parent to finance.

A “mid life crisis” was mocked when I was a child. Now, I think, we have several generations of younger people who regularly shift careers, partly out of necessity. But, I think for some, even if they can't immediately articulate it, they might be on something of a spiritual journey.

Life destabilizes us – a loved one finds out they have cancer, a loss of a job, a pandemic. I don't think God orchestrates these. But I do agree with Rabbi Harold Kushner's assertion that God grieves with us and accompanies us through the chaos.²

Remember Abram and Sarai who were pretty successful. Then their spiritual journey, the call of God, took them to dis-order. Called out of creature comforts into chaos, life as

¹ *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality*. Richard Rohr, © Franciscan Media: 2008, pages 54-55.

² *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. ©1981 Harold S. Kushner. Anchor Books.

refugees. That the journey through dis-order, challenging their sense of control, took them into a new order.

Richard Rohr calls this the re-ordering stage of spiritual growth. A new ordering of our lives grounded in faith, compassion, love. I wonder if kin-dom language is a glimpse into re-ordering. You know, the last-shall-be-first and the first, last, language. In theory it is wonderful, revolutionary. But adopting a radical new vision might be a challenge to adventure-averse folks among us.

This wonderful piece of art called “The Peaceable Kingdom” by John August Swanson is a beautiful vision. But if you begin to translate that into what life would be like, I think the dis-ordering it would impose on our comfortable lives that we have worked hard to order, managing the chaos, well, that kind of change would make this pandemic look like an annoying cold.

But with that re-ordering, after we get over the grief of losing what we knew as normal, perhaps in a new world we need to learn co-existence, sharing and loving every neighbour – no exceptions – displacing the dominant norm of competition. Maybe a holy blank slate, a divine wiping away of systems, and rewriting the rules, maybe that re-ordering is needed.

Our biblical flood story, wiping out of all creatures, the thought that God would do that is a horrifying thought to me. I don’t think, though, that it is to be understood literally. The backstory to the flood was that humanity, even animals, had made bad choices – all those “and God said it was good” of the creation story had gone bad. Violence had corrupted humankind, even the animal kingdom had gone against their given herbivore nature according to the Genesis storyteller.³

I wonder if that story of creation dis-ordered, and God initiating a covenant, a new ordering, has some merit. We are now on a spiritual journey, perhaps a dis-ordering journey of Lent. Perhaps we can together put ourselves in the shoes of those friends of Jesus who desperately tried to steer their teacher, healer and preacher off what must have felt like an inevitable path to the cross. It must have felt futile, frustrating. Don’t we feel like that at times. But here’s the thing: as dis-ordering as the crucifixion must have been, how much more dis-ordering the news of the resurrection must have been. Are we ready to be re-ordered this Lent? Amen.

³ Theological Reflection, William Lloyd Allen. *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Year B, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide.*