

“Being Seeds”

Rev. Mary Gear

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Reading

“A Seed Knows How to Wait,” an excerpt from *Lab Girl* by Hope Jahren.

A seed knows how to wait. Most seeds wait for several years before starting to grow; a cherry seed can wait for a hundred years with no problem. What exactly each seed is waiting for is known only to that seed. Some unique trigger-combination of temperature-moisture-light and many other things is required to convince a seed to jump off the deep end and take its chance—to take its one and only chance to grow.

A seed is alive while it waits. When you are in the forest, for every tree that you see, there are no less than three million more trees waiting in the soil, fervently wishing to be.

When the embryo within a seed starts to grow, it basically just stretches out of its doubled-over waiting posture, elongating into official ownership of the form that it assumed years ago. The hard coat that surrounds a peach pit, a sesame or mustard seed, or a walnut’s shell mostly exists to prevent this expansion. In the laboratory, we simply scratch the hard coat and add a little water and it’s enough to make almost any seed grow. Something so hard can be so easy if you just have a little help. In the right place, under the right conditions, you can finally stretch out into what you’re supposed to be.

Each beginning is the end of a waiting. We are each given exactly one chance to be. Each of us is both impossible and inevitable. Every replete tree was first a seed that waited.

Sermon/Homily: “Being Seeds”

Order-disorder-reorder.

It’s a model of the spiritual path that humans follow, developed by Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest and theologian.

Rohr says that as individuals on a spiritual journey, we go through three boxes or phases, over and over again. The first is order. This is what we're taught by family and culture, often that there is one truth, an absolute truth, and we are told what that truth is. This box is about naiveté and control.

Then we might begin to question, doubt, deconstruct. This is disorder. We might claim that there is no truth, certainly no absolute truth, that is truth anyway? This box is messy and chaotic. It is about anger, grief, and the death of what has been, the death of order.

If we continue on a spiritual path, then comes re-order. This is when we name our truth and recognize universal truths. This allows us to be open to other truths with acceptance and understanding. This box is about new life and new possibilities.

While Rohr names this cycle order-disorder-reorder, it is a cycle as old as the Earth itself. It's the cycle of life, death, new life. The cycle that shows up in nature as nurse logs, leaf mold, compost. This cycle is recognized in faith traditions, too. In Eastern traditions it's life, death, reincarnation; it's samsara, the cycle of birth and rebirth. In Western-Christian traditions it's the cycle of life, death, resurrection.

Recycling, reincarnation, resurrection. All names for the same process of transformation of life from death. From what is, through the messiness of becoming, to the new and what is possible.

Rohr applies his model to the spiritual path of individuals. I believe it applies to communities, like this one, as well as to groups, cultures, nations.

You don't need me to tell you that we are in a time of disorder and have been for at least a few years, if not longer. We are in the messiness and muck, the deconstruction and death of what has been. And we don't yet know what will be. It can be hard to hold on to hope that we will move through this to a re-order of some kind and that it will be more loving, just, and healthy.

The thing is, that no one, no individual or community, goes from order to re-order without going through disorder. The bridge from what has been to what can be, is disorder, chaos, revolution, liminal space, death, deconstruction, transformation. The bridge is disorder. We don't get to skip the messy part, and if we try to, if we try to go back to some sense of order, it won't be the same and it won't be order. We can't go back again.

Sometimes disorder is thrust upon us—like a global pandemic. Sometimes it comes from the unfolding of events that have been put in motion over time, like George Floyd's death at the hands of police or Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

And sometimes we cause disorder intentionally. Every activist knows that social movements must cause disorder to create change. They/we know that disorder is the bridge between what has been and what can be. The challenge is to cause enough disorder to impel change and not so much that there is a backlash strong enough to prevent change. That is the dance of social movements, the work of justice.

Those who participated in the Stonewall Uprising 53 years ago knew this dance. When police raided the Stonewall Inn during the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, the LGBTQ patrons and the Inn's neighbors said no more. Fed up with police harassment and discrimination, they refused to submit to dehumanizing beatings and arrest as they usually had. When police brutalized a lesbian, she called for others to make a ruckus and they did. Hundreds of people protested the police corruption and brutality that oppressed anyone of the LGBTQ community. Stonewall was a galvanizing event for LGBTQ activism, leading to the creation of several organizations devoted to civil rights for all.

June is Pride month, when we honor the ancestors who demanded change. Could those ancestors of 1969 have even imagined that their disorder would lead to a presidential and national recognition of June as LGBTQ Pride? Would they have imagined that same-sex marriage would be the law of the land?

Those ancestors would have recognized the backlash. Trans rights are under attack now, with anti-trans laws passed in too many states. And some fear that a Supreme Court decision to overturn Roe V Wade will put in place the legal framework to overturn same-sex marriage. Even in the midst of re-order, the pull or return to what was—to the unawareness of the old order—remains. Keeping movement toward re-order is the work of justice. Or, to put it differently, the work of justice is done amidst disorder, chaos, possibility, and transformation.

So how do we stay healthy and whole during times of transition? How do we bridge order and reorder? We must learn to be more comfortable with disorder, ambiguity, uncertainty. We can discern what helps us stay grounded and feel stable. We can cultivate patience and grace for ourselves and for each other.

And we can be seeds. Not long ago, activists in the US and Mexico gathered to protest the abuses of their respective governments: corruption, the separation of children from parents at the border. The activists drew strength from the organizing slogan: "They tried to bury us. They didn't know we were seeds."

In times of disorder, we can be seeds. That doesn't mean inactivity; it means holding on to potential, possibility and hope.

Seeds have some special characteristics. Even though it may not seem so when they are buried in soil, they are alive and full of potential. Look around—we are alive. Look around at this amazing life.

Within their shell, seeds have a store of energy to help keep them alive. What is the store of energy that helps keep us alive?

Seeds wait for light, water and warmth that will move them to break through their shell and begin to grow, unfurling into what they will be. What is the light, water and warmth that will invite us to grow? How will we unfurl into what is possible?

One hundred years ago when Norbert Cepek created the flower communion ritual, he understood transformation. It is not by chance that he chose flowers as a symbol of nature—flowers come from seeds, a symbol of connection, of possibility and hope. In the midst of disorder, a world war, he dreamed of unity and beauty, of community and connection. He knew that one of the things that helps us move through the chaos of transformation is ritual; ways of being together to acknowledge the grief and hope of transition. Weddings, memorials, Sunday morning worship are all rituals to help us connect and make meaning in our lives. That Cepek continued to offer the flower ritual during his imprisonment in World War II speaks to our human longing for connection and meaning. Even in the camps, Cepek sought and brought unity and beauty, community and connection.

And so today, in this time of disorder, we remember our ancestors, those who said no to an order that was unjust, who held hope for re-order to a world that is loving, just and healthy. In a moment we will share flowers for our flower communion, both virtually and in-person.

Over these past two years we have held our flower communion virtually. Sara put together a collection of slides from these flower ceremonies. Let's remember together.

This year, we share flowers virtually and in-person. For those online, if you have flowers to share, please hold them up. We'll look forward to seeing them on the screen. For those in person, I invite you to come forward to choose a flower during the closing hymn. And remember, anyone can stop by OUUC later this afternoon to pick up a flower.

May these flowers remind us that we are seeds, even amid disorder, we can pause to take in the unity and beauty, the community and connection, the possibility and hope.