

Independence in our Interdependence

Last week I was on the phone with my grandmother. She's 93. She's lived alone since my grandfather died a couple of years ago, and in the past 3 and a half months I'm pretty sure she's only left her house once. I'm grateful she's safe. I'm grateful for her friend who's been bringing her groceries. I'm grateful for my family who have been by for physically distanced porch visits. My grandmother asked me, "When will this all end?" And I wanted to be there with her, to see her in real life and give her a hug. When will this all end?

It's been 112 days, I think, since I left my office on a Monday afternoon for what I thought would be 3 weeks of working at home. Back in March I remember talking with a friend about how resilient human beings are, and that we can do anything for a short period of time. The next few months are kind of a blur of emails, zoom meetings, distance learning schedules, some complicated art and engineering projects, lots of hand-washing and a drive-through preschool graduation. Right now, in my household it feels like things are on hold – there are promises that playdates and birthday parties and piano lessons will happen at some point when it's "safe" – when will this all end?

It seems like something has recently shifted, though. I'm still confident in our resilience. And now I'm even more grateful for our ability to adapt and endure. And I'm frustrated with our short-sightedness and inability to take responsibility, to work together. The work of endurance is hard, though, especially amidst the uncertainty and the absence of predictability.

We're also in this constant process of letting go – of plans, of hopes, of assumptions and expectations, of the illusion of control, of a naïveté about the systems of dominance that have shaped our modern world and perpetuated horrendous oppression and injustice.

Yesterday was Independence Day, a 4th of July unlike any other, where many of us held the celebration of the Declaration of Independence and its promises of equality, and the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, alongside the hypocrisy and abomination of chattel slavery and its effects which continue to reverberate today.

Frederick Douglass' gave an important speech in Corinthian Hall to white members of the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society on this day in 1852, 168 years ago, in which he says, "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim." These words were offered about a decade before the Civil War, and as the Black Lives Matter Movement reminds us, are still relevant today.

Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, in an article published in *The Atlantic* last year, offers a lens through which to honor the 4th of July. He writes, "We should be celebrating our disobedience, turbulence, insolence and discontent about inequities and injustices in all forms."

In her book, *Disunity in Christ*, Dr. Christena Cleveland writes about power and privilege and she offers an insightful reminder of “Christ’s cross-cultural, privilege-abdicating example in the incarnation.”

The incarnation. The Holy One, birthed into this world through Mary, the Theotokos, the God-bearer.

I keep thinking that we are in the midst of birthing something new. I have hope that we are in the process of shaping a new way of being a country, and a new way of understanding and sharing power. I believe the church is being transformed as we discover new ways of connecting with each other and expressing our life in Christ. Education is changing. For many the way in which we work is changing. Our world has fundamentally shifted, and - we’re not quite there yet. The future is not quite clear. The process of laboring a new creation into the world is not usually easy, either. From my experience, there’s an intensity to it, and uncertainty. Each labor unfolds in its own way and there’s an ease that comes with working with it, responding to it and following its rhythms. During my first experience of labor, I remember reaching a point and thinking – I can’t take much more. I’m not going to be able to sustain this. The intensity is too much, and it’s constant, and I need a break but there’s no way to pause this process. It was happening whether I was ready for it or not. And just when it felt like more than I could bear, it was over. And my life has never been the same since. During my second experience of labor I remember all of a sudden realizing that I was holding back, I was fighting against it and while the intensity didn’t diminish, once I chose to work with it, there was an ease, an acceptance of the unfolding experience and once again, my life has never been the same since.

Imagine this new creation. What does it look like to you? Jesus saw a world where the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. Imagine a world where everyone has enough food to eat and a bed to sleep in every night. Imagine a world where we recognize our interdependence and put our neighbors' needs ahead of our own. Imagine a world where everyone has enough. Imagine a world where justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

We have a responsibility to each other, and we're in this for the long-haul.

Leaning into the discomfort, renewing our minds, opening our hearts, taking action that makes our interconnectedness - our interdependence - visible, this work is tremendous and important. It is holy. And I believe that this work will change us, it will transform us, and we will become a new creation, a beloved community. This work will also exhaust us and deplete us if we approach it alone. Jesus invites us: Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Years ago, when I first started paying attention to this invitation, I imagined picking up a harness of sorts that I expected to be heavy, only to discover it became lighter as I lifted it up onto my shoulders. Then at some point, I began imagining a yoke built for two, with Jesus shouldering one side as I took my place next to him, teammates working together side by side, knowing that when I grew tired, he would be there to support the

weight and carry me through. Recently I've been imagining a different kind of yoke – one that doesn't make any sense or seem in the least bit practical – it extends out in every direction connecting person to person – a bit like how I've been envisioning church during these last few months of virtual gathering - a network of sorts, each of us connected to each other. An interdependent chosen family of people linked together. There are so many of us, connected in all directions, the yoke stretching beyond the limits of our vision. It's massive and yet there's a lightness, an ease and flexibility to it, because it's the body of Christ. The church - where together, with Christ moving in us and through us and among us, we can do far more than we could imagine.