

Letting Go and Letting God

A homily preached by Jennifer A. Hudson at the Celtic Eucharist, St. Paul's Episcopal Church on the Green, March 23, 2017

In the name of the God who surprises us as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.
Amen.

I used to have a friend who was into Nostradamus' predictions. For every awful thing happening in the world she'd pick out a quatrain from the volume and try to convince me that the so-called seer had prophesied it. I remained skeptical, explaining to my friend, as English majors do, that the stanza was merely a commentary on human suffering and subject to interpretation.

And yet can I deny the striking correlation between Isaiah's passage and the details of Jesus' crucifixion? And what of Jesus' own prediction of his death to Andrew and Philip in tonight's Gospel? Can I deny Jesus' fulfillment of the Hebrew prophecies in Scripture? No. That's what's so compelling.

When I think about it, I think what's persuasive about predictions involving suffering and death is that the two are inevitable parts of the human experience. In fact, death is the only outcome in life of which we can be certain—not just physical death, but the death of relationships, of outlooks, of unrealized dreams or experiences. Endings are a natural part of life, yet we have a very hard time with them. In fact, I'd venture to say that letting go of our attachments is one of our greatest challenges in life.

If we knew ahead of time when we were going to die, when a relationship would end, when the passion and creativity behind a long-cherished goal or aspiration would fizzle out, we'd most likely try to prevent it. We humans like to believe we control our own destinies. And we do, to some degree, as we have free will. But letting go and letting God handle the big stuff, trusting that God knows what's best for us, is a tough practice to follow.

It has been for me. There's unrealized dreams that I know will keep going unrealized. I've grieved them. Sometimes I still do. Many of us are haunted by regrets. Or we suffer from an illness or the stings of rejection, and so on and so forth. And when we feel we've reached the end of our rope, when we can grieve no longer or feel maxed out on woes, it is in those moments we have no other choice but to let go.

Jesus reminds us in tonight's Gospel that "unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24). In other words, endings are new beginnings. Just think about it. Jesus, "a man of suffering, and familiar with pain," (Isaiah 53:3) surrendered his human life so that we might have new life in God. That's how much God loves us. God wants us to release our attachments, the root of our sufferings, to make space for the new blessings in store for us. The Easter story is all about trusting that the various sufferings and deaths we experience as humans are all precursors to a new and better existence, one that lies beyond anything we might have anticipated or imagined. God is willing to surprise us. Why not surprise God by letting go and letting God?