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04/03/2019 | Monthly Topic

Finding stillness

by *Ralen M. Robinson*

I wish there were more hours in a day.

Recently my life has consisted of scattered sticky notes full of memos, sleepless nights and a to-do list longer than the eye can see. These past few months, I have been running from one place to another with too few breaks. I feel overwhelmed, anxious and exhausted.

But I can't afford to be tired! How many of us have days filled to overflowing and lists too long to complete? We promise ourselves that we will rest tomorrow—but tomorrow never comes and our calendars keep getting filled.

At the beginning of this Lenten season, I was exhausted. I started on Ash Wednesday, preaching the word for the people and myself. As I ministered and walked with my parishioners, I wondered—who was walking with me? I wondered when I would have a chance to be still and reflect. And then I realized that I had to intentionally set aside time for myself and then use this time to reflect more deeply on the sacrifice Jesus made for me and for us.

It is in these 40 days that I regained time, stillness and self-care, looking past the busyness that had seemed to consume me. I looked for joy in the hustle and bustle of life.

It is in these 40 days that I regained time to breathe and reflect. I slowed down my pace.

I realized that if I had walked too quickly to my next appointment, I wouldn't have seen a little boy

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give his snack to a homeless man.

I would have missed hearing a confirmation challenge his classmate as he figured out that anyone who is called and answers that call can be a prophet.

I would have ignored the soulful song of the woman on the train belting a beautiful tune.

I would have missed the sunlight splashing onto the plants and flowers and exploding into the colors of a gorgeous rainbow.

If I hadn't stopped, I would have missed it all. I would have been oblivious.

Lent is a time for trial and testing. My exhaustion could not derail me from refocusing on life. I had to find the simple joys and moments of stillness. I had to let go of the looming deadlines, lists, obligations, and things that I put above everything else.

During Lent, we are called to strip all those things away, remove the distractions in our lives and focus our on what really matters. We get to focus on what it means to be a child of God. Then and only then am I able to concentrate on not only uplifting the people to whom I minister, but on uplifting myself.

Even Jesus had to go up to the mountaintop to pray and rest. Even Jesus had to escape the crowds to refuel. Jesus taught us that taking time to regain strength and spirit is vital.

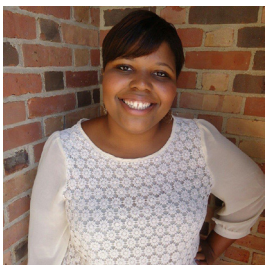
We must not forget to seek out a few quiet moments in our busy days. Find moments to be still, to be peaceful, to be joyful, and in doing so appreciate the true value of the God-given world around us.

Discussion questions

1. Where have you found moments of stillness in your day?
2. What is giving you life and joy this season?
3. How are you refueling and reviving yourself in the midst of the busyness? Or are you being wiped out?

Closing prayer

Gracious Lord, thank you for your greatness, love and continued compassion. Thank you for showing me that moments of stillness are needed to refuel, revive and be a better vessel for you. I ask you to continue to give me energy, blessings and appreciation of those moments of rest. Those moments of stillness and moments of joy are vital. Give me the strength and wisdom to continue listening to your voice -- not that of the world -- so that I can rest when needed. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Ralen Robinson is a seminarian at United Lutheran Seminary at Philadelphia seeking a call to be an ordained minister. She will be going off on her Internship year this fall at The Lutheran Church of the Holy Communion in Center City, Philadelphia. Ralen believes her faith and a good pair of shoes can take you a long way.

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Easter joy

by Ralen M. Robinson

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. (Luke 24:2-3)

When my sister and I were little, we eagerly looked forward to spring--and Easter. Easter Sunday meant fluffy dresses, frilly white ankle socks, colored barrettes and shiny little white shoes that clicked and clacked on bare floors, unlike our usual soft-soled sneakers. We'd put on our fluffy dresses and spin around so fast that the skirts sailed into the air, creating a beautiful swirl of color.

The week before Easter was filled with excitement, too--because we knew we'd be hunting for dozens of Easter eggs in the back yard. And on the afternoon of Easter every year, we'd grumble in unison when yet again, those nasty marshmallow Peeps found their way into our baskets -- no matter how many times we had told our parents how icky they were.

To my sister and me, Easter meant bickering over candy, singing in church so loudly we created surround-sound, getting grass stains on our white socks, and ignoring our parents' pleas to not eat too much candy before dinner.

That was Easter. Through our childish eyes, Easter was a day for rejoicing in candy and not in the Lord, and playing games and not paying reverence. But as the years passed and my understanding deepened, the Lent and Easter seasons took on deeper meanings too.

I began to appreciate Lent as a time of preparation, a 40-day period of trial and testing, deeply reflecting on what has occurred and what is yet to come. It became for me a time to be sensitive to the brokenness in humankind and to the doubts we hold fast. It also became for me a time to reflect on the progress humankind has made.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26)

To fully understand Easter and all it signifies, we must see how Jesus got there. It was among ridicule, verbal lashings and cruel pain that he stood in the city of Jerusalem, betrayed by a friend.

It was there that he continued to give of himself for his people. It was there that he offered grace, healed, forgave and walked alongside the flawed human beings who make up the beautiful body of Christ. Jesus had to endure it all to make it to the point of the cross.

Sometimes, we too have to go through suffering and pain to find calmer days. It isn't fair, but suffering is unavoidable. We may not experience physical lashes on our own backs or be hung on a cross as Jesus was, but we too endure the sorrows of being lost, unloved, mocked and left out. We too feel the real pains of the world in our lives and in the lives around us.

Jesus endured it all for us. He took humanity's pain, suffering, and ultimately death on himself so that we could live in a new life. In the last part of his earthly life, Jesus suffered so much agony, hurt and torment.

Yet through it all, Jesus still prayed through ragged breath, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Jesus's bold response to the cruelty and injustice that meant his death was unyielding love and compassion. Even in his anguish, Jesus' concern was for us and for our forgiveness.

So now on Easter Sunday morning we rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus. Here, now, we sing and shout hallelujah and we rejoice that death could not hold him, that God's promise was fulfilled. Yet how do we get past the sorrow of Good Friday to the joy of Easter Sunday? How do we put on our frilly Easter outfits and joyful smiles? How do we not pay homage to the 40 days of repentance and reflection?


We stand on the heartache and lashes Jesus endured in order to see that darkness will not overtake us.

The Lenten and Easter seasons show us that we will survive and surpass the ugliness and brokenness of this world. That ugliness and brokenness are there and will always be there. How do we know that and still continue to rise up as God intends?

We rise up and live according to God's plan, and we rise up to walk in the footprints Jesus left for us generations ago. We rise up when we look past a person's malice and find something good within them. We rise up when we look upon the brokenness of the world and see it as the beautiful mosaic God intends.

Easter Sunday is the day to rejoice, to praise and exalt the man who was born, lived, died and rose again for us. On that third day, he proved to us all that he was who he said he was – the Son of Man who came to save us, both human and divine, our Savior.





Easter is so much much more than frilly dresses, Easter egg hunts and candy. It's a celebration of the ultimate sacrifice made for each and every one of us, a sacrifice that led to the glorious rising of new life.

Discussion questions

1. What are you rejoicing in this Easter season?
2. What gives you joy?
3. How do you move past pain and sorrow to see the beauty in life?
4. What is bringing you new life this Easter season?

Closing prayer

Creator God, thank you for waking us up this morning to another day on this beautiful earth. Thank you for the changes of the seasons, the blooming flowers and the crisp air. We give a special thanks to your Son who came down on earth to save us from our sins. Creator God, thank you for giving your only begotten Son to be hung on the cross so that we may be brought to new and everlasting life. We pray that you continue to keep us and show us the plan you laid out so many generations ago. Amen!



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