

## God Bless Discombobulation

One of our chief complaints against God is the constant confusion and uncertainty of life.

Why the death and destruction that so often occurs?

Why the travesties and catastrophes?

Perhaps today, this day of Pentecost, provides a glimpse into something that might come close to an answer to those questions.

It might help us to see the purpose that discombobulation serves in our own development as creatures made in the image and likeness of God.

For example, the disciples are totally discombobulated just before the magnificent events of today occur.

The Master is gone.

Where do we go from here?

What do we do next?

Yet it is in that very state of fracture and worry and fear that creates the opening for the Holy Spirit, to finally give them the ability to see clearly and to comprehend completely that letting go enables our connection with God.

That real power is expressed through compassion, kindness, and justice.

That the cracks, created by discombobulation, allow these truths to dive deeply into the heart of each and every person.

Establishing an unmovable conviction that the path of Jesus is the path to life.

Discombobulation is necessary because our human nature is so stuck on power, control and manipulation.

We're so stuck on preserving our own self interest, our own status — that without frequent discombobulation — we simply revert to what is comfortable and therefore dead.

We almost instinctively exchange the radical calls of the gospel — for what we think works best for us.

We see this exchange playing out in scripture itself.

Remember when Paul so boldly proclaims that there's no longer male or female, Jew or gentile, slave or free, but all are one in Christ?

Making quite clear that in God's new creation, nobody is inferior or superior.

That any person can become a priest or bishop or deacon.

That the accidents of gender or sexual orientation or race or ethnicity are irrelevant to one's dignity as a human being and one's calling to serve in this world.

And yet before Paul is even cold in his grave, others take to writing in his name.

In the letters to the Colossians and Ephesians (letters written not by Paul but in his name) the writer tells slaveholders **to be kind** to their slaves.

A big step away from the equality of all people, don't you think?

Then, in the letter to Titus, somebody else writing under Paul's name, instructs slaves **to obey** their masters!

It's the same when it comes to women in ministry.

Paul promotes female leadership.

Pseudo-Paul bans it, telling women to sit down and be quiet!

In the short period of time from Paul to the decades following his death, that human need for control and conformity and status took the divine grant of ultimate freedom and equality and transformed it into something more to our male dominated human liking.

A similar thing happens with Pentecost itself.

On what ought to be a day of renewed inspiration (a fire in the belly!) and fearless prophetic preaching among all members of the church, (which is what the apostles do today), Pentecost has instead been reduced to — a birthday party for the church.

Instead of God's word speaking truth to power, we have chocolate cake!

Because prophetic speech is frightening and challenging — whereas chocolate cake — it's yummy!

Recognizing our human compulsion to take the freedom of God and turn it into human control is what motivated Dostoevsky to write the Grand Inquisitor.

Do you know the story?

Jesus returns, to a small Italian village in the 1500's.

"He came softly, unobserved, and yet, strange to say, everyone recognized Him."

He set about healing people, even raising a small child from the dead.

The Cardinal, the Grand Inquisitor, who enforces the rules of the faith, promptly arrests Jesus, and confronts Jesus about his return:

"You offer people freedom, but we give them bread, and people will always choose bread over freedom."

Yes, we need a regular dose of discombobulation if we are to stay open to the living word of God that still moves mightily within this world.

Because without discombobulation, wax quickly fills our ears and rock quickly forms over our heart.

Where does discombobulation take us today?

It allows us to speak new languages.

Like, in this morning's gospel reading, we learn the new language of radical forgiveness.

“Those sins you forgive are forgiven.

Those sins you retain are retained.”

That doesn't sound so radical until you remember the context of this story.

These disciples have betrayed, run away from and denied the Son of God, abandoning him in his most urgent hour.

Then, rather than a head slap, they're given the great gift of forgiveness.

In light of the forgiveness they receive, can you imagine them refusing to forgive anyone anything?

And there is this.

The gift of radical forgiveness is not a new language given only to the apostles or the clergy — but to all people.

You'll remember the Pharisees castigating Jesus for forgiving sins, claiming God alone could do so.

Jesus gives the power to forgive to us all.

What does the power of forgiveness look like?

It looks like Gary Ridgeway, the infamous Green River killer.

At his sentencing, the survivors of his victims ask the judge to impose the maximum penalty, with many demanding that he rot in jail and then burn in hell forever.

All through these angry demands, Ridgeway sits, stone-faced at his table.

But then Bob Rule speaks up.

He tells the man who cruelly murdered his daughter, that he doesn't hate him, he doesn't want revenge.

He says: "I forgive you."

At that moment, Gary Ridgeway begins to cry.

A heart of stone melts, through the healing power of forgiveness.

What other language does discombobulation teach?

It teaches us how to speak truth to power.

To hold up each and every system that we establish as human beings, and examine them in the purifying light of the gospel.

So whenever there is demonization or exclusion or injustice, when it comes to selfish hoarding of the plentiful bounty of this world, to speak out against these things.

To work to change every unjust system.

To promote in the public square the notion that all people, and particularly the poor and the vulnerable, are the beloved children of God.

Discombobulation also allows us to become the human beings we were always intended to be.

How many conform to family expectations or generational notions of what is acceptable, thereby rejecting the invitation to become their true, authentic selves?

Discombobulation breaks us free to embrace our unique identities.

As Thomas Merton says:

“Many poets are not poets for the same reason that many religious people are not saints: they never succeed in being themselves.

They never get around to being the particular poet or the particular person they are intended to be.

They waste their years in vain efforts to be some other poet, some other saint.

For many absurd reasons, they are convinced that they are obliged to become somebody else who died two hundred years ago and who lived in circumstances utterly alien to their own.

Since no two people are alike, you are not like anyone else in the universe, so please, have the humility to be yourself.” Merton, modified.

Discombobulation is the stimulant necessary to discover our true self.

Discombobulation gets us to that place where we can at long last realize that the tireless effort to remain in control of people, places and things — is a fool's errand.

Once we understand that, we can let go, and slip into the flow of God.

And with open eyes, come to see God's smile in the most ordinary things.

So if today you are struggling with discombobulation, don't be afraid!

Come and see that it is the very means by which this world touches the holy.

Discombobulation is the divine avenue toward liberation, toward true freedom, toward joyful peace.

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