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Although sharing much common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry, often Mary and Bob find themselves approaching ministerial concerns from different angles... *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives and provide food for thought.

## Elephant

### *Mary's Perspective:*

I'm fairly certain we can all agree that these past few weeks have felt surreal. Routines upended, jobs uncertain, extra time with housemates (often your own offspring), loads of opportunity, yet we feel confined and restricted and worried. I've wanted to write about anything BUT "social distancing" and all that goes with it, mentally. My initial blog was all about the butterfly... but if we didn't at least reflect a little on these very relevant times, it would be like ignoring the elephant in the room.

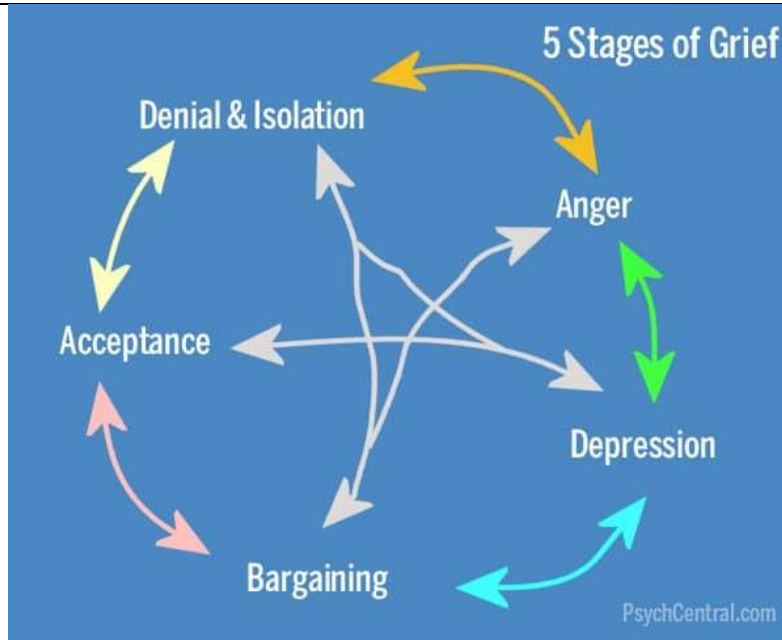
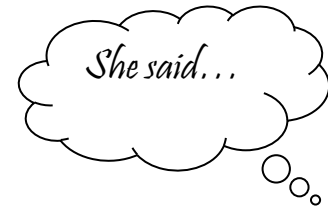
So first, let's consider elephants... large, majestic, beautiful and intimidating. Perhaps you picture a circus elephant, with a bright red blanket and a seat on top. Maybe you visualize the Serengeti, dry and dusty, with the elephant's tail swatting at flies. Maybe you see all the wrinkles and ponder how much similarity there is to what you see in the mirror. Perhaps you are enamored with its big ears, visualizing the ability to fly ala Dumbo, or maybe those beautiful strong legs with toenails that just beg for a coat of bright fuchsia polish.

One of the things I have learned is that the more you dream, the more likely your creativity will shine through - so as you ponder something even as simple as an elephant, be sure to include all of your senses. See the bright colors, feel the rough texture of its skin, sense the energy of the earth shifting as the elephant walks, the heat of the sun beating down, and even the smell of the... well maybe our elephant is standing near a bunch of hyacinths and that is the fragrance that is wafting!

You are likely familiar with the stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. They are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling during times of loss. However, they are not stops on some linear timeline in grief. The organization *Psychcentral* has a great graphic to depict this:



*Sustaining the Journey*

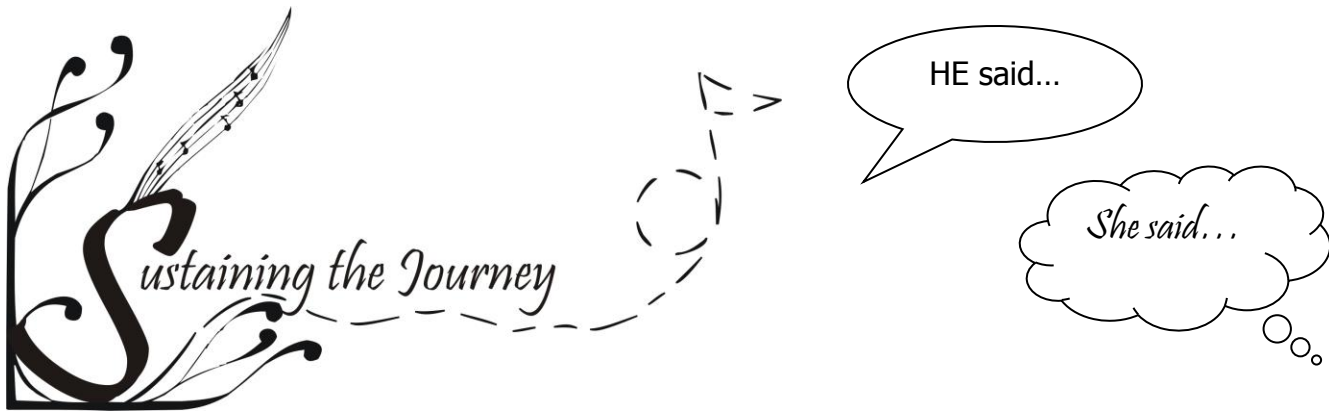


I believe this time of "social distancing" has caused legitimate experiences of grief. Many have lost jobs, a sense of security, and a physical support network. We find ourselves sad, mad, wanting to "do something", perhaps arguing that our jobs are essential or we are in good health so the rules don't apply to us. What I have found more interesting is seeing how folks respond.

For example, I know of many who see this time as a well-deserved break. We work so hard every day, and for once we have legitimate reason to sleep in, nap during the day, and get caught up in binge watching whatever series on Netflix. No guilt, no sense of having to accomplish stuff, just the rare opportunity to blob for hours on end.

I've chatted with others who see this time as a unique opportunity to reinvent oneself. When are you ever going to get this kind of time to fully immerse in learning a new language, or writing a book, or working out multiple hours per day? Innately driven, they are bound and determined to emerge from this time in stronger physical shape, with new skills.

And there are still others who are using this time for professional development. From learning how to live stream services for their church, to sending daily letters of encouragement, to creating a writing network of friends and family who each write (and then share what they've written) in response to a daily writing prompt, these folks have an innate desire to "do something". Perhaps it is an opportunity to get to those work projects that always seem to take the back burner - you who have spent the past few weeks listening to every sampler CD the publishers sent in the past 10 years, or who have reinvented their filing system, or who have organized every digital graphic and developed a library system with cross-reference capabilities, you know what I mean!



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I believe we have all experienced good days and bad days. Some days feel light, filled with the variety of catching up with family and friends, getting in some exercise, cooking, healthy eating, meditation, and perhaps playing an instrument for an hour or two. Then there are those days where gloom threatens to sink in permanently. Those are the days when we struggle to lift our heads off the pillow, slug downstairs to reposition on the couch, only getting up to refill our coffee cup. You know those days - when showering seems like a waste of time, and oh yeah, what's a hairbrush?

If you are nodding as you read this, you are not alone. In fact, even with "social distancing", YOU ARE NOT ALONE. Period. Our faith reminds us of that. On good days, on bad days, on productive days and isolated days, we still are all in this together.

In Cleveland, celebrations of Triduum and Easter have been suspended. For some of us who have spent decades riding the wave of liturgical cycles, it feels truly surreal. The buildup of Lent to the beauty and exhaustion of Holy Week, and then the rejoicing of Easter has been embodied into our very beings. What will happen on Easter Sunday without us? Collectively, together?

Sidebar - my family, like many, celebrates Easter with a brunch that includes much of the extended family. For as long as this brunch has been happening, I have not been able to attend because they are starting to eat as I am starting to play my third or fourth Mass. Finally, this year, I could possibly attend... except of course brunch has also been canceled! SIGH. Not even going to mention the words that came out of Soeder when he realized he won't be making, nor eating, his traditional kielbasa that he brings to his family brunch...

Enough. We could wax on about things lost...but I propose a change in perspective. What is Easter? It's about Resurrection. About things that have been lost coming back to life. Perhaps what was lost was our remembering how important it is to spend time with family. Perhaps what died was our creativity or meditation because we used to fill every spare minute with being "busy". Sometimes things need to die so that they emerge with renewed life.

By the time this pandemic has passed, many things will have died. Some businesses, habits, rituals, even people. But what will find new life? An appreciation for things and people we value? New skills? Rested bodies? The realization that this life is fragile?

I'm a big proponent of being mindful. During this extraordinary time, perhaps you could give life to some new habits. Start a gratitude journal (we've written about that before). Take notice of what values you continue to support when routines are washed away. Check in on family and friends regularly - we all long to feel connected. Maybe embrace learning a new skill. Support a local business. (You better believe I'm making it a point to stop at my local Dunkin regularly - I NEED those people to stay in business!) Admire the critters - from butterflies to elephants.

Recognize that we all are struggling, and take comfort in knowing you are not alone in the struggle. Rather than dwelling within (especially on the dumpy days), look beyond your own struggles to how you might lighten someone else's. This realization is true not only during the concerns about COVID-19, but in life all the time. We proclaim to be a Resurrection people.



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What will take on new life in you?

*Bob's Perspective:*

Up until now, I always thought that an elephant was a mouse designed by committee...hmm. I'll have to rethink that one.

Mary put it so succinctly that I really don't have anything else that could make this much better.

OK, well maybe I just have one thing to add (speaking of elephants). I have a favorite neighborhood ice cream stand that just reopened for the season. Among the many things that he offers, I saw an item on the menu that said, "Elephant Float." My mind conjured a huge super-sized something. My taste buds went into overdrive. So I asked him, "How do you make an Elephant Float?" He responded, "12 gallons of ice cream, 24 gallons of milk, and one medium sized elephant."

Enjoy the silence!