

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.

What Are You Doing Instead?

Mary's Perspective:

So, here we are... the "new normal"... folks are used to wearing masks in public places. Jobs have taken on new character, with remote work opportunities, or modified duties, or searching for new jobs while seeking unemployment benefits. We have figured out how to rely more on cooking at home and exercising in the great outdoors, and spending quality time with our offspring. We are even adjusting to modified public worship.

As we pondered blog topics, I kept coming back to the concepts of mission and purpose. This has universal applications, but let's start first with a very specific example: liturgy. The obligation to attend Sunday Mass has been suspended until further notice. While we are encouraged to make a "spiritual communion," that doesn't necessarily mean coming to church on the weekend. In our diocese, congregational singing is "strongly discouraged". Our worship spaces have been modified (with signs, and caution tape, and removal of modular seating) to accommodate social distance requirements. So what, as liturgists and musicians, are we doing instead?

I have been in contact with a number of colleagues, and each has their own approach. Some are using all instrumental music. Some are having smaller ensembles sing, while others are disregarding the directives and inviting at least some congregational singing. In some churches, the cantor is taking the role of the assembly, and singing all of their parts. (I have strong opinions on this one – don't get me started.) Other churches have chosen to have no music at all. I am chanting the proper Entrance Antiphon and Communion Antiphon, mixed with instrumental music. Rather than choir rehearsals taking up my time, I have been challenged to set these antiphons to music that somehow serves as "connector" – linking the antiphon to the instrumental hymn, but also (hopefully) linking the earthly to the Divine.

My mission as liturgist and music minister used to be to facilitate the assembly's full, active, conscious participation in liturgy. Now, given the current circumstances, I find myself questioning that mission. Since it is no longer my job to animate the assembly's singing, what is my role? Many of my colleagues have expressed frustration, and I believe this question is at the root of their restlessness. There's no longer a clear-cut answer, and quite frankly, there is no one right answer. In some parishes, the mission may be education and exploration of the scriptures. In others, it may be a mission to unite those separated by physical distance. In others, it may be a call to facilitate the spiritual environment so that prayer can blossom.

Stepping back from Churchworld, we pose the same question... what are you doing instead? If our time for entertainment is no longer filled with sporting events or movies or concerts, what is filling that time? If you're not eating out in restaurants, what are you doing? As our society evolves from this pandemic, the economics of many industries have changed. My husband and I have mused that places like Disneyworld and Las Vegas are going to have to target the



wealthy elite to remain financially solvent with fewer clientele (due to the restrictions of social distance). If those destinations are somewhat out of our reach, where will we go instead?

Once again, how we frame our thinking impacts how we perceive this time. We can feel restricted and grumpy because we can't sing at church or go to the bar, or we can see opportunities to learn new skills or develop our creativity. For example, my son sees this as an excellent time for us to learn to play pickle ball (yes, that's a real sport). It's played outdoors or indoors, accommodates social distance, develops hand/eye coordination and quick reflexes – yet is tame enough that “even old people can play”!

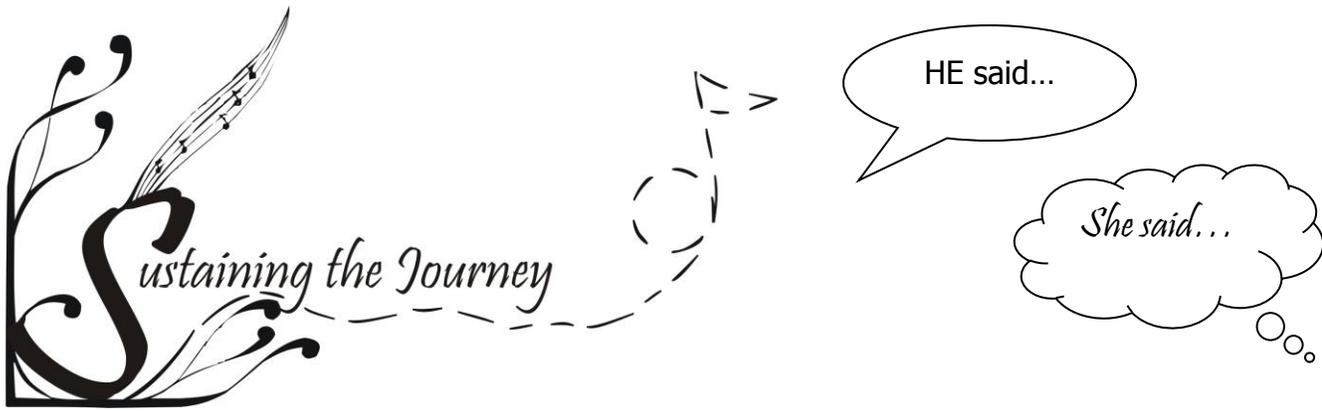
Thinking beyond our selves, we are all called to do something. What are we doing? How do we fulfill our potential in this new reality? What is the mission? If I most treasure my time, what value statement am I making with how I spend my time? (Where your treasure is, there is where your heart is. Has my value been shifted to spending time on my device, or watching TV, or reading?) If you used to spend your time singing in the choir, or volunteering at the library, and are unable to do that right now, what are you doing instead? If we are called to change peoples' lives for the better, what are we doing right now to effect that change?

Bob's Perspective:

Way back when I was a kid, one of our family rituals was to watch the Huntley-Brinkley Report (a nightly news commentary show on NBC 1956 - 1970). During one such newscast, I remember David Brinkley saying, “A successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks others have thrown at him.” In some ways, I think these days in the “Year of the Mask” have presented just that scenario. Not wishing to re-hash some of our previous blogs, suffice it to say that we have all had our share of challenges – professionally, socially and personally.

I found myself doing many things instead of those with which I had been normally involved. Being called upon to stretch my horizons, I've developed (or enhanced) a number of skill sets which, up until now, were dormant (or didn't even exist a few months ago.) At times I've felt exhilarated, and at other times I've felt overwhelmed. There have been times of clarity, concise direction and mission, while at other times things seemed quite muddled, unfocused and fairly confused. This all reminds me of the famous passage in the Book of Ecclesiastes, which some attribute to King Solomon.

“There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant. A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to tear down, and a time to build. A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather them; a time to embrace, and a time to be far from embraces. A time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away. A time to rend, and a time to sow; a time to be silent, and a time to speak. A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-9)



It seems like we've hit on a whole bunch of those things in a very short span of time! While writing this blog, I read the above passage several times. What I find interesting is that the passage starts off with "a time to be born," and ends with "...a time of peace." In between those, some clauses begin positively and end negatively, while others do just the opposite.

We've all experienced (to some degree or another) all of the things mentioned in our passage from Ecclesiastes. That's why it speaks so well. Actually, what we're experiencing right now isn't so different from other times in our lives. At one time or another, (setting aside the good times for a moment) each of us have felt sad, isolated, unfulfilled, unfocused, confused, depressed, etc. The difference between now and then is that we're all feeling it at the same time (as a group rather than individually), so it's tough to find a place to seek consolation. Now more than ever, we need to seek that consolation within ourselves rather than somewhere else. We need to summon up the inner strength (grace) that God has given us throughout our lives and take on a sense of CAN rather than a sense of CAN'T.

Getting back to our focus, "What Are You Doing Instead," it seems to me that we have a lot to think about:

1. If we're unable to gather in a physical way with family or friends, what CAN we do instead?
2. If we're unable to sing melodies and words aloud, what CAN we do instead?
3. If we're unable to immediately do things we enjoy because of the imposed restrictions, what CAN we do instead?
4. Because of the need to be isolated, if we are unable to receive our Lord in Holy Communion, what CAN we do instead?

Final thought from Mary:

Especially in these times of uncertainty, I find myself seeking resources to provide answers – and we often write these blogs in an attempt to offer solutions.

This one's more of a cliffhanger!