

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.

Mediating Grace

Mary's Perspective:

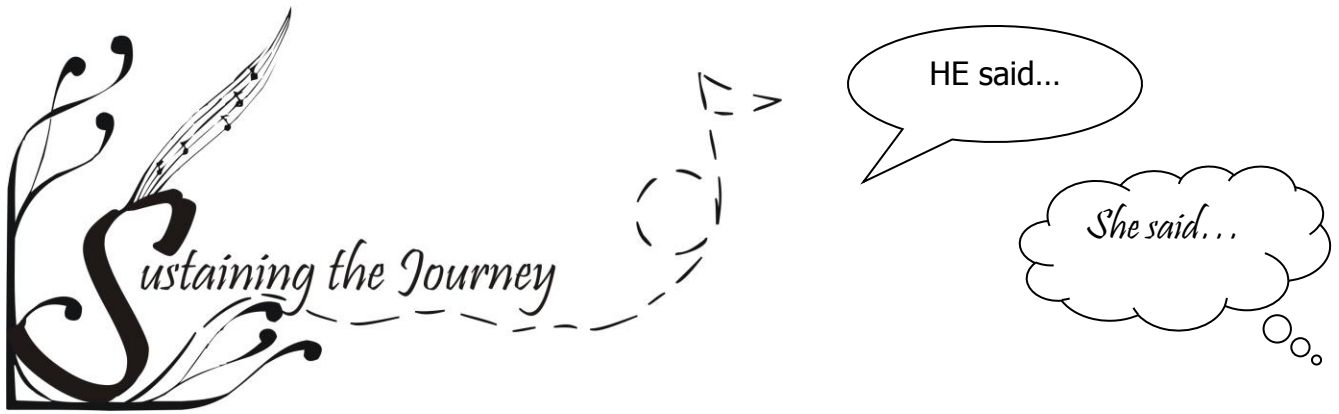
I recently read a reflection that said that everything – illness, challenge, even death – can be vessels of the glory of God. We can even use things that we consider to be darkness in life as opportunities to mediate grace. That's a pretty vast statement, and I'm one for concrete examples, so let's think a little more concretely.

To mediate means to occupy the middle position, or to connect two parties. So if we are to take our experiences and use them to mediate grace, that means we use what we have been given – good or challenging – to bring awareness of God's work to others. Witnessing by our lives, we are challenged to be the vessel, the hands, the feet, and the messenger of God's glory.

I have stayed informed on studies that are being conducted regarding singing, music, and COVID-19. This week, I attended two webinars hosted by our diocese to talk about these studies, directives, and plans for worship throughout this pandemic. One of the recommendations was to plan for things in Church as they are (no communal singing, wearing masks, maintaining social distance) for another 12 to 18 months. Finding this a bit daunting, Bob and I commiserated.

It's easy to focus on what has been "lost" or what we "can't" do. And if you know me, *The Walking Pep Talk*, you know that I will focus on what we have gained, and what we CAN do. So, in my personal life, a lot of plans have changed. Postponed weddings, attending school remotely, and new jobs working from home have changed the path and household dynamic for each of my family members. I could lament that my girls are "missing out" on the traditional high school or college experiences – or I can rejoice in the fact that I get to spend more time with them: bonus time, if you will. I can be frustrated that my choir is not starting back up, or I can rejoice that its members have remained healthy and in touch. Certainly, worship is not what it once was, but this new way has put emphasis on Scripture – and also given me opportunity to regularly write music, as I set the antiphons to chant.

I think many will agree that we have experienced a new appreciation – and longing – for Eucharist. We no longer take many things for granted. We have learned to use technology to keep us connected. Bob and I talked about how this is reminiscent of Babylonian times, where folks were forced to leave their homeland, exiled to a foreign place where they could not worship as they once had.



Back in May, we talked about this time as a great opportunity to press RESET – to restore better balance and healthier habits. It’s also an opportunity to mediate grace. Bring into focus how the pandemic has forced you to grow. Perhaps your employment situation changed and you finally got around to updating your resume. Perhaps you have come to better appreciate the members of your household, or developed better eating habits. Perhaps it has given you the chance to reorganize parts of life, whether that’s a closet or the structure of your day. Maybe the pandemic has made you more mindful of the people in your life, and has spurred you to check in with them more regularly.

We don’t know what tomorrow brings, and it would not be wise to take tomorrow for granted. Whether this pandemic changes direction quickly and restrictions are lifted, or we are in for the long haul, we have been given this unique opportunity.

How will you mediate grace?

Bob’s Perspective:

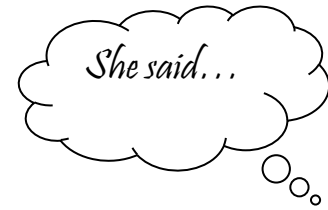
I have to admit that it’s becoming more and more difficult to write and stay positive during this “Year of the Mask.” How much more can we say in order to encourage others or ourselves without repeating the same thing over and over again? The Israelites (residents of Jerusalem) who were exiled to Babylon (modern day Baghdad, Iraq) by King Nebuchadnezzar in the year 597 B.C. probably experienced many of the same feelings.

Life for them was out of sorts in many ways. False prophets began to dispute with Jeremiah’s assertion that the captivity would continue for a long time. Because of these disputes, impatience, anxiety, unrest and tension built among the captives. That doesn’t sound a bit familiar in today’s world, does it? (*Rhetorical question meant as sarcasm*). There’s an old saying that goes something like, “If we don’t learn from history we’re bound to repeat it.”

However, Jeremiah responded to the captives in a letter ([Jer. 29:1-23](#)). The purpose of this letter was to assure the captives that God had not abandoned them. In essence, Jeremiah told them to put aside the rumors and misinformation that was being spread - and advised them to calm down, settle in, and make the best of their lives in this situation.

I won’t pull a Gutenberg and print the whole Bible here, but there is one quote worth mentioning. This is probably the most quoted passage of this section of Jeremiah’s letter. As a gift, I was given a coffee cup with this inscription:

For I know well the plans I have in mind for you—says the LORD—plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope. (Jer. 29:11)



It's in understanding this passage and taking it to heart that we can begin to take upon ourselves the task of mediating grace. That being said, I would like to quote a dear friend:

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How will you mediate grace?

Further reflection from Bob and Mary:

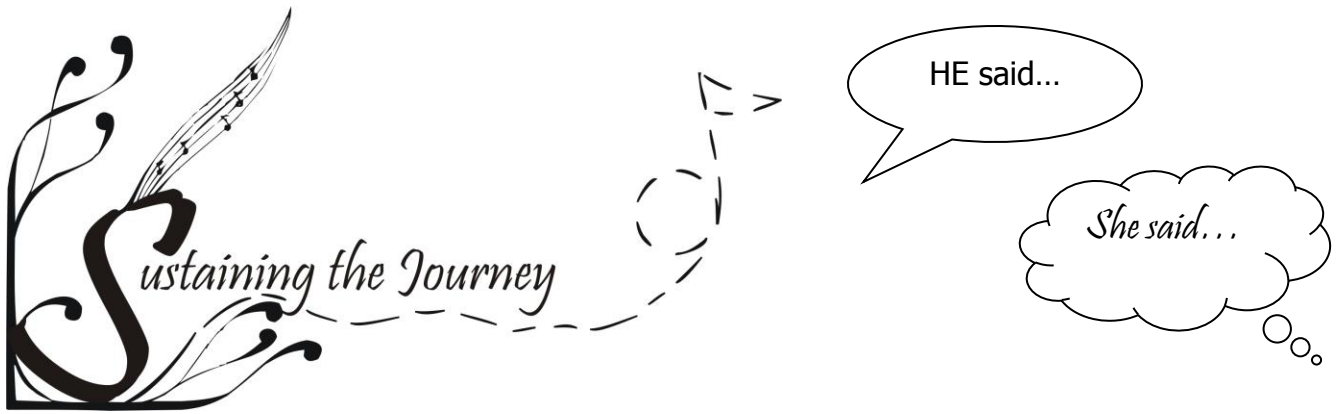
After writing these blog entries, we had further discussion. Here's the gist of our conversation...

The exiles in Babylon were basically in a long holding pattern. (Sound familiar?) False prophets were tempting them, causing unrest, and inserting chaos. Jeremiah (the prophet, not the bullfrog) told them to hunker down and live their lives – even within the constraints of their exile. He reminds them that God has a plan, is present for them, and is encouraging them to do their best even though life is different.

In our current setting, we are very aware of the tension and unrest. Simply among the musicians and clergy of the diocese, there are many diverse opinions and approaches that are inserting chaos and causing divisiveness. We are aware of parishes that are “stretching” the rules (directives provided by the diocese in time of pandemic) and others that are outright disregarding and violating them:

- We know leaders who say, “these restrictions are hooey – we’re singing anyway.”
- We know leaders who say, “choir has always resumed in September, so our first practice is the Thursday after Labor Day.”
- We know leaders who say, “the people never sing anyway, so we’re just singing for them.”
- We know leaders who say, “when the people try to recite the Gloria, they get all confused and it’s an abomination to the Almighty, so we simply must sing it instead.”
- We know leaders who say, “it just doesn’t feel like Mass if you don’t do some singing, so we will sing most of the parts unless we get in trouble or someone complains.”
- We know leaders who say, “we offer options – certain Mass times where social distance and masks are enforced, certain times when social distance and masks are optional, and certain times when Mass is outdoors – so folks can decide what is important to them, and we aren’t responsible for the consequences.”

If we believe that Scripture is inspired, and is meant to be alive today, then perhaps Jeremiah’s words are meant for us: when it (our exile into the Year of the Mask) is done, all will be well. Meanwhile, trust that God



is present and we should be doing the best we can to live our lives within these constraints. That means not stretching, bending, or outright disregarding the directives established by our hierarchy. It means continuing to minister to, and with, God's people, even when we're feeling anxious, uninspired, or not very positive. It means acknowledging the holding pattern, and making the most of this time to the best of our ability.

So we go back to the original challenge... how do we mediate grace within these rules, without giving in to the chaos and unrest? Yes, it's hard – but most worthwhile things usually are!