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VIA DOLOROSA

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CONNECTING CHURCH & COMMUNITY

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RLN exists to explore issues at the intersections of faith and life. In doing so we solicit and publish a range of opinions, not all of which reflect the official positions of the Diocese.

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Cover: Grant Whitty

Photo: Lisa Forkner

Faith Matters:
Via Dolorosa

"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."[1] It is an all-too-human feeling to experience the heartache that accompanies suffering, when all we can muster is, "Please, God, no."

The nature of suffering in human life is difficult to confront, precisely because it cannot be avoided. It comes in many forms, at different times, and with varying intensity, yet it is something we all share. At some point, we all walk along the *Via Dolorosa*, the "way of suffering." This reality can be troubling, yes, but it can also be unifying and holy. For this reason, I have long considered Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane His most profoundly human moment.

Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the long-hoped-for Saviour of the world. Much about His coming—how He entered the world, how He lived, and how He taught—was unexpected, yet it revealed Him as the true exemplar of human life. In the Garden of Gethsemane, in the midst of extreme distress, He displayed profound courage, wisdom, and obedience. Jesus did not want to suffer and die, as no one truly does. Yet He knew He had to. And so, He did—willingly and freely. As the most powerful being ever to walk the earth, He chose humiliation, torture, and death because He knew it was what needed to be done.

We do not know what the course of our lives holds for us, nor can we fully understand the trials we face. This uncertainty can be frightening. Yet we are not without grounding: we trust that the omnipotent and omniscient God who created us also knows what is best, even when we do not. We may never understand the reasons behind certain sufferings, nor receive clear answers to the questions they raise. Still, we are called to trust.

I cannot imagine what it was like for Jesus to agonize over what was to come—the painful end of His earthly life. Nor can I fully comprehend what it was, and is, like for the many martyrs throughout history who have willingly accepted suffering and death for the sake of a greater good. The hardships we endure can often feel painfully and frustratingly unfathomable. And yet, the courage and faith borne witness to by others can be just as unfathomable.

Perhaps this is what makes Christ's suffering in Gethsemane so deeply meaningful: not simply that He suffered, but that He chose trust in the midst of it. In doing so, He did not remove suffering from human life, but transformed how we are to endure it. We are not called to understand every trial, nor to welcome suffering for its own sake, but to remain faithful within it. Like Christ, we may find ourselves praying, "Please, God, no," and yet, in the same breath, learning to say, "Your will be done." In that tension—between fear and faith—we begin to glimpse how suffering, though painful, may become something holy.

As our three authors—Melissa Ritz, Obren Amiesimaka, and Zoe Matties—give us their own perspectives and thoughts on the nature of suffering in human life, they all highlight the valuable lessons which Scripture teaches us in helping us navigate the most difficult parts of our lives. With Scripture, we always have a teacher; with faith, we never suffer alone. As we approach Mothering Sunday, Rene Jamieson has written an article reminding us of its origins and meaning. Finally, a new segment titled "Dispatches from the Hermitage" begins with a reflection from Donna Royer on navigating her contemplative life.

CINNA BARAN

Editor of Rupert's Land News

[1] Matthew 26:39.

Photo: Bartosz Kwitkowski

Faithful Suffering

MELISSA RITZ

If you have read the last two issues of RLN, you will be unsurprised that when asked to discuss how faith helps us to manage suffering, my first response is to ask what we mean by faith and suffering. Especially where these words encompass not only what we believe, but how we enact our beliefs and use them to interpret our experience (and vice versa).

Of the two, suffering is probably less fraught, but just in case, for the purposes of this discussion, I mean every type of physical and psychological distress we can experience that are not immediately within our power to resolve and that impact how we function in the world. This is a very broad definition that only really excludes things like paper cuts and stubbed toes (though if the cut becomes infected or the toe turns out to be broken, one may enter into suffering), but in my experience, each person draws the line at a slightly different point. Put another way, suffering involves some loss of agency and some alteration in behavior and/or perception due to the cause of suffering. At any rate, I don't intend offense to anyone who experiences paper cuts as suffering.

More important to what follows is faith. According to the writer of Hebrews, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."[1] As I wrote in January's issue of RLN, I understand this to mean that faith is the verb that accompanies hope. Hope is what you expect and desire to happen, what you believe about the world and what the future brings, both before and after death. To live in faith is to make choices about how you live in light of that hope; thus, much like our beliefs about what happens after death inform how we live prior to death, what we believe about suffering impacts how we experience suffering. For instance, if my hope is that suffering ends eventually, to live in faith means I might be able to hold a little tighter until this too shall pass. If I believe, as many Christian martyrs and mystics through the ages have, that suffering in Christ's name in this life brings greater glory in the life to come, I may embrace periods of distress more enthusiastically or even seek greater suffering.

In the January issue of RLN, my argument, in short, was that as Christians, we look forward to a final resurrection of all the faithful into transformed bodies in a transformed world. This emphasizes the redeemed but not yet renewed nature of

[1] Hebrews 11:1, ESV

the present creation in which the power of sin and death, though broken, has not yet been thoroughly vanquished. Using this hope as the framework into which we live in faith, there are several things that can be said about suffering.

First, God in Christ has promised that suffering will be no more, but that every human will, at the very least, need to suffer bodily death before that happens. Paul explores this idea in detail in 1 Corinthians 15, and again, less formally, in 1 Thessalonians 4. This follows on the prophecies of Isaiah we hear in church during Advent (see especially Isaiah 25:8 and 65:19-20), rephrased by St. John as "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man… He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."[2] When taken together, we have the promise of full transformation and renewal that comes through the purging of all that is not of God, which takes the form of suffering and death in this life.

Second, if we understand the present creation as being in the process of becoming something radically new, rather than something that will ultimately be discarded, suffering is necessarily formative. Scripture frequently uses the image of labour pains: giving birth is preceded by increasingly painful contractions that do not let up until the child has passed through the birth canal. Similarly, we and the rest of creation are feeling the increasingly urgent and painful convulsions that precede the joy of new birth and the redemptive transformation of all creation.

Photo: Kateryna Hliznitsova

And third, suffering is inevitable. It's vital to remember that the one in whom all our hope rests, Jesus Christ, suffered and promised that the path of his followers would likewise be the way of the cross (see Matthew 16:24-27 and Luke 9:23-26). Many of Jesus's most intimate friends and followers were persecuted and martyred specifically because they lived so fully into their Christian hope. Until the redemption of the world is fully realized, living into the promise of a remade and transformed heaven and earth will necessarily create friction between old and new.

We've been promised in Scripture (see again Revelation 21) that God will remake the world without the pain points, so our role in the present is therefore not to work out how to eliminate suffering entirely. Yes, we need to love our neighbours and mitigate their suffering however we can, but Jesus promises that even if—perhaps especially if—we're doing all the right things, we will still suffer. Before his death, Jesus says to his disciples, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it has hated you … if they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."[3] One has only to skim the history of the church to see that suffering has been a feature of faithful living since the very beginning.

Lots of ink has been spilled over the centuries in debates over the reason for suffering and what God's relationship to suffering and evil is (the book of Job being one of the earliest Jewish responses to the question, and Augustine's *City of God* being one of the most famous early Christian responses in its development of the concept of "just war"). While an interesting theological question, I feel this is a red herring that distracts us from the real experience of suffering and does nothing to address suffering's inevitability. I'm of the opinion that suffering happens for all sorts of reasons: sometimes God teaches us through suffering, sometimes it's sin acting in the world, sometimes it's someone enacting their free will in a way that conflicts with mine, and sometimes it's

[2] Revelation 21:3-4

[3] John 15:18, 20

all of the above and more. But no matter the reasons we dream up, the truth will always be a mystery to us.

A spiritual director once told me that "imagination is always harder than reality because in imagination there is no grace. In reality there is grace." As an extremely anxious person who lives mostly in "what ifs", I found and continue to find profound wisdom in this. It's hard to imagine how we might respond to suffering when we are not in the midst of it because our imaginations cannot account for the wildcard that is God's grace.

It has indeed been my experience that suffering can be a deep, deep well of grace. This negates none of the sadness, pain, fear, or anxiety of suffering, but rather gives shape to the hope that sustains us through it. When I was in my early twenties, my father was diagnosed with terminal cancer; for the next three years, he was only ever given three to six months to live. That's a difficult place to live, and I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. And yet, through those three years, grace abounded. Old wounds and fractured relationships were healed, new revelations were had, and I remember moments of pure joy coming unbidden and unannounced at the most unexpected times. I don't know how someone with a different sense of hope and faith than I have would have read those moments of grace, so I can only really speak for my own experience of (and reflection on) those events.

That being said, I have also experienced long periods of depression where nothing good ever seemed to happen and God seemed to be, at best, silent, and at worst, absent. But finding myself on this side of those deserts, I can say that there was at least enough grace at work to keep me moving forward.

I have reflected often on the beatitudes of Matthew 5:1-12, especially "blessed are those who mourn."[4] I'm always intrigued by the use of the present tense, and I think this stands over and against the way we speak of blessing in wider society. Blessings are associated with receiving good things—a new job, the presence of family members in a time of need, and so on. I doubt there has ever been a post on social media that "Grandma just died #blessed." And yet, Jesus promises not that those who mourn will be blessed, when the mourning is over, but rather that they are blessed, simply because God has made them a promise (in this case that they will be comforted). In all the beatitudes promises are made, but the

Photo: Bernd Dittrich

Photo: Detlef Hansmann

recipients of those promises are already blessed in their unchanged, unimproved state. As Christians living in the hope of the Resurrection, God has given us a promise, therefore we are already blessed. To say this does not necessitate a list of rules or guidelines for how God might enact that blessing. In this, I think C.S. Lewis said it best in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, that Aslan (who is in many ways a Christ figure) "...isn't safe. But he's good."

To illustrate this another way, St. Paul endures mocking, beatings, humiliation, and imprisonment cheerfully in the sure and certain hope of Christ's Lordship (see 2 Corinthians 11:16-12:10). St. John of the Cross speaks of the "dark night of the soul," which is ultimately a period of purification and instruction by God, but which at the time is painful and lonely. At the moment when she is nearest death, St. Julian of Norwich discovers the immensity of the love of God. If there is a pithy lesson that can be taken from the whole of Christian experience, it may only be that suffering is, and so is God. And if we believe that God is good and faithful and loving, then that is enough to keep walking.

[4] Matthew 5:4

MELISSA RITZ

Melissa Ritz is a theologically-trained librarian with a love for teaching and preaching. Originally from Edmonton, she is relatively new to Winnipeg, where she lives with her husband, an Anglican priest and military chaplain, and their tuxedo cat, Holly.

Photo: Jametlene Reskp

Faith in Times of Suffering

OBREN I. AMIESIMAKA

Suffering is an unfortunate part of life. As Christians, we sometimes wonder why there is suffering in the world, and why we who are children of God experience suffering ourselves; but even Jesus Christ suffered persecution and death for our salvation. The types of suffering are innumerable, from infertility, financial challenges and relationship problems to, disease, war/violence and death. Whether perceived as explainable or irrational, it can be challenging to reconcile why bad things happen.

The Bible gives us many examples of people who suffered greatly; from Job, who lost everything he had except his life, to martyrs like St. Stephen the Protomartyr, who held on to his faith till the very end. However, their faith in God was never misplaced.

After his many trials—the loss of his children, wealth and health—Job had an exchange with God and bowed to God's superior knowledge, plans, workings, and the splendour of His majesty. "Then Job replied to the Lord: "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know."[1]

Job 42:10b-12 then tells us: "The Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before. All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the Lord had brought on him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring. The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part."

[1] Job 42:1-3

Photo: John Cardamone

Even when the outcome was death, it was for God's glory to be manifest. St. Stephen spoke of the word of God before the High Priest and the Sanhendrin, pointing out their hypocrisy and highlighting the blessing of the Holy Spirit saying: "You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it."[2]

After this, they "...all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep."[3]

Some might say these Biblical figures were uniquely blessed with grace to bear their suffering, but there are recent examples of people who held on to their faith even through great tragedy.

Having noted his many trials, repeated imprisonments, multiple bombings of his home, stabbing, incessant death threats and more, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King said: "My personal trials have also taught me the value of unmerited suffering. As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways that I could respond to my situation: either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course. Recognizing the necessity for suffering I have tried to make of it a virtue. If only to save myself from bitterness, I have attempted to see my personal ordeals as an opportunity to transform myself and heal the people involved in the tragic situation which now obtains. I have lived these last few years with the conviction that unearned suffering is redemptive.

There are some who still find the cross a stumbling block, and others consider it foolishness, but I am more convinced than ever before that it is the power of God unto social and individual salvation. So like the Apostle Paul I can now humbly yet proudly say, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." The suffering and agonizing moments through which I have passed over the last few years have also drawn me closer to God. More than ever before I am convinced of the reality of a personal God."

I cannot but think of the words our Saviour Himself tells us: "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."[4]

I would be remiss if I failed to note that the journey of faith in times of suffering is not just one of fortitude and resilience, but can be, and often is, one of pain, faltering faith, negotiation with God, acceptance of His will and reconciliation to Him.

The story of Dr. Jill Biden dealing with the death of her son, Beau Biden, springs to mind. She recounts how having prayed for her son's life as he battled brain cancer, then watched him die, caused her to almost lose her faith. "In 2015

[2] Acts 7:51-53

[3] Acts 5:57b-60

[4] Matthew 5:10-12

Photo: Wiki Sinaloa

my faith was shaken ... For over a year I watched my brave, strong, funny, bright young son fight brain cancer. Chemotherapy, operation after operation, weight loss. But still I never gave up hope. As a mother, you can't." "In the final days I made one last desperate prayer and it went unanswered. After Beau died, I felt betrayed, broken". After this, even with her priest repeatedly inviting her to church, she says "...I just couldn't go. I couldn't even pray. I wondered if I would ever feel joy again."

It was not until years later, when another pastor's wife, offered to be her prayer partner that things changed. "She sat beside me and she said, 'Dr. Biden, I would like to be your prayer partner.' I don't know if she sensed how moved I had been by the service. I don't know if she could still see the grief that I feel still hides behind my smile. But I do know that when she spoke, it was as if God was saying to me, 'Okay Jill, you've had enough time. It's time to come home.'" "And in that moment, I felt for the first time that there was a path for my recovering my faith."

Suffering can shake one's faith, but it is especially in those moments, when 'going through the dark night of the soul,' that we ought most to hold on to our faith in God. Isaiah 40:31 always brings me comfort and strength: "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Yes, in this world, there will be times of running, and times of walking, but our God will fortify us through them all. I also hold fast to Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Our God's plans are for our good and even in times of trial, He is there with us, we need only to reach out in prayer. 'What a Friend we have in Jesus' by the Irish-Canadian poet, Joseph M. Scriven, tells us as much:

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

OBREN I. AMIESIMAKA

Dr. Amiesimaka declares that he is no theologian, but a lowly follower of Christ, striving to see Him more clearly, love Him more dearly, and follow Him more nearly, day by day. Obren lives trusting in God's mercies and salvation bearing in mind Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

The Incomprehensible Mystery

ZOE MATTIES

My brother, Jesse, was the kind of guy who could make friends with anyone. His unconventional perspective, and non-judgemental attitude meant he could find ways to connect with others no matter their age, or their background. His inventive and creative spirit kept everyone on their toes, as he found uses for things most of us would consider garbage. He was an artist, a fixer of all things broken, and an imaginer of different worlds.

Just over three years ago the unthinkable happened. Jesse, who was bravely battling a cancer diagnosis, had an extremely rare and adverse reaction to his treatment. While we knew this was a possibility going into the treatment, we were told the chances of a severe reaction were below one percent, and we were not prepared for this outcome. He died on December 19th, 2022, at the age of 31, three months after his son was born. I write this essay the week of what would have been his 35th birthday.

There is a stark dividing line in my life now. A before, and an after, separated by a hollowness I am still trying to wrap my mind around. When people would ask me how I was doing in that time, all I could say was, "I am trying to figure out what it means to live life in the after." Life kept moving forward, but I was bewildered by the sudden absence of my brother's enthusiastic presence in my future. Pieces of myself that had once felt permanent were suddenly up for debate, and I experienced a radical reorienting of everything I thought I knew about God, and the world. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says it best in her memoir Notes on Grief: "Grief is forcing new skins on me, scraping scales from my eyes. I regret all my past certainties."[1]

Photo: Brooke Balentine

As I tried to make sense of this experience, I discovered that much popular Christian thought around suffering is filled with shallow theology and trite consolations. When faced with the unthinkable, many want to assure us that "God is in control", or "your loved one is in a better place now," or even "everything happens for a reason." I know people mean well, and are simply trying to be kind, but these words still rankle. They feel glib in the face of the worst thing that's ever happened to me.

[1] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Notes on Grief (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2021), 6

I think we offer words like these in an effort to make sense of or find meaning in a terrible experience. At a different funeral a few months ago, we sang the hymn It is Well with my Soul. I concede that the tune is moving and beautiful, but in that moment, I just wanted to yell, "No! It isn't well with my soul! This is sad! Can you just let us be sad for a moment?!" We are often so quick to move through the desolation towards consolation. We want to skip right through Ash Wednesday, Lent, and Good Friday and get right to Easter. I wonder if this is because grief is uncomfortable and inconvenient. It points towards something that is really wrong in the world. We cannot make sense of a good God who is all powerful, and yet allows suffering to happen, especially to good people.

One answer to this theological conundrum is that we say it was not God who brought this suffering, but it was caused by sin. When my grandmother was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, a fellow church member asked her whether there was any unresolved sin in her life that had led to her illness. I can't even imagine what must have passed through my grandma's mind in response to this deeply uncaring question. I shudder to think she might have believed that it was her fault that she had been diagnosed with this debilitating illness.

In all my ponderings and theological meanderings, the closest I have come to an answer to the problem of evil is that it is a mystery. I recently learned that theologians have a category for this. They say that "evil is a surd,"[2] which means that it is not rational. You cannot reason with it. A surd is a mathematical term referring to an irrational number, like the square root of two. As I consider this analogy, I recall a line my parents wrote in my brother's eulogy, "There is no explanation for Jesse's death. No theological or philosophical reasoning does justice to the incomprehensible mystery we are facing now." Even though this doesn't provide me with a neat answer, I do find a strange comfort in it.

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[2] Thanks to Ryan Turnbull and his Bluesky post on Feb 16th, 2026, for this enlightening idea.

Photo: Jakub Neskora

I am like Job, who, in asking God why he suffers, is not given a reason, but is told to consider creation, the storehouses laden with snow, the constellations, and the mighty leviathan. Here, God and creation are beyond human control and comprehension. Here, amidst the wildness, there is freedom from needing an answer. The suffering does not need to make sense. It just is. In creation I observe that death is an intrinsic part of life, and there is also great beauty. I hold onto both these truths tenderly. When I do, I find that God is there alongside me and all of the groaning-singing creation.

When I was in the deepest part of my grief, the responses that I found most helpful were the ones who said, "This is hard and awful, and I'm with you in this." There's a section in The Magician's Nephew by C.S. Lewis where Digory confronts Aslan, asking him to heal his mother who is sick. In despair he gazes up to Aslan's face and is surprised to see "great shining tears" in the lion's eyes. "They were such big, bright tears compared with Digory's own that for a moment he felt as if the Lion must really be sorrier about his Mother than he was himself. 'My son, my son,' said Aslan. 'I know. Grief is great. Only you and I in this land know that yet. Let us be good to one another."[3]

Photo: Evgeni Tcherkasski

Like Aslan, the God who chose to become human, who experienced both the beauty and the terror of life, knows what it is to suffer, and walks alongside all those who hurt. I cannot claim to have a good answer to the question of suffering in the world. I can only tell you that in my own journey, I find solidarity with the crucified Christ—a man who wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, felt abandoned by friends and forsaken by God at the end of his life. The "man of sorrows… acquainted with grief"[4] sits with us in our suffering and, as the risen Christ, promises "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."[5]

While there may not be an explanation for my brother's death, there is an explanation for his life. "Jesse reflected the kind heart of Jesus with everyone he met," his eulogy concludes, "He didn't die for a reason. But he lived for many reasons. His compassion will live on. His inventive and creative spirit will live on. His love will live on." I hope that I can honour his memory by living out the creativity, compassion, and imagination that fuelled his life in order to accompany others in both the beauty and the terror of being alive. "Let us be good to one another", says Aslan, or as the poet Philip Larkin puts it,

"…we should be careful
Of each other, we should be kind
While there is still time."[6]

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[3] C.S. Lewis, The Magician's Nephew (Macmillan, 1955)

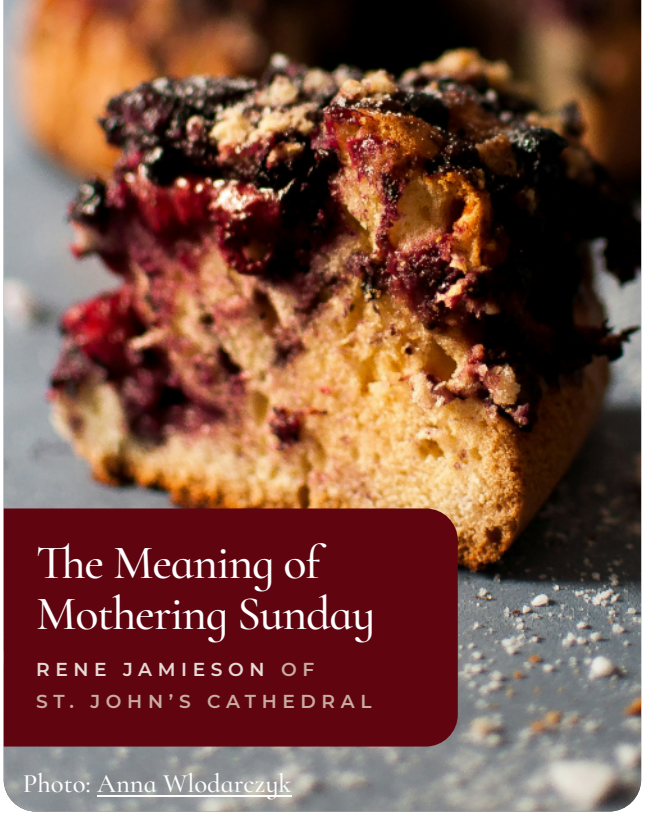
[4] Isaiah 53:3 (KJV)

[5] Matthew 28:20 (KJV)

[6] Philip Larkin, "The Mower" Poetry Foundation, 2001

ZOE MATTIES

Zoe Matties lives within the watersheds of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. She enjoys eating veggies from her garden, exploring the woods with her dog, and watching birds. She works for A Rocha Canada helping people of all ages learn to love and care for the places they call home.



The Meaning of Mothering Sunday

RENE JAMIESON OF
ST. JOHN'S CATHEDRAL

Photo: Anna Wlodarczyk

Anybody who believes that the Anglican Church resists change, by and large, does not know the story of the evolution of Mothering Sunday, and thereby hangs a tale. I hope with this article to set the record straight because the initial reason for declaring the fourth Sunday of Lent as Mothering Sunday has little or nothing to do with our mothers and everything to do with the Church.

Mothering Sunday (also known as Laetare or Refreshment Sunday) has its origins in the mediaeval church, when the fourth Sunday of Lent (roughly halfway between Ash Wednesday and Easter) was set aside to give people a break from observing the strict Lenten fast. Laetare means 'Rejoice' and special attention was paid to Mary, the Mother of God on this day.

With the Reformation in the mid-16th century, the emphasis switched from honouring Mary to encouraging the faithful to visit either the parish church where they had been baptized or the Diocesan Cathedral, the Mother Church of the Diocese. Around this time, the priests of the Church adopted the practice of wearing rose-coloured vestments on Mothering Sunday as some still do on the third Sunday in Advent, and Lent 4 became Rose Sunday as well as Mothering Sunday.

In the late 17th century and through the 18th century, Mothering Sunday, while still focused on worshipping at either the church in which one had been baptized or the Diocesan Cathedral, was the day when apprentices and domestic servants were given the day off to visit their families. By the late 18th and part of the 19th century, Mothering Sunday had languished a little and was not observed as it had been in the mediaeval and Reformation Church.

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century saw a revival of religious zeal in the UK (and by extrapolation in the then-British Empire), and Mothering Sunday was revived and became the day for honouring one's mother. By the mid-1950s it had also adopted some of the sentiment and practices of the U.S. version of Mother's Day.

Join us at St. John's Cathedral for a Celebration of Mothering Sunday on Saturday, March 28th, following the Chrism Mass scheduled for 2:00 pm (and yes, the Blessing of the Oils is traditionally done on Maundy Thursday, but that's a story for another day). Enjoy a slice of Simnel cake, the traditional indulgence for Mothering Sunday. Oh, and thereby hangs yet another tale! Through the ages Simnel cake has gone through many forms. It started out as yeast leavened bread made with //simila//, Latin for the finest of white flour – hence the name. Through the centuries it morphed into a pudding, then into a simple flat fruit cake, and finally into the late 19th century, into the elaborate fruit cake with marzipan layers and decorations. The recipe below is the traditional version made in the 17th and 18th centuries and comes from the Household Journal of my 5-x great-grandmother, Myffanwy Edwards. My mother, Eunice Iles, a chef, translated the measurements into modern terms (after all, when was the last time you used "butter the size of a walnut?") I have doubled the recipe. As we know that there are many superb bakers in the diocese, we at St. John's Cathedral invite you to bring simnel cakes to share at the event (if you so choose).

SIMNEL CAKE RECIPE:

Preparation: Pre-heat oven to 350°F. Grease an 8-inch cake pan with butter and dust the bottom with flour.
Ingredients: ½ c butter; 1 cup sugar; 4 eggs; pinch of salt; 2 c flour; ½ c currants; ½ c raisins or candied peel.
Method: Cream together butter and sugar. When mixture is fluffy, add eggs, one at a time, beating well after every addition. Add remaining ingredients and mix well. Pour batter into prepared cake pan. Bake for 30 minutes. Insert knife into centre and if it comes out clean, your simnel cake is done. Store in airtight tin.

Photo: Andraz Lazic

Dispatches from the Hermitage: Silence Calls

DONNA ROYER

One of the sure signs that spring is approaching, in this day and age, is the tendency of social media algorithms to suggest gardening and landscaping material for my consideration. While not deeply drawn to this material, I appreciate how it stirs my thoughts to daydreaming about warm weather activities and the near future. Alongside my considerations on how I wanted to mark the Lenten season this year, these 'spring' thoughts have led me forward to exploring an even more robust quietude than the one I have been living.

Fifteen years ago, when I began my foray into an intentional contemplative life in solitude, it was marked with both a sense of hesitancy and curiosity. Over the first few years I repeatedly committed to a six-month experiment. It was a long enough stretch to set aside questioning of whether this lifestyle was a good fit, freeing myself to experience something of the slower rhythms. At the same time, it ensured the question of whether to continue remained open. At the time stepping further away from what I perceived to be the social norms was both exciting and scary. I was healing from a nervous breakdown, unsure how or if I could financially support myself in a manner that would suit solitude, and had only a vague sense of the existence of others living in the manner I envisioned in the current day and age. The historical examples, with their emphasis on ascetic life, inspired and terrified in equal measure. What I have found as a result of my bravery though has been more than I could ask or imagine. While there have been struggles and challenges, the fact I have thrived is emboldening me to follow the siren's call again, deeper into the silence of a solitude shared with God. Please know this is an intentional move motivated by a desire to move towards something I only vaguely understand at the moment, not a 'fleeing from.'

Photo: Daiga Ellaby

What does this actually mean, you might ask. For me, right now, it means that I am simplifying my innermost circle of relationships to include only the one between God and myself. This is not a rejection of love, but a re-ordering of intimacy. It is trusting that boundaries and 'distance' do not diminish love. I am happy to be there for family and friends, but no longer as their first, or even necessarily second, 'go-to person.' I still care deeply for them. I will pray for them, be there in crisis, and still infrequently (but meaningfully) connect socially, but I will no longer position others in my life such that their needs and rhythms shape mine by default. Even more of my day-to-day life will be considered private and shared with God alone—not because it's secret, but because I want my intimacy with God to expand even further than it already does.

Just as fifteen years ago, I am not saying these shifts to my life will be permanent. I'm experimenting. I need to experience this level of silence and solitude before I can assess if it is actually a healthy space for me. Unlike when I first entered solitude, however, I am not currently setting up a formal review period. Rather I am simply heading into the deeper desert, trusting God and I will walk together as He directs—whether that's for a short walkabout or a more permanent relocation. The example of the early Desert Mothers and Fathers leads me to be hopeful, while my own desert-like experiences so far lead me to be cautious. It is a similar but unfamiliar land, for me. It will take time for it to become my 'new normal.' And yet, now is time for me to heed the call and step forward.

DONNA ROYER

After decades of active ministry on behalf of, and within, the Church, Donna now lives a quieter, slower, life as an intentional contemplative Solitaire. She spends her days on her rural Interlake acreage reading, creating textile art, taking photos, and wandering in the woods.