

We have to give many names to this time period in which we have found ourselves.

A time of uncertainty.

Extraordinary times.

A time on hold.

A time of war.

Unprecedented times.

The time of coronavirus.

What name have you given to this time in which we are living?

To these previous names I would add “a time of sacrifice.”

Perhaps you saw it. There was an article in the Tribune on Thursday by Michael Tackett called “Of America and sacrifice: Is the country ready to step up?”

The article points out that these days are the first time since World War II that Americans have had to sacrifice for the public good. Yes, we have had segments of our population sacrifice “The civil rights era, Vietnam, the Gulf wars, 9/11 and the financial crisis all involved suffering, even death, but no call for universal sacrifice.” Some sacrificed for the common good, but not all.

However, today, in these times, we are all called to sacrifice. In this time of the coronavirus we are all being called to shelter at home and keep our distance from those who are not part of our immediate household. Small business owners are especially hard hit, but so are parents of young children.

As an aside about children, one article that I read yesterday gave a new name to the generation of children being born today. They are called Gen-C. That is “C” as in cat. Each generation seems to get a nickname.

The Silent Generation

Baby Boomers

Gen-X

Millennials

Gen-Z, and now Gen-C.

Whether the “C” is for calamity, or coronavirus, or Covid-19, I’m curious to see if this name sticks. Gen-C. As a six month old, our grandson, Carter, is part of Gen-C this latest generation.

Our world is not the same as it was two weeks ago. Carter will grow up in a world that is not the same as the one you and I grew up in. Even when we are released we will not go back to the old normal world. Instead, it will be new.

Some of this may be good and some of it may not be.

Now, occasionally in times like these it is easier to see God around us. God is always present with us, but we are usually oblivious. We are busy, and distracted, and we fail to see the God who is always embracing us with arms of love.

Have you had the gift of slowing down?

Have you been more aware of God’s presence?

A moment ago, I called this a time of sacrifice. Or, maybe it is more accurate to call this a time of sacrifice for the common good.

And, this is not the old fashioned way of thinking about the sacrifice and certainly not the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus did not suffer and die to accept the punishment or penalty of an angry God. That is a warped way of thinking about the beautiful sacrifice that Jesus made.

Instead, Jesus sacrificed himself for the common good. He died not for God, but for us. Jesus accepted a burden that was for all of us. He gave us an opportunity for a healed relationship with God, others, and self. He paid a price to end the cycle of violence and death. God was the sacrifice. What does that tell us about this time of sacrifice for the common good?

A few weeks ago, I talked about how we can be a non-anxious presence in a world that has a lot of anxiety. When we are anxious we focus on what might happen. We have little control over things these days, and as we give up our demand for instant answers and control, we can learn to be a non-anxious presence in a world that sorely needs us.

But, fretting over what might happen is not the only thing on our minds these days. We also have hurts for the negative things that have happened, and disappointments for the positive things that have not happened. During this time of sacrifice for the common good, we have hurts and disappointments.

And, I believe that hurts and disappointments have a different remedy than the remedy for anxiety. For anxiety we let go of our need for answers. For hurts and disappointments we remember the pain and process it so that it doesn't have a grip on our thoughts and minds. We give our pain over to God and accept the comfort of a God who is always with us. Not always easy to do is it – giving the pain over to God.

During one of my virtual clergy gathering this past week, Lisa Cressman, of Backstory Preaching, suggested the following method to process our hurts and disappointments and give them over to God.

She suggest that each week we should write on a slip of paper. We should briefly write something that we did in the prior week that was a sacrifice for the public good. These would include hurts for things that happened because of these unprecedented times, and this would include disappointments for things that did not happen during this time of pause.

And Lisa said, don't log it into your computer, or write it into a journal. Instead, write the sacrifice on a slip of paper, and each week add the new slip of paper to the pile of older papers. Since we don't know how long these extraordinary times are going to take, we don't know if we will have a small pile of paper when we are released or a large pile of paper.

I wrote mine on sticky pads that I have stuck to the wall in my home office. We are only in day-10 of our shelter in place emergency order, but our sacrifices started before that. So to date, I have three pieces of paper.

My three sacrifices for the common good are: (1) having to postpone my sabbatical and walk on the Camino de Santiago in Spain, (2) having to shift to virtual worship on Sunday morning and for Easter, and (3) sheltering at home.

So those are my first three sacrifices. What three things would you have on your slips of paper? What sacrifices have you been making? After our worship, write them down and start a pile.

Now you should write these on slips of paper, because it is important to gather and remember our hurts and disappointments. But in the end it is also important to do something with them.

In our Episcopal Church we are really good at ritual. Non-Episcopalians always comment on the beauty of our funerals. But, that beauty is also our Sunday morning worship, even when it is virtual. We need to come up with a meaningful, beautiful

ritual that helps us let go of our hurts and disappointments during this time of sacrifice for the common good. And, I think a Lazarus box will help us do that.

A Lazarus box is a handmade Spirit Box based on the story of Lazarus. Spirit Boxes are reliquaries containing items based on a person or theme. They contain items that depict the life of a person or hold with the theme. In olden times they might have even contained bones of a person, but today we simplify and place items and even sayings that represent the person or theme.

In today's Gospel reading we have the death of Lazarus, his placement in a tomb for four days, and his subsequent resurrection by Jesus. Though he himself has not yet died on the Cross and been resurrected, today's Gospel reading is one of Jesus' resurrection miracles.

And, following this model, a Lazarus box is a type of Spirit Box that allows us to bury things and let God release them again. Today, I wonder if this is a way for us to honor and process the sacrifices we are making in this time of coronavirus.

We can have a ritual in which decorate a box with things that depict this time of coronavirus. We can take all of our pieces of paper on which we have written our weekly sacrifice, and we can place them in the decorated box. And we can ceremonially bury it in our memorial garden. Remember I said we were pretty good at funeral rituals. With the burial of the box and the pieces of paper, we can then let God resurrect us as we let go of our hurts and disappointments.

I can assure you that when all of this is over, and we have entered into a new normal, we will have to process the hurts and disappointments that have accumulated. So, write down your sacrifices and save them for a time when we can put them in a Lazarus box and bury them.

Thank you for the sacrifices you are making for the common good. Know that God is with each and every one of us in the pain of our sacrifices. And, know that when we get through this we will figure out a way to let go and let God resurrect us into a new way of being.