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A Candle in the Window

Peter Millar

Words to encourage us in tough times.

ionacottage@hotmail.com

"Christian faith does not assume a life (or world) of continuous security and familiarity. It is fed by scriptures that speak of transience, mortality, provisionality, interruptions and leavings. But, they also whisper that the endings are always beginnings - the leavings open a door to arrivals that could not have been experienced otherwise. In other words, the loss can be seen as a gift - what Walter Bruggemann calls 'newness after loss.'

So we may be helped in articulating this by asking 4 Covid-related questions:

- 1. What have I/we lost that we need to regain in the weeks and months ahead?**
- 2. What have we lost that needs to remain lost - left behind in another country?**
- 3. What have I/we gained that we need to retain in the future?**
- 4. What have we gained recently that was useful for this season but needs to be lost if we are to move forward?** (These questions have been in various church and other publications in recent weeks.)

One of my earlier poems slightly adapted by a good friend Dr Allan Gordon in these Covid19 days:

***Companion of the faithful -
have we forgotten the wonder of each day
and the magic of each other,
as we speak yet again
these strange words about
'the war on this pandemic' -
in a world attacked by Covid-19?***

***Yet even while imprisoned
in our freedoms,
our hearts still sing of hope -
for we long to laugh again,
to dream a dream,
to dance in the sun -
in a world of love.***

(From the booklet "Remembering Dorothy: A Few Prayers for Life, Healing, Hope and Laughter" first printed in 2011 - ten years after Dorothy's sudden death in 2001.

Spirit of God, we thank you that you dance through creation, scattering sparks of peace and markers of healing in our wounded, uncertain world. pm

Tears for the hurting ones, tears for the frightened ones, tears for the world, tears for myself - and weaving through them all Your tender tears of love. pm

Thomas Homer-Dixon, **Commanding Hope: The Power we have to Renew a World in Peril**. Knopf Canada/Penguin. 464 pp. Hardcover \$27.00; ISBN 9780307363169: This important book calls on history, cutting-edge research, complexity science and even Lord of the Rings. Thomas Homer-Dixon lays out the tools we can command to rescue a world on the brink. For three decades, the renowned author of *The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity, and the Renewal of Civilization*, and *The Ingenuity Gap: Can We Solve the Problems of the Future?*, has examined the threats to our future security—predicting a deteriorating global environment, extreme economic stresses, mass migrations, social instability and wide political violence if humankind continued on its current course. He was called The Doom Meister, but we now see how prescient he was. Today just about everything we've known and relied on (our natural environment, economy, societies, cultures and institutions) is changing dramatically—too often for the worse. Without radical new approaches, our planet will become unrecognizable as well as poorer, more violent, more authoritarian. In his fascinating long-awaited new book (dedicated to his young children), he calls on his extraordinary knowledge of complexity science, of how societies work and can evolve, and of our capacity to handle threats, to show that we can shift human civilization onto a decisively new path if we mobilize our minds, spirits, imaginations and collective values. *Commanding Hope* marshals a fascinating, accessible argument for reinvigorating our cognitive strengths and belief systems to affect urgent systemic change, strengthen our economies and cultures, and renew our hope in a positive future for everyone on Earth. (I would like to thank my friend Prof Stuart Hill in Sydney for sending me this Review.)

On the brink: (A reflection by the American novelist, Richard Powers)

In January, 2017, the day after being sworn in as President of the United States, Donald Trump directed the Interior Department to help lie about the size of the crowd who turned out to witness him rave about “American carnage”. I read the news in a state of stunned disbelief. Since then, few weeks have passed without some escalating offence coming from the White House. Four years of sadness, horror and trauma: We’ve all been broken by it. In these four years, I’ve lived through things that I could not have imagined witnessing in my country. The president has stoked paranoid conspiracy theories. The president has championed division and hatred and violence. The president repeatedly attacks basic decency and violates the constitution. The president is actively working to undermine public trust in the election. Each new day brings some impossible outrage that I have habituated to, changed by the daily horrors in ways which I can no longer see. As Yeats captured it, in another time of civil war:

**We had fed the heart on fantasies/The heart’s grown brutal from the fare/
More substance in our enmities/ Than in our love....”**

(This insightful reflection by Richard Powers continues on the following page.)

I'm afraid this election will shake America to the breaking point. I see the polls but take no comfort in them. The president's plans to subvert are forming up in plain sight, as open and obvious as all the other high crimes and misdemeanours that he has already gotten away with. Maybe the polls will yield the results that all the polls predict. Maybe the president will leave office, peacefully, without ordering his supports into the street. (It would be the first such conciliatory act of his life.) But even if the election follows the best possible course, an uncontested Biden victory won't save us: for four years 40% of the country has unwaveringly backed Trump's every assault against civic life, and the once-great party that has enabled him at every turn shows no sign of repudiation, even now. It will take decades to heal the deep wounds.

One thing is certain, though: Trump's re-election would maim America beyond recovering. A considerable majority of Americans now know that, too. I'm braced for the worst, but I take my slender hope from our great poet of democracy, Walt Whitman, writing over a century and a half ago, in the middle of the war for the nation's soul that we're somehow still fighting:

**Over the carnage rose a prophetic voice,
Be not disheartened – Affection shall solve
The problems of Freedom yet;
Those who love each other shall become invincible.**

As our world waits:

As the world anxiously waits for the American election results, all of us hold the American people in our thoughts and prayers. As we all know this election matters greatly, not just to America, but to the world, and not least to the millions of our sisters and brothers in many places who companion suffering, poverty and war on a daily basis. But truly it MATTERS to every person who believes in human decency and human solidarity. Trump's election was more evidence of ecological and human derangement. Take him out of the mix and we must have more of a chance. Hopefully, those of us who still have the strength to campaign can be on the streets of the world in solidarity and love. The new dictators in our time (and there are several) are not right: they are wrong, and on the wrong side of history. All we need for evil to triumph more and more is for people of integrity, wherever they are, to remain silent. For my own part, I give a prayer of thanks to the One who holds us all, when I hear that my 15 year old grand-daughter, Ella, is already making her voice heard in relation to some of the great issues of our day. And Ella is not alone. Millions of young people are awakening. Let us rejoice and be glad! This not a time for either cynicism or despair, no matter our age. Let us refute the idea which Yeats articulated so powerfully in his poem. There MUST BE more substance in our love, than in our enmities. I hope you are playing your part, and perhaps especially so if you are in the last chapter of your life. We need your wisdom, awareness and compassion more than ever. Peter.