

Dear Trinity family:

April 6, 2020

Last week my friend (and President of the House of Deputies in the Episcopal Church) the Rev. Dr. Gay Jennings published a compelling and timely article about the situation in which we find ourselves. For the past 20 years, in addition to leading our church in countless capacities, Gay has served as a critical incident stress de-briefer for emergency service workers. Over time she has cultivated a graph that parses out common and predictable phases of disaster, which she shared in her article and applied to our current coronavirus pandemic. I read the article multiple times, pouring over its application to what I am witnessing and experiencing at home, at church, and in the wider community. It rings true on all counts.

Every disaster, Gay maintains, begins with a **threat** phase (a disaster could happen), followed by a **warning** phase (when it is highly likely that a disaster will occur). Then – there’s **impact**, which can last anywhere from a few seconds to -- in the case of war, drought, famine, or pandemic -- months or years. We’re in the impact stage at the moment. During impact and immediately after is the **heroic** phase, during which people use enormous energy and ingenuity to save their own and others’ lives and properties. Next, **honeymoon** phase, when people experience a strong sense of having shared an intense experience and lived through it. Then, the **disillusionment** phase hits, when the extent of the loss becomes fully apparent, community cohesion begins to decay, and disaster victims look back and critique whether or not resources and help arrived in time. And if that wasn’t enough, close on its heels comes the **grief** phase, when we come to terms with our new reality post-disaster and deal with our physical, material, emotional, and spiritual losses. Then and only then can we move to the final **reconstruction** phase, the new beginning and new reality into which we move forward.

With each phase of disaster, Gay includes examples of what she calls *normal reactions to abnormal events*. So, for the **threat** and **warning** phases, normal reactions include: denial, blissful distractedness, disbelief, “downgrading” the situation to make it feel less threatening, and a reluctance to act. “A frequently cited example in disaster literature,” Gay writes, “tells of people in a small town hearing the roar of an oncoming tornado and mistaking it for a freight train, even though the town has no train tracks.” Some of these same reactions may flow into the actual **impact** phase, but are quickly replaced by feelings of shock, anger, disorientation, fear, and confusion as the disaster’s duration, intensity, and effect either remain unknown, or begin to make themselves known. Normal survivor reactions to the **honeymoon** phase may be elation, joy, or happiness just to be alive and have weathered the storm, followed quickly by **disillusionment** feelings of bitterness, outrage, or resentment – especially if there were delays or failures regarding prompt aid and assistance during impact. Gay reminds us that a normal reaction here is concentrating on rebuilding our own lives and solving our own problems, which compromises shared community and destiny. Old and new conflicts arise “over who to blame, who gets resources, who is in and who is out, who has power and influence, and whose priorities for rebuilding and recovery should prevail.” Then, **grief** over lost loved ones, homes, jobs, hopes and dreams. We then kind of ease, in time, into the **new beginning** stage, some with more assurance and faith than others, some ready, and some who will never be ready, to move on.

This week begins a Holy Week in lock-down (or, as I’m calling it, e-Holy Week), during which we take a whole week to tell a single story about Jesus (the story is called The Passion). It is the story of Jesus’ last days – his condemnation, crucifixion, death – and his resurrection on Easter morning. Taking a whole week to tell a single story gives us time to listen and think deeply. It feels comforting to be

observing the rituals of Holy Week by praying the same prayers, hearing the same scriptures, and marking the same days as we always do - even though this year the venue and format is strange and different. A silver lining is that, as most of us are home, we might have some additional time and focus this year to walk the whole story, patiently and thoughtfully.

This morning something clicked – it occurred to me to lay the Phases of Disaster template alongside the Passion narrative. Because really, the Passion is a disaster. And while it doesn't sequence exactly, all phases are there: threat and warning (all Jesus' talk about "birth pangs," end of times, and temples coming down), impact, heroism (think Simon of Cyrene, Joseph of Arimathea, and the Marys), disillusionment, grief, and then (the tomb is empty!) a new beginning.

If you're like me you might read the Passion narrative with a critical eye cast in the direction of Jesus' friends, disciples, on-lookers, and tormenters. They are a mess. Over the course of the story, they *all* fall apart. But if the Passion is like a disaster, then really what we are seeing are **normal responses to abnormal events**. Think about it: in what must have seemed like an instant, everything comes crashing down on their heads with wretched, unforeseen force. And just like any human being experiencing a cataclysmic disaster, the disciples respond with normal reactions to the abnormal circumstances. Among their reactions we see disbelief ("You will never wash my feet!"), denial ("I do not know the man (Jesus)."), disorientation and fear ("Then all the disciples deserted him and fled."), bitterness and betrayal ("The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him."), disintegration of community ("...the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear..."), and grief ("Woman, here is your son...(to the disciple) Here is your mother."). It's all there.

And after it all, through it all, at the end, there's reconstruction, a new beginning, Easter morning – discovered by the women in the early morning light in the form of an empty tomb. The resurrection of Jesus sets in motion God's promise of resurrection for everyone and everything. In God, all is resurrected, healed, transformed, made new. Love wins. Love has the last word. All of the time. While I look forward to the **reconstruction** phase on Gay's chart, what gives me real hope, real sustainability and energy for the weeks and months of pandemic ahead, is that God resurrects. I trust that promise. As Evelyn Underhill famously said, "I *expect* resurrection." Yes there will be death, resentment, and devastation ahead. Yes there will be some responses that, while normal, will be ugly and tragic. We are human beings, and we are also Christians. We are disciples of Jesus Christ. And we *expect* resurrection. It won't look like we think it will or arrive at a time we predict. That's God's business. In our current disaster, we know -- we trust with all our hearts -- that God is with us and God resurrects. And that, my friends, is Easter. May the wind of God's life and love and hope be yours this sacred Holy Week, this joyous Easter, and every day of your life.

Devon



Enclosed is an Easter offering envelope. Our Easter offering provides an important source of revenue for Trinity, and we realize that the financial impact of Covid 19 on Trinity and Trinitarians remains unclear. We also recognize that some of us may not be able to give at our customary level, but if you are able, please give generously in gratitude for Trinity's continued spiritual, pastoral, and liturgical support of our beloved community. *Online giving is also available: onrealm.org/TrinityExcelsior/give/now*