

April 23, 2020

Dear Trinity family:

Many of you know that I am a devotee of James Vukelich's "Ojibwe Word of the Day." He is Turtle Clan, and a descendent of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe. Every Thursday, the word is live on Facebook. The word this past week: "Minjinawezi." S/he is disappointed. He started off by admitting that he had had no joy or inspiration coming up with the live word that week, mostly because of some recent disappointments he was suffering. So over diner he decided to use the word for disappointment, "and when I found this word," he said, "I was blown away by the insight in it. Because the language is carrying all sorts of philosophical, spiritual, ethical teachings and wisdom within it."

Specifically, "minjinawezi" has two words contained in it. The first is "minjin" which means "to hold on," or "to hold on to." "Awezi" is a state of being. If you are "minjinawezi," you are in a state of being of holding on to something. You are refusing to let it go."

What is so thrilling to Vukelich is that there have been people, over thousands of years, who have had this feeling. And through that spiritual experience were able to characterize it in this insightful way. And here, in 2020, from the vantage point of pandemic, we are able to look at that ancient word and draw wisdom from it.

Disappointment is the result of something we expected to take place that is not going to happen, of which we cannot let go. If we stopped holding on to it, then we would no longer feel a deep sense of regret or disappointment. "To release, to let go," claims Vukelich, "is a spiritual practice. We pray to the Mystery, Manidoo, God, to please accept our pain, our anguish, as a way of letting it go, so that we no longer have to carry it." This is how we seek out our own healing. The only thing we can do is to release it. And when we're able to let go, then, and only then, can we be fully spiritually present. We release and then we heal.

I always perk up and pay particular attention when I hear something profound (like the wisdom embedded in an Ojibwe word) spring from a religious tradition or spiritual practice that is not my own, that is also a truth reflected in my spiritual practice of Christianity. Universal truths that transcend any one body of religious belief, that serve as the cornerstone of many or all world religions, to me, hold a distinct power and credibility. The work of "letting go" is a huge part of Christian practice, and an essential step deeper into the spiritual life, as it is for many or most faith traditions. Because it's important for so many, it must be true!

This past Sunday I spoke of the weeks following Easter (the season known as "Eastertide") as liminal space (the in-between time when the old is falling away but the new has not yet presented itself), and this time of pandemic as liminal space. I also invited Trinitarians to consider using this time of pandemic, social distancing, and (for some) isolation as a chance to claim the liminal space, a "thin place" where the veil between us and God is especially sheer. God is ever more available in liminal spaces – and we have a chance in these strange times to "go there" – to avoid our impulse to avoid or distract ourselves from being in uncomfortable liminal space and, instead, embrace it, gleaning from it everything it might have to teach us.

Theologian Richard Rohr has ideas about what kind of truths are revealed in liminal space. And it strikes me that all of his spiritual truths are, essentially, about letting go.

Writes Rohr: “Five essential messages of [liminal space] are:

- 1) Life is hard.
- 2) You are not important.
- 3) Your life is not about you.
- 4) You are not in control.
- 5) You are going to die.”

True to form, Rohr doesn't pull any punches. “We typically want to flee from our current anxiety, grief and pain,” he writes, “but I encourage you to stay with these messages. They are truths for your soul that can help you find meaning and a sense of God's compassionate presence inside of the chaos.”

Each week of Eastertide (in the Rector's Weekly Letter, in the Sunday homily and Adult Forum) we'll tackle one of these five essential messages as a way of sinking deeper into this unique – if fraught – liminal space and time. First up: “Life is hard.” Stay tuned.

### What's Helping Me Right Now

Offering me a sense of hope this week is this: giving. The stars aligned this month, equipping Michael and I to pre-pay our entire 2020 pledge to Trinity. I wrote a check to St. Nicholas Episcopal Church in Richfield, the majority of whose parishioners are Hispanic, many of whom have lost their jobs and are suffering. St. Nicholas is helping parishioners purchase groceries and medications. I also wrote a check to the Episcopal Diocese of Navajoland, which is working to address the significant deficits of needed health care, water, and internet access (for at-home education) on the reservations. The Navajo nation has been disproportionately hit with coronavirus, to date suffering 1,282 cases, and 49 deaths. The Episcopal Church in Navajoland is alive, well, and unafraid to stand in the breach. They are a witness for us all of courage, sacrifice, and an uncompromised commitment to the common good.

Giving is its own kind of joy. While it can feel like “spit in the ocean,” or the tiniest drop in the bucket, being able to give, and give strategically and generously, is a blessing in and of itself.

### Blessing

Your blessing this week is what we are using at Sunday Zoom Church as our final blessing. Several of you commented on its poignancy. I did some research as to its source. It's coming from the Roman Catholic Church, and specifically (I think) the Ursuline Sisters of Louisville.

May we who are merely inconvenienced  
remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors  
remember those who are vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home

remember those who must choose between their health or paying their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close  
remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips  
remember those who have no safe place to go.

May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market  
remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for quarantine at home  
remember those who have no home.

As fear grips our country,  
let us choose love.

During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other,  
let us find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.

And may the blessing of God Almighty:  
Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit,  
be yours this day, and always.

**With love, Devon**