

Covid Message #10—A Message to Young Adults, Youth and Many Others

Psalm 25:1-10 Matthew 4:1-11

And the Spirit drove him into the wilderness!

Many people today can identify with this experience Jesus had—Being driven into the wilderness.

According to in depth research by the **New York Times**—in this long pandemic, young adults struggling to create a career path—or just trying to find paying work –create lives of intimacy and meaning—are especially hard hit.

Every day! All day! All night!

The wilderness can be a wilderness of frustration.

A wilderness of Isolation.

Unemployment and underemployment.

Despair.

Depression.

Loneliness!

“The pandemic feels like a big stop in our lives,” a young woman told one of the Times’ reporters.

“One that puts us so low that I wonder, ‘What’s the point?’”

“At night, I look at the ceiling, I feel a lump in my throat. I hardly want to live.”

“Not being in control of something like this is anxiety inducing,” said a twenty-one year old university student to another reporter.

As the pandemic has dragged on, she said, so has her sense of being in limbo, and she tried online therapy for the first time last year.

“What am I doing?”

Why am I getting a degree, if there are not going to be any jobs?" she asked.

A professor of psychiatry says isolation has also disrupted the usual teenage transition, when young people move from belonging to their family to belonging to their peers.

"They feel empty, lonely, and that loneliness brings them into despair," he said.

However, this has not stopped some from feeling guilty given that the pandemic has affected everyone and led to now millions of deaths worldwide.

"There are people with bigger struggles: people who have lost their jobs, or a relative to the disease," said a young graphic designer.

He said he began taking antidepressants after he was told he had depression and obsessive compulsive disorder this year.

Winter has worsened the situation, according to therapists and psychiatrists, who say they have seen young people manifesting more severe symptoms of anxiety, depression, eating disorders and addictions.

Still, some young people see a silver lining. *"At least the pandemic has given us the right to be sad,"* said one young adult. *"We don't have to show all the time how strong we are."*

How to combat this feeling of being lost in the wilderness of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Last week, I was watching a documentary, *"Bird—Not Out of Nowhere"*. Produced right here by KCPT public television, the one hour doc tells a many layered story of the incomparable jazz musician Charlie Parker.

Charlie Parker was born in Kansas City, Kansas, but lived much of his life in KCMO, in fact near Westport. He went to a school at 4200 block of Pennsylvania, a few blocks from here.

A genius rising out the converging rivers of African and American music culture.

Eventually Charlie Parker would singlehandedly transformed jazz from swing— which made you feel the music and want to dance— to Bebop which made you want to imagine and think.

Yet at a certain point, in his twenties, Charlie Parker was struggling, and he was playing poorly. In fact, he was terrible. His performance one night in a club near 18th and Vine was so poor that the drummer turned to him and said, referring to Parker's playing "If you got something to say, man, say it. It doesn't sound like you do so, so get out of here."

Parker was devastated.

But after a few days, he said, "*I started to study my instrument.*"

He started studying it at home, in the park, in his room, on the porch.

8, 10, 12 hours a day, he studied his tenor sax, And as he engaged in that process of studying, practicing, thinking about what he was doing, he learned to play all over again and he created bebop."

I think this is one way to survive the pandemic.

If you can't work, study your work. Study **for** your work.

If you can't be happy, study what makes you happy.

Become a student in the school of your own life.

Begin to learn how to do what you want to do really, even if you cannot do it under present circumstances.

I think this is a lot of what Jesus was doing in the wilderness.

Remember! He was driven there.

The Spirit drove him into the wilderness.

It wasn't his choice to go into that dangerous desert.

And once there, he encountered serious opposition in the form of the Devil.

In the Bible, until you reach the Book of Revelation, the Devil is not so much all encompassing evil as a spiritual opponent.

In the desert wilderness which Jesus was thrust into, the Devil's work was to try to derail Jesus from getting started on his work and accomplishing the mission God had given him—to ignite people to want to create the Kingdom of God in real life.

What do I mean by that?

The devil tempted Jesus with three offers which, the devil thinks, will surely deflect Jesus from his intended work and scuttle his plans.

First. Turn stones into bread.

Control the food supply so that people will be dependent on him.

They won't follow him or love him or learn faith in the God he loves.

They will fear him.

Two. Leap off tall buildings in a single bound. No harm will come to him.

In other words, become immortal and invincible, unlike every other living person.

Nothing bad can happen to him!

Who can match that?

Who can learn from such a person?

He will be written off as unreal.

Three, become a super power ruler of the world.

So everyone will live under his tyranny—and hate him.

All these temptations, if Jesus submits to them, will end the God directed work he has been given to do.

So Jesus reflects on each temptation that the devil offers, and he turns down each one, one by one.

But the inner struggle is so dire, so painful, so relentlessly nerve wracking, that he ends up exhausted, and angels must come and comfort him.

Since I believe angels are ordinary people who have accepted special assignments from God—

Or they have accepted an assignment to communicate special delivery messages from God.

I am thinking these angels were living somewhere in and around this southern Israel desert wilderness—

—found Jesus in his depleted, even despairing, lonely state—

—surrounded him with loving care—and surely water and food as well.

This Biblical wilderness experience suggests a form of study that will help those who are suffering, especially the young, during this pandemic.

That is—study yourself.

Practice the art of creating and re-creating YOU.

Make it a focus of your life to explore your me—ness.

That is—the unique characteristics which make you YOU.

That even if there were no other living being in the universe, you would still be a unique expression of the creative energy of the universe.

One way you can accomplish this deep self study is through meditation.

After all, the word meditation comes from the Latin word “Meditare”—meaning—
Stand in your center!

You can accomplish this through prayer, in which you put your life under the scrutiny of God and begin to find out, not who you think you are, but who you really are.

Making the journey from persona to essence.

From natural person to spiritual person.

This spiritual discipline is really a survival skill in these times. Why?

Because the pandemic and its collateral damage threaten to capsize a person, especially younger persons into believing, for example,

“Well, I am not employable.”

“I am without a path to a future.”

“I am only acquainted with misery these days.”

“Why did I even take the time and energy to educate myself?”

“Who will love me?” And give me the grace of relying upon them?

While those are real, destabilizing worries—and we cannot ignore them—nevertheless, we can take steps to transcend them. Some simple, indirect ways make a good start.

Spend more time outdoors. Let nature speak to you. Deepen friendships. Become a friend to someone else. Read. Cook.

And worship! When you worship—which is how Jesus, by his own testimony fended off the temptations of the devil—you are allowing the Spirit to embrace you.

And through the prayers, the music, the hymns, the message—you are also connecting yourself to other people who are going through the same experience you are, right now.

Imagine! You are also immersing yourself in the life and spirit of great souls of all time—whether they be composers, singers, poets, prophets, artists, writers, or rebels who refused to let the inhuman conditions of their time degrade their experience of this life.

There is a saying by a great religious thinker: “We are not physical beings having a temporary spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a temporary physical experience.”

Now that is significant for two reasons.

First, it suggests that deeper than all facets of your identity—your body, your work, your gender, your race, your personality—there is a non-physical center that is you, has always been you and forever will be you.

Call that 5th dimensional reality soul, spirit, essence, call it your personal cosmic drama and comedy show. It doesn't matter really what you call it. It's like the law of gravity. It's always there, always functioning and only gains a name or label or definition when it's discovered.

The law of gravity by a scientist.

The law of the soul by some mystic.....Jesus for instance.

It is the eternal, immortal you which has always existed and will never cease to be.

And then, building on that thought—your work in this life, is to use your physical life—your personality, your body, your gender, your race, your work, your brain, your heart—to express and manifest the eternal spirit within you.

See your soul this way, shaping and inwardly guiding your physical life, and then everything that happens in your physical life, including your suffering and your success,

your most desperate loneliness and deep diving despair, and your loftiest experience of joy and love—all become material for your deep soul to work with.

What's more, once you realize this truth about you—nothing that happens to the outer, physical and totally real you—whether it's the destabilizing effects of a global pandemic or the private, personal setbacks and sufferings you personally experience—none of that can invade, capsize or destroy you.

Even though you suffer wounds, bruises and serious blows, you remain resilient.

This kind of thinking, should you make it your own, will enable you to ascend to lofty places even when the world and its multiple pandemics threaten to hold you down.

We close by connecting the thoughts of an unlikely pair of souls—one a colossal, cosmic thinker the other a colossal earth shaker:

Notice the metaphor of bridges in both their thoughts:

Friedrich Nietzsche, who freed the world from conventional, one dimensional thinking and morals:

You and you alone must build the bridge for you to walk across the river of life. There are, to be sure, demi-gods which would carry you across this river; but only at the cost of yourself; you would pawn yourself and lose. There is in the world only one way, on which nobody can go, except you: where does it lead? Do not ask, go along with it.

Fannie Lou Hamer who freed Mississippi and many others from Jim Crow segregation

Never forget where we came from!

And always praise the bridges that carried us over.

All we have to do is trust God and launch out into the deep.

Amen.

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