

Pandemic Awakenings - Week 16

Day 1



The Cycle of Nature

All that is of the earth must return to the earth. For every human being there is a tomb. Is death an end or a new beginning? The world and nature speaks of death and rebirth. From now on we notice daylight waning as the sun sets earlier and earlier. Eventually on the shortest day we will see it, if at all, for a few brief hours. Such is the reality of our planetary life. However experience has taught us that, without fail, the days will gradually lengthen and the blossom of spring and the warmth of summer will return once more bringing us renewed hope and joy.

Nature shows us that change is inevitable and despair is unnecessary, that nothing remains the same forever, not even the darkest-seeming fate.

Day 2

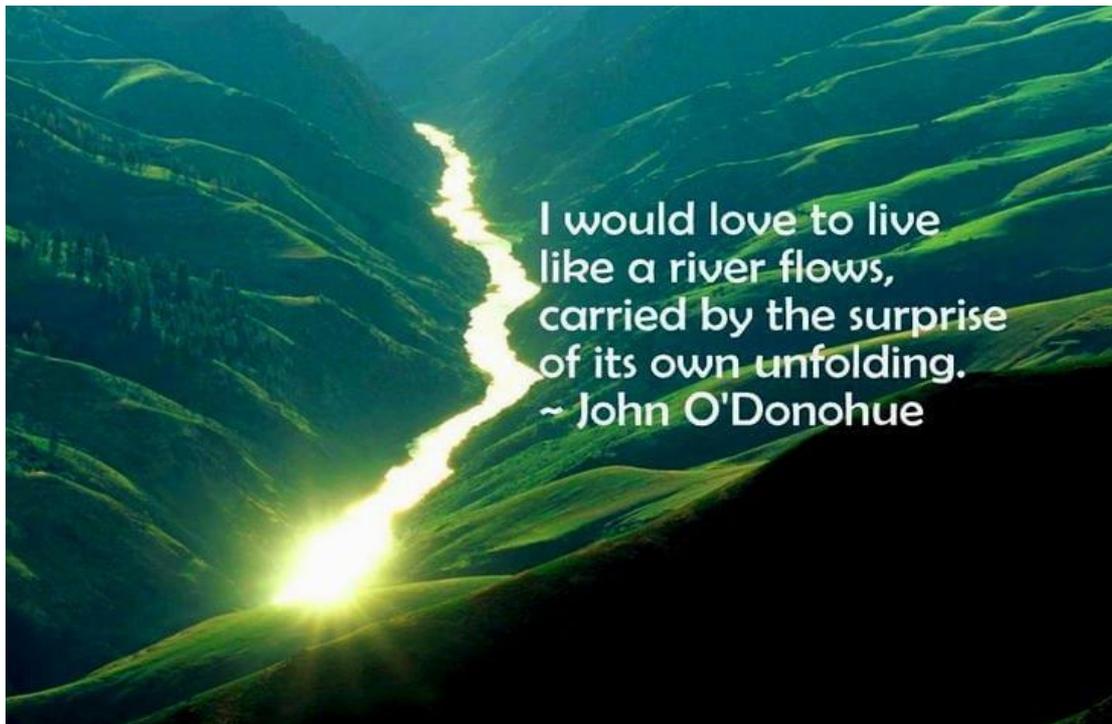


The Art of Waiting

Spring already lies in the womb of winter when all feels lost and everything appears empty and lifeless. The challenge is to calmly wait the appointed hour of change knowing that it will come and that it cannot be forced. The caterpillar has its own unique timing to emerge as a butterfly. Grief too has its season.

Discipleship demands patience knowing that nothing in the universe stands still, all is in movement, constantly changing and assuming new forms. It would be vanity to expect the present to persist and so it is foolish to resist change. The awareness that change is inevitable and flowing with it rather than having it forced upon us is something that brings us freedom. This in turn gives rise to joy and this is our natural state of being.

Day 3



We Are Not in Charge!

The word patience comes from the Latin word *patior*, which means to suffer. Suffering is something we try to avoid and so we don't respect change as a process and we try to hurry it up. This is called control!

Yet nature teaches us to keep our hands off and that we are not in charge. The planets revolve around the Sun; plants grow, seeds become flowers and embryos become babies and all without our doing. As the different stages of development take in the womb it all happens in divine timing and if we were so foolish to try and hurry up the process it would be disastrous.

We need to develop a sense of the way things blossom in their own time and how unfolding always takes place in stages. Only then can we adopt a hands off approach, to let go of our tendency to control and simply allow things and people just to be.

Day 4



Allowing

The piece of wood sculpture shown lay for years in my workshop as a very unattractive piece of bog oak. Having become tired of tripping over it I took it in my hands and asked: What could I make out of you? Then I paused and reflected on the question. It seemed so irreverent to the wood. This was once part of a magnificent oak tree stretching back five thousand years. I was holding a bit of history in my hands that even predated the oldest parts of the Old Testament. Now in all my egocentricity I was asking: What can I make out of you? Surely the more reverent question should have been, what do you want to become?

So I set to work with a new mindset; not to conform it to my image but to allow its uniqueness to emerge. As it unfolded, one side began to look like a dinosaur, and the other a bird of paradise. One species having evolved from the other in the far distant past this seemed to be the perfect expression of its utter uniqueness.

Day 5



Freedom to Be

The question posed yesterday in relation to a piece of bog oak: *What can I make out of you?* has very wide implications. It's a form of fundamental disrespect that is pandemic. It is when we want to change others and conform them to our expectations.

Parents often exert subtle pressure on their children to become something that they are not in order to look good themselves. Our education system, especially in the past, forced conformity rather than promoted self-expression. In close relationships, like marriage, couples are often engaged in trying to get the other to conform to their expectations rather than exercising the essence of love that is giving the freedom to be. For one person to expect another to be true to them is a trap. Even to expect the other to be true to the relationship is to make it into a prison, while trusting the other to be true to themselves lies freedom.

Day 6



Wheat and Weeds

There have been times when someone has said to me that they don't have much time for Church. I have usually replied by saying, There are a lot of things about Church that I don't have much time for either but there's still more than enough that I do agree with and am prepared to invest my life into. We are part of a Church that so often didn't teach what Christ taught and on many occasions got what he was saying completely wrong. The parable of the sower is just one such example. A man sows good seed in his field and when his back is turned his enemy sows weeds. Later he looks with horror to find both weeds and wheat growing together. His servants suggest that they go in and pull out the weeds but the master in his wisdom forbids them saying, 'Allow them both to grow until the harvest then the good can be separated from the bad.' Here are some reasons why that was good advice:

First the presence of the weeds growing alongside the wheat creates a more challenging environment for the wheat to grow. Precisely because of the darnel the wheat will be forced to grow taller. If we apply that to our lives it helps us to accept people and circumstances as they are and not as we would like them to be. The challenge is to accept the imperfection that is part of life and rise above it. In the acceptance of what is we find peace whereas peace eluded those who are always complaining.

Another reason is a very obvious one. When the weeds and wheat begin to grow it is impossible to clearly identify one from the other and so how are we to eradicate one without damaging the other? The Christian life is not about weeding or using the scissors treatment. Without the weeds our lives might be easier but would they be more fruitful and might they not be a lot less interesting ?

Day 7



The Divided Heart

The piece shown is of a heart that is divided and where darkness finds its home in the divide. Life can be very complicated or it can be in essence quite simple. This was the case with Christ. His purpose in life was simply to do the will of the one who sent him. (Jn 3:34) And so in him there was no room for darkness. Singleness of focus was the secret of his life.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) put it beautifully when he said, ‘Purity of heart is to will one thing.’ No wonder Jesus said that the pure of heart would see God (Matthew 5:8). They alone keep their eyes in one constant and consistent direction, and thus overcome the divisions created by the divided hearts and loyalties which plague the rest of us. As we grow spiritually, our lives become more and more centered and simple. There are only a few things that matter, and eventually really only one. It can take a long time to realise that it is only in His will that we find our true lives – and peace.