

WESTON PRIORY

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Seeds of Newness

I don't know Who—or what—put the question.

I don't know when it was put.

I don't even remember answering.

But at some moment

I did answer Yes to Someone—or something...

I am not alone.

DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD

A man sits at the window, typing a difficult letter, trying to express the immense personal journey he has undertaken since his wife was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. She is now mid-way into the

time remaining, according to the doctors' prognosis. Her symptoms are worsening. To experience his beloved change so radically, with no way to ameliorate her condition, is his deepest anguish.

Yet in his daily presence, care, and compassion, as he moves through his frustration and grief, he lives a faithfulness that defies all the workings of the disease. At the end of his letter, admitting how wrenching all of this is, and not knowing what lies ahead, he exclaims, "But I love

every minute of it!" Here, in the midst of life's harshness, a hope-against-hope is born. In what seems like an ending, a seed of newness germinates.



Living in the northern hemisphere, we tend to associate *hope* with the burst of green in *spring*, with the lush blossoms and their fragrance. The page has turned; it is no longer winter. Our celebration of Easter is marked by a similar movement: from sadness to exuberant joy,

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from darkness to brilliant light, from death to life's fullness. There is wisdom here: we proclaim our faith that hope will not be conquered, that newness will have the last word.

But the peoples of the *southern* hemisphere (Australia or Aotorea/New Zealand, for example), who inhabit a different geography, can teach us something very important about hope and newness. For them, the celebration of Easter's promise comes at the beginning of *autumn*, as nature becomes quiet, the harvests are gathered, and life's cycles are running their course. This is a geography of the *heart* as much as of the earth, and, honestly, it seems much closer to our experience of life. How, then, might we think of hope, of resurrection?

Seeds of Newness

TODAY'S WORLD often demands instant solutions to its problems, but God calls us to another way, the way of Emmanuel.

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Like the husband whose faithfulness wells up from the midst of his struggle and questioning, and surprises him ("But I love every minute of it!"), hope isn't the turning of a page, the sudden appearance of a now-blissful world. It is neither wishful thinking nor a pipe-dream. No, hope is the grace to *risk loving and living in the midst of life's uncertainties*, placing our trust in a Faithfulness stronger than death. As the earliest disciples remembered him,

this is the wholly unexpected paradox and promise of Jesus of Nazareth—of the way he lived; why he could give of himself so unreservedly and freely; and why he is for us the human face of God. "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains a single grain. But if it dies, it will yield a rich harvest. Those who cling to their lives will lose them" (John 12: 24—25a).

In speaking to his sisters and brothers in the Christian community of Hippo, St. Augustine expressed this gospel paradox with these words: Jesus came among us "so that...the Bread of Life might be hungry; the Fountain of living water thirsty; the Light of the world sleeping; the Way be wearied with the journey; Strength be made weak; Health be wounded; Life die." ¹

Resurrection is more like a tender shoot, springing up in a fallow field covered with summer's leaves; it is the humble grain of Jesus' self-giving, planted deep in the rocky soil of our lives and our history—by which the God of newness "comes forth" as pure Love and Gift. In what seems like an ending, a seed of newness germinates. Our Easter faith calls us, not so much to

the *imitation* of Christ, as to the *innovation* of Christⁱ, the “making new” which Jesus, in his life, death, and resurrection, unleashes.

Hope’s arrival takes us by surprise: it doesn’t remove us from the realities of living, but leads us out of the confines of what we thought “possible.” God’s promise to be utterly faithful—a Gift deeper than every ending, a Love wider than every expectation—takes root in us and spreads *as we risk the new, the untried, the impossible*. As we travel to where we cannot go! ☒

ⁱ Cited in R. Kevin Seasoltz, OSB, *God’s Gift Giving: In Christ and Through the Spirit* (New York: Continuum, 2007) 21-22.

ⁱⁱ Joerg Rieger, *Remember the Poor: The Challenge to Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International), 210.

