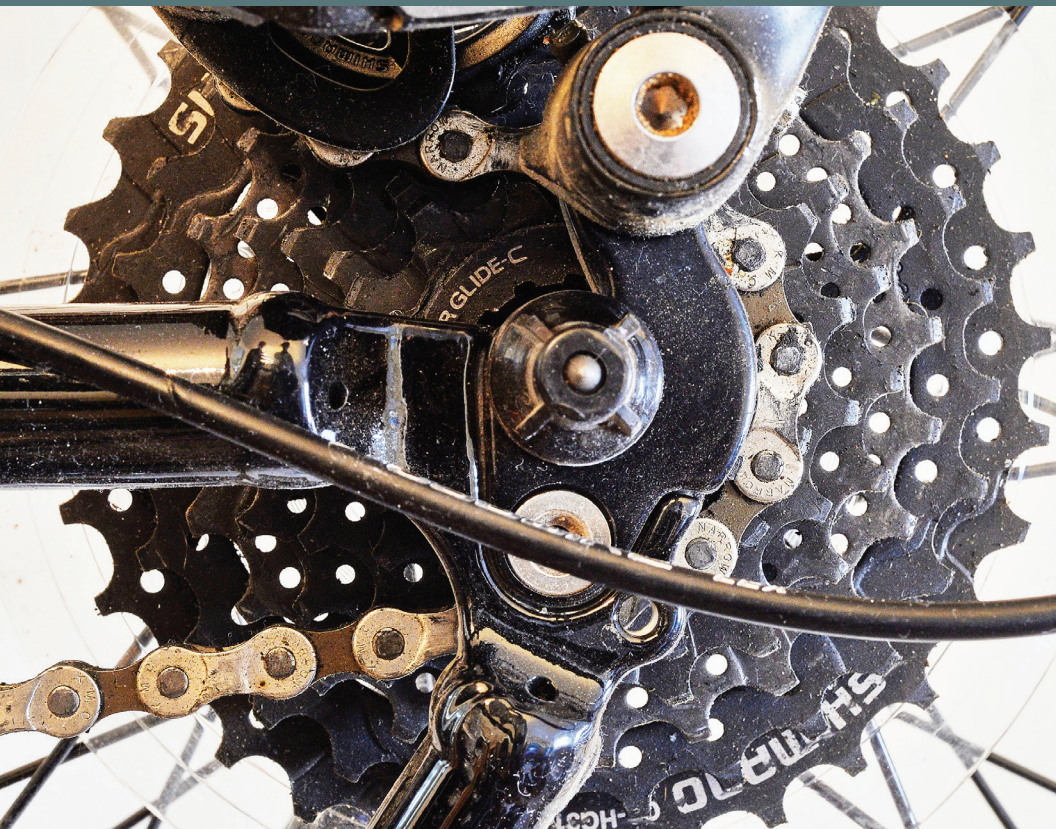


Faith Remastered
Dissonance



2018 Lenten Devotional
Foundry United Methodist Church

Seeking to Sing God's Song

Ginger Gaines-Cirelli,
Senior Pastor

The world, of course, is in a frightful mess, but because of us, not because of God. God could only clean up the mess by taking away our freedom. But without freedom where could love be? So paradoxically, it is because God is a loving God that there is so much suffering in the world. But because God is a loving God [s]he is suffering too, and suffering also through the bodies and souls of [God's] creatures...

William Sloane Coffin

Out of the chaos of “a formless void,” God created harmony. Each day there was evening and there was morning, again and again, and God observed that it was very good (Genesis 1). The composition was a new creation, a creation interwoven, mutually dependent, and made to live in harmony. The new creation is a love song, God's love song, a melody that saturates everything that is, seen and unseen.

The song of creative love is what we are created to sing—in harmony with God, with each other, and all creation. The power of overflowing love to create something new is at the heart of our understanding of God and of creation and of what it means to share life together as children of God.

But we know that “the world...is in a frightful mess.” The original goodness, the intended harmony, is full of suffering and dissonance. We may struggle to hold together the notion of a loving God with the reality of suffering in our world. This is an example of what psychologists call “cognitive dissonance.”

Our spiritual tradition teaches that, out of love for us, God gifts humankind with freedom—and human freedom is responsible for so much of the suffering in the world. In this season and throughout this devotional, we will wrestle and reflect on the reality of dissonance, our place in it and responsibility for it, and the reality of God's grace that promises healing and ever greater harmony and love in our lives and world.

May that grace attend you as we journey together through these holy days.

Faith Remastered Dissonance

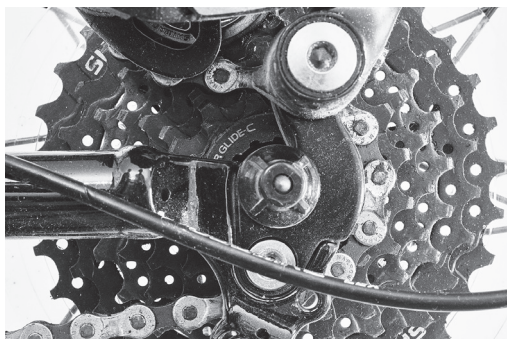
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Those who have provided devotionals hope their expressions resonate with you. May each day's meditation give you an opportunity to pause and:

- *Reflect on how the sharing relates to your life.*
- *Be still. Ask God to speak to you. Listen.*
- *Give thanks. Pray for yourself, those special in your life, the contributor, and the Foundry community.*

Whenever a devotional moves you, please consider sharing your response with the author or with someone who came to mind in the day's meditation. In doing so, you may find new, renewed, or deeper relationships with yourself, God, and others.



Acknowledgments

We are grateful to all the writers and artists of this 24th consecutive edition of Foundry's Lenten Devotional for their creative contributions, published here and **online at www.foundryumc.org**.

Foundry's annual Lenten Devotional is a ministry led since the 2015 edition by members of the Practicing Spirituality adult education class. It is one of Foundry's Connecting Ministries under the direction of Pastor Will Green. Lead participants in the development and production of this year's effort include Jeanette Barker, Stephen Roberts, Joanne Steller, and Joe Steller. Thanks also to Lindi Lewis, who designed the publication and to Ta-Chen Wu for the cover photograph.

Fitting in the Flutes

Dissonance can feel ugly, both in our ears and in our lives. Things aren't fitting together as we think they should. It's different sounds and instruments and forces and interests and ideas clanging into each other and making something we don't enjoy or understand. Indeed, it may not be something we want to enjoy or understand.

Time impacts how we see dissonance. During a musical performance, when the bassoon is blaring, the cello is caterwauling, and the flute is flying – it's a lot to hear, much less sit through. We may not even want to sit through it, but we do. And then, on the drive home from the concert, we can put it all together and see what the composer wanted to achieve with the piece. We can't see the full meaning of it when we're listening to it, but we can try to understand it once we're through it.

I believe it's the same with dissonant situations in our lives. Challenging situations, hard choices, and even harder conversations can feel impossible to understand when we're in the middle of them. They feel dissonant with our lives, with the story we tell ourselves about what our lives should be. Yet while we don't know the full story of our lives and what God wants for us, dissonance is a core theme. It's not going to be what we expect, ever, and that's okay. Trusting that there is a fuller meaning can get us through the day, toward a time where we're able to see how the different elements fit together in the performance of our lives.

We can focus on how the flutes aren't fitting with the cellos. Or we can let go of the story of how things should fit together and enjoy the performance.

Beth Scott

To Be and Not To Be

I ask ... also on behalf of those who will believe in me ...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us...

John 17: 20-26 NIV

I listen to the discord of Mozart's String Quartet and am overcome by the struggle that I feel. The Beatles, Revolution 9 evokes confusion in me. Both at their core represent my search for peace to balance the conflicting forces of my life.

The Buddhists say, '*all life is suffering*'.

I suffer in my struggles with the unresolved, incompatible chords of successes and failures; lack of courage to come out, disdain for my cowardice that keeps me locked in.

To be or not to be me.

Success is not trusted, the prologue feels forever my epilogue; will I ever be me?

I am committed to Christ. I try to love everyone, yet I can't accept me. I lose my way; the disharmonies of life bury my spirit.

The Buddhists seek enlightenment contemplating, who was I before I was in my mother's womb?

I sit and meditate.

Life stands still in the flickering moments of rest between its cacophonous sounds. In the silence between notes, the oneness with the God spirit is known. The miracle of God's peace is not in the absence of discord but in the midst of it. Peace that is sufficient. Peace that is everlasting. In the space between the conflicts of to be and not to be, God in me conforms outward disharmony to inner harmony, and at the same life-enduring moment I experience how to be and not be.

Karl N. Marshall

Dissonance is Part of the Human Condition

Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord and whose hope the Lord is.
Jeremiah 7:17 KJV

By placing together notes that do not belong together, musical dissonance throws one into discomfort. Cognitive dissonance does much the same when a person may experience conflicting beliefs. For example, one may subscribe to the Bible's requirement of love of neighbor, yet endorse immigration policies that are unwelcoming of others. Dissonance, by its nature engenders a longing for order and harmony.

The human condition is one of dissonance—of struggle: to be well, to be happy, to find peace, to feel loved and be secure. Daily, we are confronted with news of disasters, with loss, with discordant relationships. Joyful occasions can shift our spirits into a condition of dissonance too. Think of an upcoming marriage, a birth, buying a new home, organizing a family reunion. At those times we can become filled with anxiety, self-doubt, and even fear. We are fearful that reality may not match our dream for ourselves or for our plans.

I remember my first conscious exposure to musical dissonance at the age of fifteen. My older brother, who mischievously awaited my reaction, had invited me to listen to Igor Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring." Well, he got what he was waiting for. I was outraged, but so was Stravinsky's original audience, I later learned. They wanted none of it! Now I understand that, by being still and acknowledging my states and circumstances of dissonance (and we live in challenging political times), I have many opportunities to examine my beliefs, understand better who I am, and align my life with God's intentions for me. Harmony is restored when I invite God into my day.

Josiane Blackman

“De Profundis”

Out of the depths have I called unto Thee, O Lord.

Psalm 130:2 KJV

One of the pieces that Hal and I both love is a rendition of “De Profundis” by Boston University’s Seminary Singers. It is especially meaningful when I feel in the depths of despair. Despair can be personal or it can be for the plight of others. It can also be for one’s nation; the Hebrew Bible is full of such laments for Israel.

I fear that my country has lost its way. As I write this, the government is closed down. Almost 700,000 young Americans, as well as many others, are living in fear of deportation. We have granted tax cuts to the rich at the expense of the poor. Drugs and violence snuff out young lives. My heart weeps. I wonder if God is weeping also.

Psalm 130:2 continues:

“Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.”

Help us, I ask, to love all our neighbors. Ground us in the teachings of the prophets of old and of your Son. Help us, as a nation and as individuals, through the dissonance that bombards us from all directions, to be still and listen to your voice.

It does no good to simply shrug one’s shoulders and believe that there is nothing we can do. God works through people like us. Our faith tells us that God hears our pleas and if we listen, we can find ways “out of the depths,” through the morass into creative action, whatever form that action may take. Our actions may seem small but many small actions can change the world. The Psalm’s verse 8 assures us that Israel is redeemable. So, too, is the country we love.

Jan Garman

Dissonance

The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.
The meek shall inherit the earth.
You must become like little children.
Store up your treasure---in heaven.
Turn the other cheek.
Take up your cross and follow me.
Be fools for Christ's sake.
Die so that you may live.
*Although I am free, I have made myself a servant to all
for the sake of the Gospel.*
Go, sell all that you have, and follow me.
Love your enemies.
Pray for those who persecute you.
Give that you may receive.
Whenever I am weak (for Christ's sake), then I am strong.
Be in the world, but not of it.
*Those who save their lives will lose them, and those who lose
their lives (for my sake)
will save them.*
If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to this
mountain: Move.
And it will move.
I believe. Help thou my unbelief.
The Kingdom of God is among you . . . and you . . . and you . . .
and you.

*He said to them: In this world, you will have much trouble.
But take heart:
I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD.*

Deryl Davis

Night Goggles

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.

Psalm 23:4 KJV

I hear foreboding in the long, low chords of the strings. Eyes closed, I am listening to Krzysztof Penderecki's atonal composition, 8'37" or *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*. My gut is clenched as the music prompts me to see myself stepping with fearful trepidation through a dank, unlit underground passage. Not being able to see might be a good thing. There is water underfoot and no doubt vermin too—if only I could also see a safe escape route. Crying out for help is not an option. It may alert predators to my whereabouts in this unrelenting darkness. Five minutes pass. I cannot see and cannot make good choices in this situation. I crave a set of the night vision goggles like the ones the military uses. Surely then the way would be clear.

Shimmering strings pierce the darkness at five minutes, 40 seconds into the piece. Now I can see a thin shaft of light. Danger lingers as discordance swirls around intermittent harmonic chords. But I sense some relief as I see myself gingerly stepping forward. That little bit of light is uplifting, hopeful. Maybe I can get out of this place.

The composition fades to soundless quietude after another three minutes. It's over. With heart pounding, I realize I have found my way through the darkness.

Prayer:

Dissonance makes me fearfully anxious, Lord, although I know I need not be. Night goggles are internal. They are the spiritual fortitude and vision that come from your divine light. Help me use it, trust it, and follow it always.

Joanne Steller

Joanne led a six-part exploration of dissonance in music, life, and faith for Practicing Spirituality. This is the first in a series of four personal reflections on the study.

Days of Dissonance, Days of Harmony

Days of dissonance, struggle, struggle: I miss an appointment, I lose my keys, my creativity abandons me. Other days there are no major stumbling blocks, just harmony and peace. My early mornings of quiet find me gazing at dense woods 30-40 feet from my window. Autumn and winter have stripped the trees, making ready for another season of growth, symbolic of Lent. I envision the roots going deeper, the gaunt limbs lifting their arms in praise.

The religious writer Leonardo Boff is also helpful to me:

“Falling is not just a physical accident.
Falling means recognizing freely and sincerely
the limits of our strength in the face of situations
that are beyond us and force us to submit.
Falling shows our human frailty. It reveals the
fragile clay of which we are made, showing us
that we are neither omnipotent nor invulnerable.
Confronted with such a fall we may nurture our
spirit of revolt. Or we may nurture a spirit of resignation.
There is a third possibility, however.
We can nurture the spirit of humility.
While calmly accepting our fall, we may still trust in God,
whose strength comes to reinvigorate our weakness,
and get up again with renewed courage.”

Prayer:

*Redeemer God, help us to grow in the likeness of Christ our Savior.
Thank you for your immeasurable love and grace. Amen.*

Sunny Branner

DC Money Dissonance

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

Matthew 19:24 NIV

I've struggled with money for a lot of my life. It's not that I don't have enough, but instead I struggle with feeling like I never have enough. No matter how much I save, there's always a persistent worry that any second something horrible could happen and I'd lose everything.

Living in DC definitely does not help my anxieties over money and prestige. I can't even afford to live without a roommate, but I often walk by luxury condos that can go for upwards of \$3,000 a month. I also pass by people on the streets asking for money for breakfast. All I can think is: but what if I need that money? How would I ever be able to afford my own place?

I've sat with the passage from Matthew 19:24 for a while, reflecting on all the ways life in DC makes me feel desperate to accumulate wealth. While focusing only on myself, I am ignoring those in need. None of it is fair or just. Yet, I think it's good to be struggling with this dissonance. I need to start letting go of the chains that bind me to wanting more and more instead of being grateful for what I have and being generous towards others.

Prayer:

Lord, give me the strength to be grateful for what I have. Help me trust in You that I will have what I need if the time arises. Keep me honest and humble. Help me to be generous towards those with less than I have. Help me to break free of the power that money has over me so I can live fully in this world.

Beth Gwane

Bad Notes

Some notes don't seem to go together musically. But who decides which note is the bad note? That is subjective.

The diagnosis. The accident. The election. The drug paraphernalia in our teenagers's dresser drawer. My movers (when I came to DC years ago) who held my furniture hostage for weeks requiring me to be home whenever they arrived (with 24 hours notice), causing me to cancel a speaking gig where the headliner was this fresh young senator from Illinois. (His talk would have smoked mine anyway.)

Bad notes. They just don't work with our choices and priorities to make pretty melody.

Yet some of the most dissonant notes to our ears may be constructive, promoting a transition in the score. Even if we have no control over certain notes, we certainly have control over others. In order to restore harmony, we move. We change. We grow. Sometimes we repent.

There's a verse from Paul that was meaningful to me when I was 15, when I had to move cross country leaving my friends behind: "...all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose." (Romans 8.28) That made sense to me then. It still does. Life is mystery. And God doesn't cause the bad notes. But God can redeem any music, no matter how crazy certain measures may get in the middle of the score. And God leads us in the midst of the crazy...

To change some notes.

And thus we move forward with the Spirit's larger symphony.

The redemption is not always for us personally. (Life really isn't all about me.). Happily ever after transcends the life experience of any one of us. But to be Christian is to accept the invitation to trust... that all of the beauty and the ugly is ultimately redeemed.

In the end, the music is beautiful. I really believe that.

Paul Nixon

Are We Listening?

Watch for the new thing I am going to do. It is happening already—you can see it now!

Isaiah 43:19 TEV

God speaks through Dissonance.

In the midst of one of the worst periods in Israel's history, the Babylonian Exile, Isaiah discerned that God had not abandoned the people. Indeed, God was beginning to do a new thing. God, through Cyrus, the new king of Persia, would lead the way home to Jerusalem.

We are living through the one of the most perilous of times—refugees struggle, too often unable to find a nation that will let them in. At the same time our nation decreases the number of refugees allowed to enter, it promises to build a wall along the Mexican border, and reverses commitments to Haitians, El Salvadorans, and DACA youth and adults. ICE officers are in neighborhoods, even ours, rounding people up for deportation. Some are returning to places where they are strangers; others to violence and possible death; and still others are forced to leave families behind. Many live each day in fear of deportation.

If we believe that God is active in the world, and if we believe that God is in the midst of our worst moments, and if we believe that God speaks today, then God may be speaking through the dissonance. Are we listening? Are we watching for hopeful signs?

A Lutheran Palestinian pastor in Bethlehem, in the midst of conflict, believes that hope emerges as we do constructive things to help make a difference. God may be speaking through our lives, through what we do to enable positive outcomes.

In this spirit, we can go forward on faith, trusting God through our own attitudes and involvements to bring “a new thing.”

Hal Garman

Christmas Remnants

Then Jesus spoke to them again: "I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows Me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life.

John 8:12 HCSB

"It's not Christmas anymore!" I said to the hotel desk person where I was staying mid-January. They had a big, pretty Christmas tree in the lobby with all the decorations and lights. "It's so big, we need a crew to take it down!" she said in reply.

Christmas lights on a small rural house that stay on the house all year.

A few left over Santas on my shelf at home in March.

A stuffed snowman, tree, gifts and Santa on a co-worker's cubicle in February.

Christmas lights that I keep plugging in each day, even though its past Epiphany.

Christmas remnants. These are dissonant notes outside of Christmas time which can be reminders of joy, a joy we hold onto all year, even as we contemplate Christ's ultimate sacrifice for us on the cross during Lent. Christmas remnants remind us that Jesus came to us not just at Christmas, but to be with us in our hearts all year long. Christmas remnants as dissonant notes add interest, meaning and mystery: with the sadness of Christ's death on the cross, we also have the joy of His birth and resurrection. With the darkness of death and the tomb, we also have the brilliance of Christ's love and resurrection.

When you next see Christmas remnants, let it be a grace note reminder of the joy of a Holy birthday, when Jesus came to us personally, as Emmanuel, the light of the world.

Meditation:

Lord, renew the joy of my salvation like the joy of a new baby being born with a bright star above.

John Godshalk

Faith is Enough

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1 KJV

At the beginning of each worship service, Pastor Ginger greets us with a welcome to all that includes the phrase “whatever you believe or doubt.” That phrase is relevant to many of us, perhaps all, who are present. We want, even need, to believe, while at the same time sometimes doubting the very existence of God. Informed by modern science, many of us even challenge some of the core tenets of our faith.

I have those doubts. They are deep and sometimes troubling, asking me to accept what I cannot see or fully understand. Where did God come from? Why should He care for us? Is there a life after death? Why should we believe? We are concerned by the dissonance between what we are told and what we can see with our own eyes.

Somehow, despite that dissonance, I have a stronger belief, unshakable and profound, that God exists, is everywhere, and loves me. I cannot conceive an alternative. The writer of that verse in Hebrews is responding to our doubts by telling us that “faith” is the substance of our belief and is all the evidence that we need. We do not have to believe every teaching of the church or every word of a wonderful bible handed down through many translations and disputes. Or, for that matter, we do not have to accept every teaching of our pastors.

It is more than enough to rely on our faith that God is there, for us and for all mankind, and to believe that He is committed to justice and mercy for all.

Larry Slagle

Tinnitus

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Proverbs 3:5-6 ESV

As an infant, my eldest grandson would turn his face away when someone spoke to him directly for too long. Later, and before he could speak, he recoiled from intense repetitive sound. He would wave one hand over his ear when the blender was clamoring or when people around him spoke stridently. It was as if he were teaching us that his peace-loving world often doled out more commotion than anyone needs to hear. His ear waving gesture became family code for Too Much Noise.

Over the past year, it seems I've invoked the TMN gesture constantly. Unending discordance comes with the 24-hour news cycle and is exacerbated by the droning of one-sided conservationists. This constant irritating noise is for me the spiritual version of tinnitus, a constant ringing sound that its sufferers hear. It buzzes incessantly on the ear and weighs heavily on the heart. It is laden with incivility, partisanship, bias, and the kind of verbal outbursts folks should have outgrown by kindergarten.

Medically, tinnitus not a condition itself; it is a symptom of an underlying condition. Might dissonance overload be at the root of this TMN? I know the daily deluge of disagreement will not stop. No amount of ear-waving can make it go away or diminish its effect. I also know that God's voice is speaking nonstop through the noise in the loving language of grace. Now, if I can only listen carefully and hear it.

Prayer:

Fortify me, Lord. Help me hear beyond the constant irritation of dissonance. Let that buzzing sound in my ear be a reminder to summon and lean on your ever-present grace.

Joanne Steller

WHY?

Just as there is dissonance in music, there are things in life that long to be resolved. It is the human condition that we need to have a sense of justice.

Elie Wiesel struggled physically and mentally for his own life, and lost his family in Hitler's concentration camps. He witnessed the horrors of the gas chambers, crematories, and hangings. In his book, *Loss of Faith in Night*, he says, "I was not denying God's existence but I was doubting his absolute justice."

The following questions have been in my head and heart for years. I can shut off dissonant music, but I cannot shut these off. They are neither rhetorical nor answerable, I fear.

Why were the Jews being savagely slaughtered and God was doing nothing about it? Why do mass genocides continue in new countries?

Why doesn't God punish bad people?

Why does the sun rise and the rain fall on the good and the bad? (Matthew 5:45)

Why is there a Ku Klux Klan?

How is it that Mozart and Hitler both come from the same country, Austria?

Why do over 30,000 –21 each minute– children under the age of five die every day from preventable causes? (UNICEF)

I hope that some of this dissonance may be resolved, if not in my lifetime, in the time to come. Let us not be satisfied with simplistic answers. Let us not make our God too small, like us. But let us at least face these questions.

Ella Cleveland

The Council of War

You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

Matthew 24:6 NIV



The Council of War
(ca.1873)
by John Rogers
(1829-1904)

When North America was colonized by Europeans, there was a shortage of labor. White indentured servants arrived from Europe, but there were not enough to meet the demand. Slaves from Africa were the solution. In the South slaves were essential on large farms with cash crops, but less so in the industrialized North. Dissension followed. Regions took sides and eleven states seceded from the Union. President Abraham Lincoln believed that entering a war to preserve the Union was a necessary evil. The Civil War ensued. The Union was maintained, and the institution of slavery was abolished.

President Lincoln, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and General Ulysses S. Grant appear together in the sculpture, which is on view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Stanton suggested to Nineteenth Century American genre sculptor John Rogers that he create the piece. Stanton described the scene to Rogers as “one of the most interesting and appropriate occasions” for a sculpture. The three men, each with religious convictions, were wrestling with the immediate and personal moral conflicts occasioned by the dissonance of their duties as military officers. Thank God for these three wise men.

Prayer:

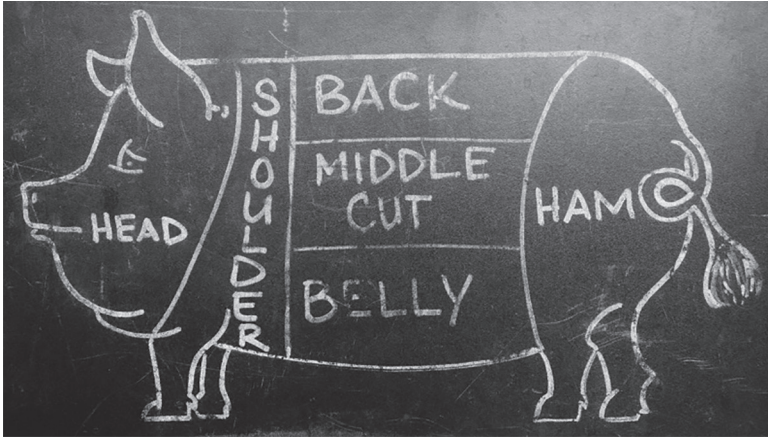
God, year after year I pray for peace. Yet wars persist. It troubles me. Give me wisdom to understand.

Stephen Roberts

Grace

The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.

Romans 14:3 NIV



It is a tug of war when it comes to eating meat. Animals have to die in order for people to eat their flesh. Seeing a wrapped package of pork chops in the grocery store seems far removed from the slaughter of a hog. Killing helpless animals is tragic, but their meat is sustenance for consumers.

Prayer

Father of us all, every meal is a sign of your love for us. Bless us and bless our food, and help us to give you glory each day, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

Ta-Chen Wu

The Grace Note

The Law stepped in to amplify the failure, but where sin increased, grace multiplied even more.

Romans 5:20 CEB

Recently, Pastor Ginger preached a sermon on grace reflecting on the “grace note,” a musical term which means “a soft, swift note played before a melodic note.” This was a reminder how foundational grace is to our lives, the Wesleyan tradition, and the Christian faith.

It is a really simple concept—a universal concept, but we often make it difficult and forget about its universality. While our attendance in worship and faith practices is important, the apostle Paul reminds us that God’s grace is the foundation. All the good stuff in our lives is there because of God’s grace and, when we’re able, our willingness to accept it.

I feel the need to better define grace and the fact that we can’t do anything to earn it. I will defer to Dr. Paul Tillich and his famous sermon titled, *You Are Accepted*.

Sometimes ... a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: “You are accepted. You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name which you do not know. Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later. Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!” If that happens to us, we experience grace. After such an experience, we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed. In that moment, grace conquers sin, and reconciliation bridges the gulf of estrangement.

In the light of this grace we perceive the power of grace in our relation to others and to ourselves. We experience the grace of being able to look frankly into the eyes of another, the miraculous grace of reunion of life with life.

Chuck Kluepfel

Making and Answering the Call

As a prisoner of the Lord, I urge you: Live a life that is worthy of the calling He has graciously extended to you. Be humble. Be gentle. Be patient. Tolerate one another in an atmosphere thick with love. Make every effort to preserve the unity the Spirit has already created, with peace binding you together.

Ephesians 4:1-3 The Voice

As a child, I accompanied my father to the telephone company where he was general manager. When opening the door to the switch room, my ears were met with what sounded like hail hitting a tin roof. This sound came from the clattering switches of pulses being generated from phone numbers being dialed. Who knew that making a telephone call would create such dissonance?

Actress Lily Tomlin, who portrayed TV's iconic telephone operator Ernestine would say, "We are not bound by the city, state, or federal regulations. We are omnipotent." That quote is all too real today. The jarring clash of dissonance is occurring in workplaces, legislative chambers, and religious institutions, and it is coming from God's children. It can evoke emotions of anxiety, hopelessness, fear, and disappointment. These emotions collide with our desire to do good. To avoid the discord, we may find ourselves tuning out.

Gentleness, grace, and patience can release the tension created the dissonance. By becoming "thick" with love, we're able to answer the call to feed the hungry, house the homeless, advocate for those who have been marginalized, model civility in the community square, and embrace all of God's children. Or, in the words of Ernestine, "How may I, in all humble servitude, be of assistance?"

Drew Williams

Life is Difficult

Blessed are those who are meek, they will inherit the earth.

Beatitude 3, Matthew 5:5

“Life is difficult.” is the lead sentence of M. Scott Peck’s classic work, *The Road Less Travelled*. It came to mind as I thought about Foundry’s Lenten theme, Faith Remastered: Dissonance. At the same time, the third Beatitude also came to mind. What two statements could be more dissonant?

Peck’s lead sentence is no less true today than when it was written in 1978. His opening goes on to say “...once we truly see this truth, we transcend it.” (p. 15) How do we get to this point?

Unlike the world’s view that meek means weak, the contrary is true. Meekness requires courage, patience and long-suffering as God’s will eventually is made known. As Paul states in his letter to the Romans (5:3-5), “We... boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” In this light, difficulties take on new meaning.

Transcending difficulties is a daily discipline of remastering my faith through seeing scripture like the Third Beatitude manifest in life—mine and others’. Health, family, and career difficulties resolve themselves for the better over time with God’s help. Even potential difficulties, I imagine, can be conquered when I finally turn my anxiety over to God. I trust that God provides. From this perspective, life’s difficulties and the Third Beatitude are not so dissonant.

Prayer:

God, remaster my faith to transform what I believe are difficulties, whether real or imaginary, into strength by trusting You to work on my behalf. Help my unbelief. Keep me open to Your constant, freely-given grace. Amen.

Joe Steller

The Hamster Cage

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Colossians 3:12-14 ESV

Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that people will go to any length to reduce or eliminate the keenly unpleasant experience of reality clashing with what we want to believe. This phenomenon is painfully evident these days in the politics of church and state.

All sides of any issue or policy participate in the dissonance-making. Agreement seems impossible to imagine. The norm is discord. Conflict persists and polar positions remain steadfast. No fact is irrefutable. Instead, we'll reduce the importance, deny, or challenge the veracity of whatever the other side says. We'll find our own sources to prove our positions. We'll master the technique of false equivocation, asking "what about..." situations that divert attention from the question at hand.

We do not see or hear each other's ideas or point of view. We justify, rationalize, and argue what we believe is right. As a result, we are in a constant disquieted state of unsuccessful dissonance reduction. We are hamsters running circles in our squeaky mindset cages.

Of course, changing our own behavior is a way to restore harmony. This definitely is the road less traveled. It's hard to be open to the opposing stance, and doing so is a risk. Our side more likely will see our openness to the other side as a betrayal rather than an act of peacemaking. Yet, isn't this what Jesus asked of us?

Prayer:

Dear Lord, life's dissonance too often spins our minds in unending circles that go nowhere. Help us "put on love" and change the way we bear with one another.

Joanne Steller

Self-portrait

I lived between my heart and my head,
like a married couple who can't get along.

I lived between my left arm, which is swift
and sinister, and my right, which is righteous.

I lived between a laugh and a scowl,
and voted against myself, a two-party system.

My left leg dawdled or danced along,
my right cleaved to the straight and narrow.

My left shoulder was like a stripper on vacation,
my right stood upright as a Roman soldier.

Let's just say that my left side was the organ
donor and leave my private parts alone,

but as for my eyes, which are two shades
of brown, well, Dionysus, meet Apollo.

Look at Eve raising her left eyebrow
while Adam puts his right foot down.

No one expected it to survive,
but divorce seemed out of the question.

I suppose my left hand and my right hand
will be clasped over my chest in the coffin

and I'll be reconciled at last,
I'll be whole again.

Edward Hirsch

"Self-portrait" appears in Edward Hirsch's book *Special Orders* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).
Used by permission of the author.

Reading With My Ears

And Moses came and told the people all the LORD's words... Moses then wrote down all the LORD's words.

Exodus 24:3-4 CEB

Some of us in Foundry's Disciple I class supplement (or sometimes substitute) our Bible reading with online listening to scripture. I've been experimenting with combining the two simultaneously, and while I love feeling linked to an ancient oral tradition through the spoken word, sometimes my brain hurts. You see, my preferred audio dramatized version doesn't correspond to the translation I am reading. When auditory and visual data don't match—even if the message is the same—who doesn't experience dissonance?

The brain tries mightily to make sense of conflicting information it receives, and when it can't, it has several ways to grapple with this uncomfortable state. In my multi-modality scripture example, I could change my behavior by reading and listening to the text separately and then trying to integrate the two. Or I could choose one input over the other—either written or oral. Or I could eliminate the dissonance by purchasing a compatible audio version so I can both read and listen to the same translation. But some days, I realize that what felt like noise or discord yesterday, feels more like a rich “stereo-translation” experience today, and so my experiment continues...

Prayer:

Thank you, dear Lord, for the gift of all my senses through which I absorb not only your word but your world. I am grateful for my brain which tries to “make sense of” the jumble, and yes, even for the disharmony I sometimes find myself in! Help me choose when to avoid or reduce dissonance and know when to embrace its challenge and its richness.

Patricia Elder

Staying Focused

I run straight toward the goal in order to win the prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above.

Philippians 3:14 TEV

Whenever our two oldest grandsons traveled with their mom to visit us in Syracuse, the boys would climb up on the piano bench and play whatever keys their small hands could reach. This was dissonance at its “grandest.” Those young lives were expressing, at least symbolically, the context in which they were growing up and in which we were living. The boys are now in college and finding their way in a very different world than even the nearly 20 years ago when they banged on our piano. If anything, there is more dissonance. We, their grandparents, are living through it as 80 somethings.

It is not just the political dynamics, or the loss of civility, or the disintegration of democratic values, or extreme polarization, or devaluation of humans who are non-white, or lying. It is a world where the demise of civilization as we know it is threatened, if not by the threat of nuclear annihilation then by the rise of global temperatures. While one would be instantaneous the other will be happening over the next dozen decades.

How do we live with the dissonance of today? Do we bury our heads in the sand pretending all is well? Or say, the situation is hopeless, nothing can be done? Or forge ahead toward a vision of a better world, a beloved community, where dissonance focuses on eliminating discrimination and inequality, where all have dignity and worth, where income and opportunity gaps are diminished. This involves staying focused, “keeping our eyes on the prize,” getting beyond negative dissonance, to a goal of Kindom on earth as it is in Heaven.

Hal Garman

Yes, but. . . .

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

2 Timothy 4:8 NIV

Years ago I heard a sermon about death. The pastor remarked that our deaths will be much like unborn babies that resist moving through the birth canal. Why would fetuses want to leave the comfortable and very familiar environment? The preacher concluded that adults are so comfortable in their earthly lives that they can't imagine how great heaven is. Evidently it was a powerful message because I have remembered it 40+ years.

Let's assess. What do I know? Streets in heaven are paved with gold. There are pearly gates at which St. Peter checks admission. God and angels dwell there. The angels have wings; we won't. People I know on earth I will know in heaven. We will hang out. Sounds pretty good, but do I want to give up life on earth for an afterlife in heaven? Maybe yes, maybe no; honestly, I'm not so sure.

I'm double minded. I'm like the reluctant fetus. I want to go to heaven, but I don't want to die. Heaven sounds terrific, but for a couple more decades, maybe three, I prefer the trials and tribulations on earth. It's a serious case of cognitive dissonance. The solution? I need to understand what the scriptures say about heaven. Perhaps then I will say with eager anticipation, "Bye, bye, Earth" and "Hello, St. Peter!"

Prayer:

As I age, Lord, I am thinking more and more about heaven, but it seems I'm holding fast to life here. Give me opportunities to learn more about the heaven that you promised to all Christians. Amen.

Stephen Roberts

I Saw Esau Sitting on a See-Saw

The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.

Zechariah 8:5 NIV



When we can play with the unselfconscious concentration of a child,
this is: art: prayer: love.

—Madeleine L'Engle

Prayer:

*Help me, Lord, to love thee more
Than I have ever loved before,
In my work and in my play,
Be thou with me throughout the day.*

Anonymous

Through My Neighbor's Eyes

Last fall, my partner and I traveled to Israel on a unique ten-day clergy interfaith mission trip. Twenty-five ministers, rabbis and community faith leaders of all backgrounds gathered to visit the holy sites in Jerusalem and across the Galilee region. We met with some of Israel's most renowned religious and thought leaders. At a time when our own American political, religious and cultural landscapes seemed stuck in the quicksand of fear and resentment, we had an opportunity to explore real hope for peaceful dialogue among those of differing beliefs.

The most powerful unscripted moment of the trip took place at Dormition Abbey, located at the foot of the Mount of Olives. It is where Christians mark the Virgin Mary's assumption into heaven. While our group was silently meditating inside Mary's tomb, three women entered and began singing in beautiful harmony in their native language. Except for the words "Ave Maria" none of us understood the lyrics of their song. In our discomfort, we stayed silent, averting our eyes from their witness.

Suddenly, they started singing a chorus in English. It was a hymn every one of us instantly recognized. We were Protestants, Catholics, Evangelicals and Jews. We were straight, gay, married and single. We were black and white, older and younger, affluent and less so. We were strangers from different backgrounds, but in that moment we became one and instantly joined in, singing, "This is my story this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long..."

Our collective voices echoed throughout the tomb, and in that holy place I felt a holy moment. Fellow traveler Rabbi Alex Lazarus-Klein poetically expressed how I felt.

I too felt my heart tugged and for a moment was carried by the arms of angels to another place, and for a moment I could see the world through my neighbor's eyes.

Peter M. Kornis

My Mother's Song

Pass me not, O gentle savior. Hear my humble cry.

Oh Lord, I can remember my mother singing this hymn while hanging the wash on the clothesline in our backyard in Coffeyville, Kansas. As a child, I didn't know the problem or concern that prompted her singing, but I knew she summoned God when confronted with circumstances beyond her understanding. Mom knew God could make a way out of no way. However, despite witnessing her faith in action, I find myself living in constant anxiety when facing life's challenges. Suddenly, bigoted language is accepted as normal speech. National leaders denigrate and disrespect people because of their country of origin. Racial tolerance has devolved into segregation and economic isolation. How can 50 years of hard fought social progress be erased by the whims of one selfish individual?

Just a closer walk with thee...

Oh Lord, hear my song. I want to make a contribution, both physically and spiritually, to counteract the onslaught of nativism, greed, and active racism. Lord, take my hand and walk with me as you did with my mother. Repackage your love and life through me.

Precious Lord, take my hand.

Oh Lord...guide me...support me...take my hand. Grant me the conviction of my mother's faith. May I sing her song of "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine".

Prayer:

Divine one, it is beyond me to understand the complexities of this world and how You move supremely throughout time. Help me to stay grounded in Your love, to pray without ceasing, to remember the power of the resurrection, and to stay 'woke' so I can be an instrument of Your peace. Amen.

Paula Blair

Being a PK

My father was a Lutheran pastor. It was not easy being a preacher's kid (PK). Church members would report to my father that I had not worn a hat to church, or that I was wearing nail polish. (This was in the 1960s.)

PKs were expected to participate in most church activities. I taught Sunday School, sang in the choir, played the organ, and was the leader of the youth group. PKs were expected to be role models for ideal, virtuous behavior.

Here was the dissonance: no one was following my lead! The straw that broke the camel's back, so to speak, was one night on a hayride. I sat up front with the driver, leading hymns. The others were fooling around on the hay. That did it! At college, I told people that my father was "a public speaker." And since then, I am more interested in "grass roots" activities at the church.

But seriously, I experienced some real dissonance earlier, when I was about 12- or 13-years old. My father had just returned from a funeral and we were all sitting around the lunch table. He said, "You know, I lie at funerals." YOU WHAT?!? "I don't believe that there is marriage in heaven, but I tell the bereaved that they will meet their spouses again in heaven, because I believe that my job as a pastor is to comfort people in their bereavement."

I could deal with this dissonance because of my love for my father—for his interpretation of the scriptures, for his care and concern for his congregants, and for his honesty. Life is full of difficult choices and apparent contradictions, so we must learn not to judge others too quickly until we get the full picture.

Ella Cleveland

Fratricide

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Genesis 4:8 NIV

When my older brother and I were seven and four we enjoyed climbing. One day we threw a rope over a tree branch and tied one end of the rope to a steel bucket filled with walnuts. I pulled the rope so the bucket rose up to my brother who was perched in the tree. He gripped the bail and coaxed me to stand directly beneath the dangling pail. He let go. It crashed down on the top of my head.

Our father carried me to our car for a swift ride to our doctor's office, where I was stitched, plastered and released. My mother, grateful I was alive, predicted that parting my hair would henceforth be difficult. The next day I shared the story with playmates in the neighborhood. They examined the dent in the bucket and we counted the blood drops on the sidewalk.

I occasionally think about the event, usually when parting my hair. I'm pretty sure my older brother tried to kill me. He doesn't see it that way. He had been the center of the universe. When I came along, he was jealous and wanted me gone, but I survived. Interestingly, our family never discussed the "accident". It was I who became the keeper of the tale, and when I told it at family gatherings, it was received with silence. Draw your own conclusion.

Prayer:

*Okay, God, my brother and I are old men. Bygones are bygones.
He's in my prayers. Amen.*

Anonymous

Harmony

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

James 3:1-2 NIV

Harmony, peace and joy are very important to me. I wish and try to avoid disharmony at all times. I learned this from my grandmother, who is one of the kindest people I have ever known. When I was a child getting off the school bus in rural Fauquier County, Virginia, and walking up the hill to our home, Grandmother was always there to receive me with a hot meal. She had so much wisdom and often said to me, “It’s not what you say, it’s the way you say it.”

I believe that God wants us to live in harmony and be kind to each other. Kindness is a gift from God, and we should be supportive of kind people. I honestly believe that it is so important that we should make an effort to try to get along with each other and avoid confrontation as much as possible. At times words can be painful. It is my humble opinion that the tongue is the most dangerous part of the body. In the Book of James, Chapter 3, emphasis is placed on the tongue. The manner of how we speak to each other is of great significance. We should be aware of how we approach people with a sharp tongue. The sting can be devastating. There are some questions that I would never think of asking people, since I prefer to mind my business.

My grandmother was a role model who played a very important role in my life. An outstanding cook and an excellent seamstress, she was married at 17 to Papa who was 24. I learned from her how important harmony is in getting through life. It was Grandmother who taught me The Lord’s Prayer.

Prayer:

Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Joan Williams

Life's Symphony

I loved my best friend, and our lives were truly intertwined. We worked for the same company for years. We met volunteering at Meridian Hill Park. Our apartments were down the hall from each other. Then, in 2002, my best friend killed himself. I was devastated, wondering why and questioning what I could have done differently.

To cope with my grief, I fell back on my faith in God, my dear friends at Foundry, and the caring staff here. It was a long, slow process to overcome the pain and sadness. In time, I started to feel better even though my life had changed forever.

This tragic loss changed my outlook on life. I love my friends and family more. I reach out to strangers, even if it is to just say hello, smile, or nod. And I am far more observant of people's behavior. I no longer live with my head in the clouds thinking that everyone is okay. Life is hard and I now recognize that some people are going through tough times and need a little extra love.

And for those who live in perpetual self-absorption or social malaise, I worry. We all need to wake up to the hungry world surrounding us. People are starving for connection, validation, a positive voice, love.

Life's soundtrack is cacophony. To calm the noise, love more, listen, give, compliment many, help everyone you can. Start looking outward beyond self-interest and fix the things in your life that help you do so. Observe the people around you and smile. Shake a stranger's hand. Hug a friend. Call up an old college roommate. Send out Christmas cards. Turn life's noise into a symphony of love and caring.

Love is the point to life's journey, and joy is its outcome. Embrace it.

Bill McLeod

Ground Zero

Be strong and of good courage...he will not fail thee.

Deuteronomy 31:6 KJV

After my husband Tom's passing last August, I took a trip through the Hudson Valley. I reconnected with a couple I'd met in 2008 and spent extra days exploring New York. The panoramic mountain views inspired us.

Ground Zero was included in our city tour. A deputy policewoman, present at 9/11, led our group. With firm, positive tone and determination, she narrated stories of instant decision making: jumping out an upper story Twin Tower window or being consumed by flames. Sometimes determined figures joined hands before jumping. She narrated heroic rescues and plenty of grief. Our group left roses in the wall.

Later my friends and I visited Ellis Island, entering the enclave as millions of immigrants had. There, they had been intensely questioned and medically examined before taking on the new language and culture of their adopted country.

The contrasting situations were summed up for me, inscribed on a carryall bag I'd bought at Ground Zero: Resilience. Renewal. Hope. It's my inspiration and companion.

Diane Seeger

Remembering Aunt Martha

Jesus taught them to pray, ‘... Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.’

Matthew 6:10 KJV

My Aunt Martha lived a life of faith dedicated to Christian service. She taught nursing in Vietnam, witnessing the horrors of war. She provided care in a South African township at the ending of apartheid. She was the first geriatric nurse practitioner In North Carolina. As a Doctor of Divinity, she provided spiritual support for the dying and their caretakers. She advocated for and helped people to achieve a good death in a culture that avoids the ending of life at great cost.

However, the thing Aunt Martha most wanted, a child of her own, eluded her. I remember vividly the great dissonance—sadness and grief—as she struggled to become a mother and to be a good stepmother to the children of her husband. The relationships with her stepchildren were fraught with conflict as her drive to motherhood failed.

Aunt Martha’s life is the story of humanity. We live in a broken world, yet we have a longing for things to be right. This is why we feel dissonance. We want so badly for the chord to resolve. In the same way, we long to see God’s peace on earth, but we only get glimpses.

For my aunt, resolution did come. Her stepdaughter Caroline was a steadfast caretaker at the end of Aunt Martha’s life, as she suffered from Alzheimer’s and a stroke. Her stepdaughter helped make sure that she had a good death, as Martha had made possible for so many others. In her death, Martha was surrounded by the love of a daughter she had always longed for.

Prayer:

Jesus, bring the gospel alive, to give us hope that our longing will come to an end. May we see God’s kingdom come. Amen.

Camilla Taft Hicks

God's Calling to Love Each Other

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

Isaiah 1:17 NIV

Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt.

Exodus 22:21 NIV

Many immigrant families are “multi-status” families, those with members of different immigration statuses. They are particularly at risk of being separated, as was the case of the Garcias whose story was told in *The Washington Post* on January 16, 2018:

With two immigration agents hovering nearby, Jorge Garcia pulled his family close for one final hug near security gates at Detroit Metropolitan Airport. His wife and 15-year-old daughter sobbed in his arms. His 12-year-old son stood stoically. Garcia was silent. Soon after, the 39-year-old landscaper from Lincoln Park, Michigan, boarded a plane bound for Mexico, deported to his home country on Monday after three decades in the United States...‘It’s just a nightmare,’ his wife, Cindy Garcia, told the *Detroit News* after watching her husband walk through the airport scanners. ‘You can’t even put it into words how it feels.’

We as people of faith are called to love and support our neighbors. We are called to nurture our communities and our families and to love all as God loves us. The Garcia’s story is just one in the national tragedy surrounding our government’s strident immigration policy. Imagine how you would feel if you were separated from your spouse, father, mother, siblings.

Prayer and Meditation:

God, we pray for the Garcia family. May you be a comfort to them and give them strength and fearlessness as they endure separation. May we all have compassion for any family pulled apart in the dissonance of current immigration policy. Help us answer your call to love and help them in any way we can. Amen.

Ed Crump

Friendly, Discordant Road Maps

Jordan walked in the church two days after Donald Trump was elected president. Welcoming him back to Foundry seemed to ease my inner emotional volcano which kept spitting out heat and denial. We swapped hellos; then reality of the election came up.

In a kind, calming voice Jordan said, “Well, if you look at modern electorate history, most presidential elections swing toward the opposite party of the exiting administration. It’s an historical pattern playing out.”

His perspective delivered more than timely insight; but it took me a second to realize what it was. As we talked more, it dawned on me I was sharing this conversation with a person who inspired trust. For over a year Jordan would visit the church to access our community clothing closet. We would talk pretty regularly but more on a surface level. This deeper exchange now was comforting, and harmonized well with my inner cravings for solace. It was the substance of friendship.

Then a few weeks went by that brought piercing November chill. My husband and I were running to dinner at a local cafe. As we opened the cafe’s front door, a familiar voice said: “Hey Jill, how are you?”

It was Jordan rising up from his bedroll on the sidewalk. We hugged and talked. He and my husband shook hands introducing themselves to each other. We offered respective “good nights” as Jordan lay down to rest... traffic whipping by on Connecticut Ave.

Our conversation immediately came back to mind from a few weeks prior. Memories of comfort from that post-election talk now stood in stark opposition to the very different levels of comfort existing in our respective lives. The moment evoked a ton of humility for how God blesses us with friendship—the unforeseen and sometimes discordant layers of which reveal a road map for how friends can learn from and care for one another.

Jill Foster

Prophecy and Reflection

We welcome the hard work of prophecy... We are mindful that prophets examine themselves closely before sharing their message with the world.

Foundry's Core Values

Recently, Pastor Ginger talked in a sermon about what it meant to do “the hard work of prophecy,” one of our core values. “The strength of that witness is measured by how much our actions match what we say we value,” she said.

In my mind, self-examination is a critical part of leadership, and prophecy is a form of leadership. Who wants to follow a leader, or a prophet, who says one thing but does another? We all know that Jesus frequently called out “hypocrites”—literally, play actors—showing off as they pray, fast or tithe; pointing out the specks in their brother’s eye with logs in their own; or honoring dead prophets while persecuting living ones. And that’s just in the Book of Matthew.

True self-examination also gives us credibility and integrity. Before we declare to the world that Black Lives Matter, we must ensure that we as a church and as individuals live by that creed. Before we tell the entire United Methodist Church that it must welcome all, we must see who, intentionally or not, we are excluding. Our words gain great strength when matched with example.

That’s why, I think, Matthew, Mark and Luke describe Jesus’ time of testing with Satan in the desert. Jesus strengthened himself for ministry by testing himself. Like other prophets, he reflected on their own choices and how they squared with God’s will.

We don’t necessarily need a trip to the desert—literally or figuratively—to examine ourselves. But we need to be honest with ourselves, and honest with God, before our words can ring true.

Prayer:

Lord, where there is discord in our lives, help us to reconcile who we are and who You call us to be, so that we may do Your work in this world. Amen.

Dan Vock

Coming to the Parson

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

James 1:17 NIV



Coming to the Parson (1870) by John Rogers (1829-1904)

The Smithsonian American Art Museum has on display *Coming to the Parson* in Luce Foundation Center. The sculpture is displayed under glass. The label states: “John Rogers sold more than eight thousand copies of the group *Coming to the Parson*, making it by far his most successful piece. This group was particularly favored as a wedding present...”

Foundry UMC has its own copy of *Coming to the Parson* on display in a window well by the south balcony door, where the painted plaster is negatively affected by ambient air and pollutants. Imagine a plinth in which the objet d’art could be properly preserved and displayed. It would be on view for all to enjoy. Everyone, perhaps Pre-Cana participants especially, will appreciate the story it tells.

Prayer:

Lord, let us be good stewards of all things gifted to the church, regardless of monetary value. Amen.

Stephen Roberts

The Lockout

I can do all things through him who strengthens me...

Proverbs: 3:5 KJV

My computer locked me out cold—no new e-mails for 24 hours at Thanksgiving. I felt isolated and fear of the unknown. My husband Tom had always resolved computer problems. Now he was gone.

Early next morning, with great determination, I dialed the Apple Help Desk. Over the next four days of two- to three-hour calls, I learned it was a password problem and that customer service reps have unique personalities, skills and rapport. I would not establish good teamwork with all of them.

The first challenge was the password question, which was the name of my school. Which school? No response was correct. “Change the question,” I said. We finally gained access.

The rep now shared my computer screen. With his instructions, attempting many strategies, I followed his red arrow dancing across my computer screen. I discovered changing a password is tricky: creating sequences, jotting them down, testing the system successfully, securing the site with updates.

My learning curve was complete. The weight of the world lifted off my shoulders. I was up and running again.

Prayer:

Lord: Grant me the patience to work through challenges in my life.

Diane Seeger

Keeping an Active Paddle

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.

Isaiah 43:2 NIV

Living in unrelenting dissonance feels like I'm navigating back-to-back class five river rapids. I found insights on that terrifying but exhilarating feeling in an Outdoor 101 article on kayaking. (Mark Quest, Trails.com)

Always keep an active paddle blade in the water...do not rest and let the river carry you along. One could drown in the river of today's uncivil discourse and onslaught of negativity. The struggle of just staying upright can be daunting; it would be easier to shut down and give up. Yet, surrendering to the turbulence brings no relief. It means losing sight of a destination beyond mere survival. I want a peaceful state that is better for having had the discordant experience. Keep paddling toward hope. Summon the energy to carry on.

Small corrective strokes will keep the kayak pointed in the right direction. When navigating huge challenges there is an urge to go big toward a revolutionary fix. That move flows straight into the vortex of over-thinking, frustration, and eventual inaction or burn-out. The next best step is to take a breather. Walk outside. Weed the garden. Vacuum. Pray. Meditate. Open some space in my mind and heart so the way forward becomes clear.

Keeping the paddle blade in the water will also allow you to brace faster to prevent capsizing. Navigating life's dissonance requires a resilient state of readiness. Mine comes with a spiritual toolbox that faith helped develop. Use the tools. Call on God. Listen. Discern.

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, for being with me. When discordance thunders down river to threaten my stability, it is an opportunity to course correct. Help me take the best next stroke. Guide me toward Your still waters.

Joanne Steller

Boundless Love

Offer yourself this day to faithful trust. Even if the world seems to swirl with chaos, even as we continue to observe and experience systematic oppression of neighbors because of the way we love, the language we speak, our countries of origin, our gender, or the color of our skin—trust this day that God still moves with you. Trust this day that God’s love cannot be bound, kept out, silenced, or stopped. And trust this day that God is with you in all things.

Prayer:

For those who lift their eyes to the hills—
Who ask “from where will my help come?”
Our help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

May we remember:

God’s love knows no bounds

For anyone who fears a knock at the door,
remind us God will not let your foot be
moved.
The One who keeps you will not slumber.
The One who watches over you,
will neither slumber nor sleep.

May we remember:

God’s love knows no bounds

The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Holy One stands against evil, against
injustice, against persecution, and division.

May we remember:

God’s love knows no bounds

The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
Created in God’s own image, we’ve been
instructed to love God and one another.
But now we act through walls, raids,
private prisons, corporate profit,
deportations, the destruction of families.
These are failures of community.
These are failures to love.

May we remember:

God’s love knows no bounds

The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.
Be present Lord, in the hearts of those
who have power to create policy.
Be present Lord in the lives of those who fear.

May we all remember: God’s love knows no bounds.

Rev. Ben Roberts,
Director of Social Justice Ministries

Ben’s prayer is adapted from Psalm 121

Responding to Dissonance

To prepare to write this devotional, I've been reading about cognitive dissonance and how people respond when reality conflicts with their world view. According to Wikipedia, one way to avoid the dissonance of wanting what is difficult to obtain is to devalue it in our minds even if what we want is positive. The gym isn't so important as long as I walk right? And when faced with facts that discredit our beliefs, we discredit the facts instead. This is true for liberals and conservatives.

Adjusting our beliefs can be positive. Our society emphasizes always buying bigger and better. But I have owned homes in the suburbs before and I drive past big homes now and thank God I don't own one. Give me my one-bedroom apartment with little maintenance! Am I'm devaluing what is difficult, or rejecting our consumer culture? I think the key is knowing yourself and being as honest as you can about what you truly want or need. OK, OK, I'll go to the gym!

The hardest thing, though, is to drop a long-held belief critical to your faith. Peter reports about his own struggles in Acts 11 when the early church was deciding to accept Gentiles. In his vision, Peter resists the break from Jewish laws:

But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.'

Acts 11: 8-9 ESV

Later when the Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit, Peter is ready to change his mind. What's Peter doing when God breaks through to him? He's praying. He's listening to God. That's key!

Prayer:

Dear Lord, help me be as honest with myself as possible and to listen for Your word!

Joanne Garlow

Being Transformed

Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind.

Romans 12:2 TEV

For several years before moving to the DC area, I shared a lot of time with two men who had grown up in a poor all black neighborhood south of downtown Syracuse. They were in their 50s and retired, one from being a lineman for the power company and the other from a life of mistakes and imprisonments. They became best friends following a fight in 4th grade. Both were boxers, one a national Golden Glove champion. When we met, they were looking for a way to “put back” into their old neighborhood. Kids were killing each other. They wanted to do something to curb it. Their dream was to start a boxing center. A Christian Methodist Episcopal pastor shared the same dream. We teamed up to enable this to happen as part of a community wide program to end youth violence in one of the poorest census tracts in the U.S.

As I helped with fund raising, purchasing a building, organizing a 501-c-3, and a board of directors, I was plagued by an awareness of Jan’s and my comfortable life style compared to theirs and people who came to the center. The dissonance for me was unresolvable. Today, 15 years later, as we work through the Gaithersburg Beloved Community Initiative in a poor neighborhood, I feel the same dissonance.

Romans 12:2 calls on me to allow God to keep on transforming my mind. This helps me get through the dissonance of the inequities, enabling me to move beyond guilt to using my talents and resources to enable people caught in poverty and suppression to take control of their lives and destiny.

Hal Garman

Tuning Back In

Most mornings I skip news articles with Trumping headlines.
One annual list of most harmful tweets—that's an education.
Bless reporters who slog through the barrage to pen a jewel.
Blah, blah and flip flop deserve earplugs. Not listening,
I tune into Mahjong, one way to block out the bilge.

Dissonance composed by a skilled musician is my wakeup call.
I can't just move to Canada. No more wakeful wondering.
No meandering worry. No sleeping through alarms.
Discord and dissension are a difference of opinion.
God's Grace pulls me back to love God and all creation.

Prayer:

*Help me Lord attend to the bountiful seeds of Grace you so
freely offer.*

Jeanette Barker

Remastering a Personal Journey of Faith

The following eight lines complete the full version of the familiar Serenity Prayer:

Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time,
accepting hardships as the pathway to peace.

Taking, as Christ did, his sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it.

Trusting that God will make all things right
if I surrender to His will.

That I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him forever in the next.

Rarely is the full version of the prayer recited or read in 12-step recovery meetings. One day, I stumbled upon the complete version and realized that through hardships in my life I am ultimately finding a pathway to peace. Last year around this time I was diagnosed with Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension, PAH. My heart was working too hard to keep oxygen flowing into my lungs. As one doctor stated, “Your lung arteries are collapsing”. This was devastating. The only treatment for me was a 24/7 IV pump therapy.

Throughout this therapy, trusting that “God will make all things right” I have been challenged to surrender to His will. God has placed this dissonance in my life as a way of allowing me, challenging me, and forcing me to be “reasonably happy in this life” while guaranteeing me of supreme happiness in the next life!

My prayer for you: **Psalm 139**

John Harden

That Most Beautiful Easter Chord

At about three, Jesus cried out with a loud shout, ‘My God, My God, why have you left me?’

Matthew 27:46 CEB

“You know it is ‘dissonance’ if you have a strong desire to cover your ears.” That was just one of many examples provided to engender discussion and thought among Lenten Devotional volunteers. But I believe I have a better word for that description: Noise. There is a world of difference between dissonance and noise. My tenor friends sitting near me in choir practice occasionally experience this difference firsthand.

For me, dissonance in music often evokes feelings of mystery and a sense of awe. I sit up. I listen. It may be discomfiting. Or I may experience a unique sense of beauty in it. Sometimes dissonance resolves into a chord more comfortable to the 21st Century ear. But sometimes it doesn’t... it just slowly fades to silence.

As I thought about this year’s Lenten theme, I now realize how dissonance courses its way through the entirety of the Bible: Noah. Job. David. Daniel. Paul. Thomas.

And Judas.

But arguably, the greatest dissonance in the Bible is found in Mark and Matthew: Jesus—in anguish and pain—believes that God “hath forsaken” Him. How can this be? The mystery of dissonance hangs heavy. The stone seals the tomb. Two nights pass. Dissonance remains. But this is anything but noise. On the third day—

and announced in modern times with trumpets—this mysterious, anguished dissonance ultimately resolves to that most beautiful, resonant Easter chord.

Prayer:

Oh God, help us to separate all of the noise in our lives from the meaningful mysteries of dissonance. Help us look forward to the day that dissonance eventually resolves and ponder the mystery of dissonance that remains. Amen.

Michael Lawson

Seeds, Death and Easter

Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal.

John 24:24-25 MSG

When I was a kid, my mom showed me how to take the seeds from flowers, like zinnias and marigolds, letting a few of the blooms go to seed, then storing the seeds for the next year. It was fun to start the seeds growing inside in the early spring and then plant the seedlings in the flower beds later in the spring. We would store a few seeds like that each year and keep the process going for the flowers my mom liked. Sometimes we would forget to plant the seeds until the following year, and they still turned into flowers even after two years! Pretty amazing for a kid.

The oldest known viable seed (now a plant) is a Judean Date Palm from Masada in Israel, about 2,000 years old, so seeds can last a long time. Seeds don't really do much. It's only when they are planted they turn into something wonderful—a flower that brings joy, a date palm that bears sweet fruit.

Prayer:

Today I die to self and let my life go to You, Lord, in reckless love and abandon. I trust You to multiply my life for the Kin-dom and all eternity.

Meditation:

What part of my life may I be holding onto too tightly, such that it is being diminished?

John Godshalk

Resurrection

I carried my cross through Jerusalem
Up the Mount of Olives
Over the steps of the Via Delarosa
And onto the hill of Golgatha.
As a Jew I was carried gently from my resting place
in the cave,
Anointed with oil by the loving hands
Of the women and ushered into
Eternal life

This is not my story, but yours
And in another place I may have feared its retelling
Dreaded its consequences
But like with a trusted friend
I see it now in your eyes

So I too carry the cross
Letting its weight settle on my shoulders
Where my story and yours
Can rest and be reborn
Into something precious
And filled with divine goodness
And love

Prayer:

Dear God, help us to always see and hear beyond the echo chambers that plague Your call for peaceful dialogue, and to see the world in a new way—to hear voices unfiltered by prejudices, to allow our minds to understand someone else's experience and their truth, and to open our hearts so that we might build bridges of respect, connection and love.

Peter M. Kornis

Adapted from a poem by Rabbi Alex Lazarus-Klein

Yell

Sometimes you must yell—not sing, not shout, but, repeat after me, YELL. The need comes out of pain, fear, anger. It can come at any time, in any place, to anyone. It can ruin a day at the least, or a lifetime at worst.

Yelling can be alarming or annoying, depending upon who may be listening. I shall always be grateful to the neighbor who heard my yell and saw what was happening one beautiful autumn morning years ago. An attempted car-jacking was underway.

Yelling hurts the ears. It disturbs the atmosphere. It rearranges everything for minutes at the least, a lifetime at the worst. Could I yell (curse) and throw the car into reverse that fast again? Who knows?

My hope is to try to do for others what a neighbor did for me. She followed the only sound I could imagine on that beautiful morning.

Barbara Slate

New Life

Neglect not the gift within thee.

Timothy 4:14 KJV

We rebel against the structure in our lives, yet many of us need it. We rebel against a clock ticking our day away while we attempt to race against time. We rebel against all the projects we must do in one day, one weekend, one week, yet fritter away time we'll never win back again.

Prioritize, structure your day, the experts say—what fun is that? Yet planning our time awards us more time for exploring what's most meaningful in our lives whether it's more time spent with our children, our spouses, creative hours with art in galleries, musical concerts, traveling the world, or with the written word.

What attracts you? Explore old interests you set aside—are they still relevant? Try a new class in a field you've been curious about but never explored. Volunteer at your favorite museum. Question. Let God guide you to new heights this year. Be inspired. Try a new path.

Prayer:

Lord: Guide me in exploring new windows to the world.

Diane Seeger

Weeds

"No," he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest."

Matthew 13:29-30 NIV



"Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them." —A. A. Milne

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, for allowing me to see the beauty in everything and everyone. Amen.

Ta-Chen Wu



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