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Reflections on a Pandemic

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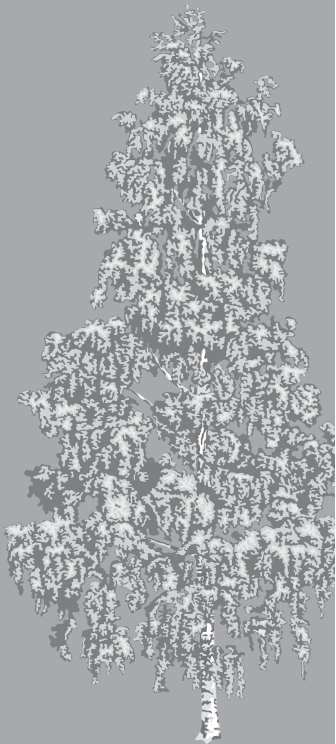
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ABSTRACT:

This provides a personal ethical reflection on issues raised during the Covid-19 pandemic and racial justice movements and how these themes connect to the themes of hope, destruction, chaos, and resurrection as depicted in the Synoptic Gospels, particularly the Gospel of Mark.



Reflections on a Pandemic

by Leah Wakefield

We are living in this pattern of destruction and creation. What is hidden is being manifest; what was secretive and ignored is illuminated. The pandemic gradually reveals racial inequities in society: those in poor minority communities are more likely to contract and die from COVID; parents in these communities likely do not have the privilege of staying home from work; their kids, who are already at an unconscionable disadvantage at school suddenly no longer having access to their schools' amenities- two daily meals, showers, adults who love them, education tools like computers, the list goes on. Concurrently with the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States faces an additional pandemic of racism. The death of George Floyd thrust these issues into the spotlight in a new way. I would like to think most people were aware of the systemic racism, but we turned a blind eye to the unspoken horror of it. Now it is in the light of day.

The COVID-19 pandemic reveals tenuous housing situations. Those at risk of losing their homes either benefited from rent forgiveness or had to move; those who were already homeless found themselves at an increased risk of exposure to a

deadly virus if they went to a shelter or if they did not; those who lived paycheck-to-paycheck were laid off, with a measly \$1,200 in the spring of 2020 which they had to stretch until the \$600 survival check came in the fall; those who could not afford healthcare before certainly cannot now that they have lost their jobs or contracted a novel virus. We saw a moment of progress and solidarity when the riots tore through Minneapolis and hotels gave people in need rooms for free. We speculated that this maybe was the beginning of the end of the housing crisis. But this, too, succumbed to death and destruction.

The COVID-19 pandemic also reveals the lack of protections for people with underlying health conditions or those who are otherwise medically vulnerable. Being reared by a medically vulnerable adult I have lived my whole life the way many have had to begin to live theirs these last few months. By the time I was three, I knew when I came in the house, I took off my shoes and immediately washed my hands; this is how I learned to sing my ABCs. When I was sick, we converted my bedroom into an isolation room: meals were left outside my door, the vents were sealed, everyone donned surgical masks, and we avoided face-to-face contact, in an effort to prevent my mom from contracting whatever illness I had, lest she go into renal failure. I was 10, 12, 22, and every age in between wearing a surgical mask 24/7 (including sleeping) until my symptoms were gone for 24 hours. Every protection the CDC recommends to protect against COVID-19 (masking, distancing, washing hands, avoiding crowds, not shaking hands, etc.) is second nature to me, and I never think twice about doing any of these to protect my mom. Now, however, people still refuse to wear a mask demonstrating a lack of consideration for others. Our society does not accept or support those with chronic, debilitating, and/or immunocompromising conditions.

With the calls for justice this summer and the quarantine came hope and emotional trauma; together, the last year has created tense, volatile situations because what was hidden has been revealed. The Gospel of Mark is relevant now more than ever. Where is the resurrection in these situations? The resurrection is fulfilled through the people cleaning Minneapolis after the unrest, those who are checking on neighbors, those who *are* wearing a mask and staying home when they are sick, those who are welcoming the homeless into their hotels and their literal and metaphorical backyards, the doctors,

nurses, and every frontline and essential worker who has sacrificed so much for us- occasionally including losing their lives. Now, with the vaccines rolling out, becoming more widely available, we are experiencing a resurrection and a sense of hope that, to me, seems one of the most profound of the last year. We are living through a nonstop tidal wave of death and destruction coexisting with resurrection and creation. This is the Gospel of Mark.

