

Together

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Revelation

You come to our door masked, carrying bags of food to us. We need food to live. Your voice is kind. How old are you? You aren't young. You risk your life. How much do you get paid? Do you have health insurance if you get sick? Who are you? I'm ashamed that I never really noticed you before. Not in the same way as now. I see differently now. May this new perception stay with me until I die. You are an essential worker that makes all of our lives function. You are a human being with your own life too. Somehow, paradoxically, your masked face at my door reveals your humanity, your vulnerability, your heroism.

We are living in apocalyptic times. And by that I don't mean end times. Apocalypse, as I mentioned earlier, in Greek is a word, a verb, that means to uncover, reveal, lay bare, disclose. It's a word about possibilities. To be sure, it's a harsh word, weighty, frightening even. "It's about uncovering something we'd just as soon keep hidden. It's not an allowance to indulge in other worldly fixation, but rather an injunction to pay closer attention to the world around us. Apocalypse is meant to bring us to our senses, allowing us a sobering, and usually painful glimpse of what is, and of what is possible in the new life we build from the ashes of the old" ... so writes Kathleen Norris.

What is being uncovered? What is being revealed in this apocalyptic year? Whether we are 20 or 90, we are learning so fast, so furiously, so profoundly in this year of our life. We're being shaped in unimaginable ways... with God's grace, our hearts are growing stronger, wiser, more open rather than hardening, shriveling, despoiling...

In your home what is being laid bare? Some of us are coming to hard truths about ourselves, our families, our marriages. Counselors are working harder than they ever have. God bless their work...

More and more are returning to religion. This is not surprising, because religion, the best of it, deals in ultimate concern, not to mention the community it provides. We're coming face to face with what really matters in life.

A more thoughtful consumerism is immersing. May it last... We don't need another outfit or tech toy, but we so want our neighborhood restaurant and garden store to survive. What's the phrase? Buy local or bye local. We don't need to mark off every experience on our bucket list, but we do so want our favorite theaters and museums and music venues to survive. And we need all of the public spaces to thrive, the parks and walkways, the post office and public library. All of these communal spaces that we've so taken for granted, we can see clearly now how much they add to our lives. Not surprising then, not surprising at all to read that this has been a year of unprecedented generosity from Minnesotans. Rather than pocketing or investing all of that stimulus money, those of us who don't need it, are giving it away, both to feed those who are food insecure and to invest in our local businesses and to support the arts and justice work in our communities. The gift from the government, if not needed, must keep moving....But it's more than just the stimulus money: it's a reassessment of how our money aligns with our ultimate values in life.

What else has been revealed this year? Quite literally, the atmosphere has changed this year... as industrial soot, tailpipe emissions, and greenhouse gases have plummeted to levels not seen in decades. While this cleaner air is due to our pandemic economic slowdown "still it informs scientists understanding of atmospheric chemistry, air pollution and public health for decades to come, while giving policy makers information to fine tune air quality and climate change laws and regulations in hopes of maintaining some of the gains once things open up".

Another revelation in this strange year... how fragile democracy is. It's either living and evolving or it's at risk of dying or being killed off. Democracy is not an institution set in stone. And one of the oldest continuing democracies in the world, ours, is needing a lot of TLC and ALC, assertive loving care.

Perhaps the most profound uncovering, exposing of the truth, has occurred with racism, more pointedly with white supremacy. Not that whites are supreme, of course not!, every child of God is supreme!, but that this demonic and perverse notion of white supremacy has been planted deep down in our culture, institutions, and in our own minds, and we have created stories, the way we tell our history, to uphold this deep seated belief. Somehow the mix of the existential despair of the pandemic and a certain video taken by a certain woman at a certain time at the corner of 38th and Chicago on May 25th, of an unflinchingly brutal lynching out of the life of a human being with black skin by a human being with white skin in uniform, state sponsored terrorism, revealed a truth that people with black bodies have known and white bodies didn't want to believe true, but there it is... you can see his breath being snuffed out.... and somehow this was the moment that released a national and even international uprising, surprising even the most studied historians and social scientists and journalists, at how quickly and widely it spread, to all races.... This outward movement instigated a massive inward movement, a time of introspection, conversation, book studies; The depth of white soul searching is profound, the wrestling with colonial mind, personal histories, generational wealth acquisition like from immigrant homesteading. And words that barely got traction in years past

are now front and center, words like police reform, reparations, land acknowledgement. For some it's not new. For some it's new. But everyone is going deeper. Many of us are reading the book How to be An Anti-Racist, by Public Intellectual Ibram X Kendi. Will you also commit to the 40-day Lenten practice, especially you who are white, that our church is offering through the denomination?? ... But it's not just individuals: Institutions are engaging in deep soul searching and change... Exposing the truth, we are... Perhaps as much as anything, the way we're telling the story of our nation is changing, and so our self-understanding... Which will in turn affect our future... We, who are white, are tapping into a deep sadness and rage as we learn more about what was obscured, about the reconstruction... what the hell happened when the federal government pulled out of the south and the voting of blacks dropped precipitously and the practice of lynching rose exponentially and the seeds were planted of our modern policing culture.?....And why weren't we taught more about the burning of black wall street, also known as the Tulsa race massacre of 1921.? Why were we all fed a softer, more distorted version of the civil war and after?... And what about those confederate monuments erected in the early 1900s to try to reinforce a different telling of the story, a "good people on both sides" kind of telling?! If we could only purge our brains of implicit bias as easily as we can take down those sculptures.... Thank God that with each generation, it's getting diluted... white supremacists mind

Then Jan 6th happened. Apocalyptic images at the capital, not "end times", but an even deeper reveal of the fault lines in our national soul. There really are people who really believe, consciously and willingly, not residually, that the white race is superior and they believe that whites should be at the center of power, and they are terrified that whites will soon be in the minority in this land and so they are terrified by voter rights for everyone, and they are not just a small goofy tribe in the woods of Northern Michigan or Minnesota, or in small towns down south, and they even have elected people in our legislatures and congress and have significant influence in the Republican party, the party of Abraham Lincoln!, and they have a lot more support than many of us realized... and they have guns and terrorist tendencies. But the truth is out. And there is a new equation now. Are they terrified and desperate because the majority of white people, are waking up to the truth of racism in our institutions, our family history, our own minds and regret it! The majority of whites, I believe, though fragile, clueless, and slow to make changes, **if forced to make a choice**—which side are you on?—would walk firmly to the side with people of all races not to the side with people who believe whites should reign supreme on this earth. We know that very child is a supreme child of God. We know we cannot have a democracy that doesn't include everyone, equally. Nor would we want one. Caste and democracy, ultimately, we know now, cannot co-exist.

So much harsh truth, but necessary truth is being revealed, exposed in these strange apocalyptic, pandemic times. Finally! many of us are saying. Why would we go back to normal even if we could?! God help us!

But there is something that still feels under wraps; that's not yet been ruthlessly exposed. How is it possible that billionaires are increasing their wealth exponentially and more and more are joining this billionaire club during this pandemic year AND we are still arguing about whether we should increase the minimum wage from 7.50 to 15 dollars an hour for yes, essential workers, who are risking their lives for all the rest of us? When will it be exposed that the real God of America is money and the true, though hidden, mission statement has the word "PUBLIC", as in public lands or public university, public services, public works, crossed out and the word "PRIVATE", as in private prisons, private schools, private security firms....marked in bold along with the words "scarcity", "profit motive" and "cost benefit analysis". Another Public Intellectual, thank God for Public Intellectuals! Marilyn Robinson, writes: "The profit motive applies in every circumstance..." She writes: "The cult of cost/benefit—of the profit motive made granular, cellular—not only trivializes but also attacks whatever resists its terms."

How promising then that the new president elect took a pilgrimage, not to Ayn Rand's birthplace, and not to University of Chicago, the birthplace of neo-liberalism, but to the shrine of FDR in Warm Springs Georgia. FDR, a leader who was inspired by the chaplain at his elite prep school who was passionate about the social gospel movement, and its focus on the kingdom of God on earth, Jesus social teachings.... not the privatistic gospel of being born again. The social gospel formed FDR, just as the Catholic social teachings formed the beliefs of the current president. FDR was president at the end of similarly apocalyptic times, the Great Depression, and he initiated the new deal, public works projects, jobs for everyone, and a redistribution of the wealth that had been concentrating all through the gilded age with- the revenue act of 1935. This was all about generous care for the good of the whole society. But decades later, all of these upward trends reversed in an ethos of hyper individualism, setting the US on a downward course into another Gilded age which is where we find ourselves now. (... So... A climb from self-centeredness to a sense of shared values, followed by a steep descent back into individualism over the next half century.) But we are poised with this new leader to heal. Biden, like FDR, is a "we" not an "I" president. Deeply so... it's in his bones... that catholic social teaching. (Romney Garrett)

And so, we will work with our leader and hold him accountable when he gets faint of heart, to what he knows his right. We will fight for 15 dollars minimum wage and clean energy public works infrastructure. And some day, in the near future, we know it can be so, in greater MN, maybe around Palisade, there will be two workers, working side by side, in a decent paying and ongoing job, on a clean energy project, one worker from the White Earth Indian reservation and one worker living Off highway 200, where once, not long before, flew a bright-yellow, Gadsden flag, with a coiled rattlesnake at its center atop the words "Don't Tread on Me." ... well these two will work together, neither one really talkative, but over time they'll learn that they have similar taste, not in music, but in movies and a similar sense of humor and after a year of so they'll realize they like working together....

Together. Maybe what is being most powerfully revealed in this apocalyptic year is that we are all in this together. WE are inescapably communal. The very air we breathe..., the earth, the economy, the democracy. We shall go up together or down together.

I want to close with this fascinating bit of news. It really causes one to wonder... Remember what someone said about apocalyptic periods being a time of great possibility? So here it is.

Despite the prolific images of exhaustion and despair of doctors treating Covid patients.

Despite the danger to health care workers and their families, working in the midst of the pandemic

Despite the deaths or long-term health effects from Covid, of many colleagues.

Despite the inconsistency and sometimes downright lack of respect of government leaders, when these docs are giving their all....

Despite all of that, applications to medical schools have risen dramatically in the last several months. One medical school president said: "It's unprecedented. People seem to be inspired by the example of health care workers during this pandemic." Some are calling it the Fauci effect. One applicant said simply: "This is a way for me to make a difference".

This pandemic, despite all of its horrors, is uncovering what really matters in this life.

God, help us to not go back to normal. We know too much now. Help us to change what needs to be changed. Amen

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