

Small Talk – May 3 3031
By Michael Small

I don't think many of us in the depth of our bones have yet come to grasp, understand what the long-term impact 2020 – 2021 has wrought upon the planet, the occupants of the planet and what it will mean for the days and years to come. Some will come out of this year with bitterness and grief – a sense of despair. Others will come out of this place with thankfulness and the willingness to start anew. But all of us will enter the days to come changed. It has been a hard year.

I think of that bear coming out of hibernation after the long winter and the turtle awakening from the mud and darkness of winter into the springtime. Awakening, taking that first deep breath, smelling the spring air, looking with eyes that are at first a bit sleepy, but then seeing with clarity. A new day has dawned, the sun has come up, there are things to do, things to see, we start over again.

But, from the year past, there are deep wounds and scars. Some things are forever changed and even gone. There is the sense of loss . . . and we are forced into new beginnings. How is it that we re-enter, begin again, re-engage? Step-by-step! We take that deep breath of spring (filled with pollen), we feel the wind on our face, we truly attempt to open our eyes and our ears, seeing and hearing the world anew, as if for the first time.

Just this past weekend the SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule returned to the earth. The four astronaut's gently splashed down at night in the Gulf of Mexico to applause, joy, and relief of so many. They had been in space, zero-gravity since last November. As the astronaut's stepped into gravity, there were persons on each side holding them up, keeping them steady – but their smiles were huge, and the sense of joy and relief were clearly seen. They were safely back home. It will be a time of readjustment for them.

So too, as we enter this springtime, as we emerge from the isolation and struggle of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic – we readjust, and we reenter a world that is surprisingly new – and the same – a gift of life and life-abundant for each new day. And sometimes, we need the steady hand of another to help us into this new day.

Martha Spong¹ writes of this new entry into this time in the 5/3/2021 *UCC Stillspeaking Devotional* called *Enmities*.

“By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.”
Galatians 5:22-23 (NRSV)

¹ Martha Spong is a UCC pastor, a clergy coach, and editor of *The Words of Her Mouth: Psalms for the Struggle*, new from The Pilgrim Press.

I love the sights and sounds of baseball: the crack of the bat, balls hitting glove leather, and, this year, a healthy fraction of the live crowd noise we heard in the before times. One of my favorite things about my team, the Washington Nationals, and their fans is how much we love to welcome back former players. Friendly ovations from the crowd, kind words from the broadcasters, and good-natured interactions between teammates-turned-rivals are the norm.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul teaches that if we're letting ourselves accept the guidance of the Spirit, this is how we'll be: loving, joyful, at peace, patient, kind, generous, faithful, gentle, and able to control ourselves. His list follows a catalog of behavioral sins in verses 19-21, among them one word that stands out for me: "enmities," the active hostility to someone or something. It's a bitter and unremitting state of mind and heart. It's hatefulness we can't keep inside. It's the systemic hate that sustains racism and bigotry and fuels actions – both individual and collective – that harm people and communities and the world.

I know I have my enmities. I could probably make a convincing case (to myself, anyway) of why that hostility is deserved by its targets. But for right now, I'm picturing myself covering first base, exchanging a word with the rival I usually want to tag out, remembering we are all beloved by God.

(We'll save our enmities for the umpires.)

Prayer: Spirit of God, the human team must feel difficult to manage. Help me to follow your coaching today. Amen.

In the spirit and agape love of Jesus, Michael

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