

Small Talk – October 22 2021
By Michael Small

A primary experience of these past days and weeks has been the stark transition of seasons. From warm sunny days to cloudy days (some with rain) and to the late, but first hard freeze at Mule Lake on Wednesday night. Many of the trees have lost their leaves. Multitudes of ferns have turned brown and “died”. The fur coat displayed on the herds of deer are changing color. Frogs and turtles are burying themselves in mud for the winter. It appears that nature is shutting down, and if one did not know better – to look at the trees and plants you would think that they are dead, forever gone. What will follow is a long period of dormancy in the winter – only to be reawakened in the spring and summer. Seasons become metaphors for hope, birth, life, and death.

Along with many, I know and have heard and experienced some of the struggles over the past two years – pandemic! There have been numerous changes in all of our lives. There has been tragic loss. There has been deep sorrow. There has been lament and despair. Yet, at many levels, life moves on.

Over the past three weeks, ending with this Sunday, I have been pondering the book of Job. It has been helpful to live with his very sudden and unexpected loss, anger, loathing, and conversations with friends and ultimately with God. In the end there is restoration. Daughters and sons are born, wealth and health are returned, and the process of restoration just begins.

I wonder, are we approaching a new time, the dawning of restoration? And if so, what does restoration look like? It will be the same, but also different for each person. After fire, flood, earthquake, devastating winds, pandemic, economic hardship, inequity, and inequality – the days, months, and years that follow must be about restoration.

After Mt. St. Helens erupted causing devastation to rivers, forest, fauna, and lakes – restoration began immediately. Birds returned dropping seeds in the forest and fish eggs in Spirit Lake. There was new and rapid growth. Life begun to return to “normal”.

When there is loss to communities restoration happens only as the many come together as community, sharing resources, dreaming dreams together, and then we begin to rebuild. In rebuilding some things are lost forever, and new things emerge – often better than what was before. It becomes a time of on-going restoration.

Yes, over time, Job and his wife had ten more children and descendants up to the fourth generation. The restoration began with his friends bringing gifts. Even though through time full restoration was experienced, the repentance and the pain of loss were a part of the process. I think that not a day went by when Job and his wife did not grieve the children who were lost to them – forever!

Restoration means moving forward while at the same time remembering what it is that we have lived through and learning from it. Restoration means repenting from decisions

and actions that may have been the cause of the previous harm. Restoration might mean “afflicting the comfortable and comforting the afflicted.”¹ Restoration means letting go of destructive behavior and moving toward consensus building in communities who are damaged. It means collaborating with other communities, local, state, national, international. Restoration takes time, much time. Restoration means having faith and trust in knowing the future is possible and it will be good!

Out of the ashes of death and destruction comes life and possibility. In April of 2019, I remember watching as the 850-year-old cathedral Notre Dame was engulfed in flames. It was just in September of 2021 that General Jean-Louis Georgelin declared "We're officially saying that the cathedral is now saved, that it's solid on its pillars, that its walls are solid."² Restoration of the cathedral will be completed by 2024. With hard work, dreaming, conversation together restoration happens.

In the years to come, we will look back to late 2019 – 2022 years and we will know these to be years that shaped generations to come. We can move through change, restoration, and hopefully the live out the first glimpses of transformation as we as a whole become healthier, wiser, gentler and kinder people.

May it be so.

In the spirit and agape love of Jesus, Michael

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¹ <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2014/today-in-media-history-mr-dooley-the-job-of-the-newspaper-is-to-comfort-the-afflicted-and-afflict-the-comfortable/>

² <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/notre-dame-cathedral-france-opening-scli-intl/index.html>