Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020

When Don Paterson, the Scottish poet and jazz guitarist, published his new book in early March many people might have scoffed at the oddness of basing an entire collection of poems on a season of the *Twilight Zone*. Now that our entire lives feel like the *Twilight Zone* no one is laughing. The first poem in *Zonal* is called *Death,* with the memorable line: "Don't think for a second that Death loves his work…." The second poem is called *The Way We Were*.

*Twilight Zone* notwithstanding, we are now living inescapably in historic times. And in such times we might well turn to the poets who sing the sagas of turbulence past and ask the all important question, "*WTF?*" If not the poets, then to whom do we turn? Or do I mean WHO?

John Kelly, the historian not the former White House chief of staff, might tell us a thing or two about what to learn from the 14thC when an infectious disease changed the face of Europe. The loss of so many lives so quickly led to huge suffering, the fall of institutions, short term revolt, and ultimately a foundation for a new socio-economic order. Labourers and Craftspeople ended up with greater social power, eventually.

Margaret MacMillan might tell us of government choices during and following World War I, the temporary measure of Income Tax which proved to be not so temporary. And we might well reflect on government resource extraction and just how much a war costs and demands. We might well reflect on the intervention and regulation of a more intrusive government needing tools to maintain social control and what it might mean for surveillance, screening and monitoring all in the name of safety. How long will our freedoms be restricted? Like rationing, until the Coronation of the King?

How many of us have stopped to wonder why, after commemorating so many events of the Centenary of The Great War, we didn't say much as a society about the Centenary of La Pesadilla, The Nightmare of the 1918-20 flu pandemic? Perhaps we glanced at a few works by Egon Schiele at the Royal Academy or the Fondation Louis Vuitton and wondered what might have been had the poor artist not died so young.

So do we turn to the professors and scholars, clutching our copies of Samuel Cohn and looking for our futures? Do we turn to the historians? Or the artists?

How many of us are wondering what all this means for our economic futures? It was problematic enough before the pandemic wondering about the impacts in our lives of climate chaos, automation, the shrinking tax base and the costs of an aging population. We cannot forget the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami or the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami which caused the level 7 meltdowns at Fukushima. It was not so long ago (2010) Eyjafjallajökull, that volcano in Iceland, warned us what can happen to global travel systems when Mother Nature has an opinion; and human behaviour wrecked worse havoc on September 11, 2001 and its aftermath. We have been debating the real costs of our poor choices as personal debts have increased and our Mother Earth has continued to choke in our hearing. What will happen to our economic systems now with no consumer spending? Will we have nationalised Airlines? More Austerity? What of our pension funds and investments? Can central banks just keep printing money (with $8 trillion in stimulus from various governments already promised before we even start)? Will any of us even notice the spring meetings of the IMF and Global Bank (events which begin from tomorrow)? Catastrophe Containment and Relief, indeed, Trust perhaps not so much.

Do we turn to the economists and climate scientists?

While economists scramble to make meaningful predictions and graphs (a *V*, a *U* or a *Check Mark*, mmm?), scientists and medical researchers move to greater co-operation, information sharing and clinical trials. It has been heartening to see researchers around the Globe working together, communicating quickly and moving to action. One wants to be hopeful and not cynical about the race to a vaccine, with its prize of power and riches. We hold out hope in drugs repurposing, combination therapies and interventions that will buy us time and save lives, not least the doctors and nurses on the front lines.

Do we turn to health care professionals, medical researchers and Big Pharma, expectant of quick solutions and comfort (cold or reheated, we'll take what they can give us)?

A crisis is an opportunity for some – indeed some people's brains work differently. We have all seen Bill Gates, Elon Musk and Sir James Dyson in the news. There are lots of innovations happening in this war all over the world which will embed new technology and ideas and change our future lives as well as help us in-the-here-and-now. [You might have a look at such sources as BlueDot, weforum, StartupBlink and the Health Innovation Exchange or Martin Vander Weyer's article in *The Spectator* (28 march 2020).]

Do we turn to the entrepreneurs, disruptors and inventors?

Since the 2002-2003 protests against the invasion of Iraq (especially the mass protests on February 15 and 16, 2003) and all through the Great Recession, Migrant Crisis and Brexit debates we have questioned the ability of governments to respond and listen to the voices and needs of the people. Our politicians are often a strange mix of social and economic elites who seem compromised from the start. Politicians have been overwhelmed by difficult moral choices and some immoral institutional habits; so Iraq is invaded, Libya bombed, the bankers forgiven and the effort seems to be to keep the status quo at all costs. But is moving an IOU from me to my neighbour in this endless game of Pass the Parcel a governmental solution? Has anyone even looked inside the parcel to see what is inside (Someone did. It is empty.) And do we pass the debt onto the shoulders of future generations hoping they will not notice a dead planet and an IOU where no one remembers who is the I and who is the U? Our current system is like the Great Siberian Railway project: debt complexity equals fragility and overreach and the current contracts and agreements now have little value. Market choices have not led to fairness and wellbeing and governments and central bankers have been seemingly void of new ideas.

Do we turn to the politicians and bankers?

And what will the Big Powers do when countries begin to slip into chaos or the GDP to debt ratio makes them posture and try to look rich and powerful when it is clearly not the case? Is there a global power big enough for this crisis? Is there a moral leader? A Lender of Last resort? Does Russia invade Ukraine? China, North Korea? The US, Venezuela? Can the EU hold together? Can Brexit still be done? (I'm done. I know that much).

Please we do not turn to war.

My polemical device is obvious but so too is our vocation as Christians.

**We turn to Christ.**

And because he first turned to us, we see each other and become known in each other – just like the motley crew of Disciples who were the first Witnesses to the Resurrection - all the poets, historians, artists, economists, climate scientists, health care professionals, medical researchers, entrepreneurs, disrupters, inventors, politicians and bankers. The Twelve! All trying to understand the Kingdom of God and the Nature of God's Abiding Love.

We are not called to be passive observers of some magic trick but full partakers in the Resurrection; Children of God, the heirs of hope who will continue the family story from generation to generation – no longer a people only looking back to the Exodus past but a people knowing the Exodus that has come today; and looking forward to the Exodus that is still to come – a never ending renewal of the Creation He has Loved and Redeemed (He is the Propitiation for the sins of the whole world – past, present and future). Christ's redeeming work, His full Sacrifice, perfect Oblation, sufficient Satisfaction is complete – we can add nothing. But we must respond with our lives (ourselves, our souls and bodies – all that we have and all that we are).

Like the two Marys approaching the tomb, we are tossed to the ground by a great Upheaval and the Power of God yet greeted by an Angel proclaiming the Easter Gospel. HE IS NOT HERE.

Like the two Marys we are entrusted with a Great Commission to quickly go and tell the Good News. HE HAS BEEN RAISED.

Like the two Marys on the first Easter morning, here we are with this complex emotional mixture of fear and great joy. YOU WILL SEE HIM.

And like the two Marys Our Lord meets us where we are in all this turbulence and allows us to embrace him, clinging to his feet. DO NOT BE AFRAID.

And so, perhaps slowly not quickly, we begin to learn to live as children of the Third Day, comforting others as we have been comforted. Slowly, we learn to live more honest lives, accepting our own brokenness and frailty. Slowly, we learn to learn to live with the Truth of Resurrection. Slowly, but urgently, I pray.

We turn to Christ. Christ turns to the Creation entire.

Don Paterson's *Zonal* begins with an epigraph from the Argentinian poet Antonio Porchia:

*El sol ilumina la noche, no la convierte en luz*

(The sun illuminates the night, it does not turn it to light).

In this present crisis, our good choices and kind acts can illuminate the night .We surely must bring kindness into each day, serving one another as he first served us, clinging to his feet. DO NOT BE AFRAID.

But it is only the Risen Lord, in whom all things were made, who turns the darkness into light. The Psalmist reminds us, Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee (Psalm 139: 12).

Light of lights, save us and help us.

And May The Peace of the Risen Lord Be Always With You.

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