

**Dispatch from the Pandemic #2:  
Holding the Cross  
by Barbara Lyghtel Rohrer**

APRIL 17, 2020 — I write this dispatch during the week following Holy Week. While you may think I would want to focus on the promise of Easter and the Christ who shows all humankind that life conquers death, my thoughts drift to Good Friday instead. Yes, we are now in the liturgical season of Easter, but too many of us throughout the world are still in our own personal Good Fridays.

My father died during Holy Week in 1992. We buried him on Good Friday, so this sacred day holds particular meaning for me beyond the death of Jesus.

I buried my father knowing he loved me. I recall the little ways he tried to show that as I grew up. Bringing home Reese's Peanut Butter Cups—my favorite. The surprise of a pet guinea pig. The simple things he tried to teach me. One lesson was a way to keep my prescription glasses from getting scratched. It was a simple practice that protected the lenses, one which I still adhere to today. It's as ingrained as buckling my seat belt when getting into my car and putting on a life jacket before stepping into my kayak.

Until now, this list of practices that care for my possessions and provide safety for myself was always short. Now it is longer in ways I never would have imagined. Continual hand washing. Liberal use of hand sanitizer. Wiping down doorknobs, drawer pulls, and keyboards. Wearing masks. Not touching my face. And hauling in groceries now involves stripping off clothes after shopping at Kroger's.

This is my world today. Our world. However, the news from the Ohio governor's office in the past few days has been good. We have "flattened the curve," phrases that would have been foreign to us last month now roll easily off our tongues. Flattening is what our isolation has been working toward. Yes, there are deaths, and each is tragic. Many are ill. But we may have seen the peak—or so we pray. That doesn't mean now all goes back to normal.

We learn instead that there will be a "new normal." Opening up will take time. Physically distancing ourselves from each other will need to continue. Crowds the like of which we see at festivals and ball games will likely be at least a year off. Face masks may become the norm when shopping, at least until there is a vaccine. Testing would help ease these restrictions, but that too is a long way off.

In the meantime, people are hurting, afraid of falling ill, perhaps even more afraid of how they will pay their bills. What will happen to their children's education? How can learning take place in homes with no internet connections that so many of us (and the young ones in our lives) take for granted. And forget about things such as proms or graduations. My great nephew is graduating from high school this year. It will be a non-event, since none of my extended family will be there to celebrate with his mom and dad and sisters.

We are on the cross, which many of us have the resources to bear. Our cross is nothing like that which so many others must carry throughout our nation and around our world. And I am not unmindful of the differences of opinion as to how the threat of COVID-19 should have been or needs to be addressed. Regardless of these differences, we are embroiled in a disaster of significant proportions, and people are hurting as a result—which brings me to what I want to say here.

Easter is real—both the season and the theology behind this most sacred of Christian holy days. We will come out of these challenging times. But I don't want to go back to normal. I don't even want to go to the "new normal," as is our lexicon now. Too many people were suffering under the old normal. How will that change for them if the new normal simply means wearing a mask in public and skipping a season or two of seeing our favorite sports team play live in a stadium?

Somehow, I want this time on the cross to be more than an inconvenience we write about and tell the generation yet to be born: "Back in 2020 ..."

We as a society have failed so many who live on the margins. How is that to be different once we lay down our cross and step outside of our homes? How do we leave our Good Fridays and step into Easter fully? How do we bring the promise of the Resurrection to all people, particularly those most vulnerable, most hurting, most exploited?

I do not know. Part of it certainly is through acts of service, something the cathedral does well with its ministries to feed the hungry and to shelter those without a home or at risk of losing their homes. Part of it is being open to all people no matter their race, any gender fluidity or sexual orientation, again something the cathedral does well with its open doors and welcoming ministries. And part of it is through prayer that dives deep and worship that uplifts.

But I know more is needed. To return to the status quo is to miss the opportunity COVID-19 presents to our society—which brings me back to my father. I recall that day in our bright kitchen when I was 15 and had just gotten my first set of prescription glasses.

"Let me show you something," he said. He took off his own glasses, folded the stems in and set the glasses down, lenses up, on the yellow Formica table. "Always set your glasses down like this. That way the lenses won't get scratched."

I see clearly enough through my unscratched lenses to know that our prescription is defective. We need a new prescription for how the world is to be. The old one doesn't work anymore. Indeed, it never really did ... for all of us.

We all need to see—and hear—in new ways.

My prayer is that by the grace of all that is holy we have the eyes to see how, the ears to hear how.