



Living in the Balance

January and February 2021

What you tolerate you teach. My grandmother loved me to the moon and back, but she did not tolerate my “bad turn” behaviors.....

Disrespecting, sassy mouth. Making fun of people’s clothes, hair, accents, their lack of ability or where they lived. Lying. Stealing. Cheating. Cursing in general but especially if it attacked someone else’s humanity. Sitting on your butt when things needed to be done....food prepared, tables set, dishes washed, laundry done, neighbors helped. Getting on your “high horse” and being too big for your britches. Starting a fight. Picking on, abusing or threatening anyone.

My grandmother was always pointing the way and loving me into being my best self.

If we teach what we tolerate are we going to just go along to get along in the guise of tolerance? Bishop Curry tells us that agape love is the love that puts others before self and that the opposite of love is not hate, but selfishness. Sitting on the sidelines and taking no action is not doing nothing. Inaction *is* action that can perpetuate hatred, division and suffering. Pema Chodron speaks of the training to be the warrior-bodhisattvas not as warriors to kill or harm, but warriors of nonaggression who are willing to step into challenging situations to alleviate suffering.

Even though it has been more than twenty years, we still speak of her. We were walking in downtown Seattle and she was standing under an underpass on the left side of the sidewalk. I don’t remember what her sign said, but it doesn’t matter because her eyes drilled right into our souls. Her face was the face of desperation and fear and pain so deep I could not take it in. She was not a panhandler as she stood erect and faced us full on. I still get a sick feeling thinking about that encounter. Neither Rex nor I knew what to do so we did not do anything. We saw her and walked on. She haunts both of us to this day. And the question remains, “What lead to her being on that sidewalk so desperate?” and where do I need to weigh in and wade in to try to alleviate that kind of desperation now?

Agape love is entering into other people’s suffering and acting. It isn’t about being “gooder,” in fact it is the opposite. The agape way is the way of John Lewis and Mother Teresa and Mr. Rogers and every essential worker in the middle of this pandemic. It is those providing health care when exhausted and sometimes to people who shun or hate you. It is wearing a mask and quarantining. It is the people registering new voters. It is the community group packing and distributing food boxes. It is the countless thousands writing letters and testifying and calling and emailing and marching and organizing to help dismantle systems and policies that continue to oppress others. It is not tolerating language or behaviors that belittle, denigrate or tear at the soul of another. Agape means I continually keep my eyes open and grasp both the misery and the opportunity in my own backyard. Seeing those without shelter or those sitting in food lines or those without health care or those mistreated because of who they are or where they come from. Taking it in is a start, but not enough. I must dig down into the suffering and become a rebel armed with agape love.

Becoming an agape warrior is truly the hard and narrow way and requires us to rise above “ain’t it awful” and our own world weariness. I don’t have to run into a burning building to put others before myself. What I must do is see the dark places around me and find a way to step in. And when the tasks feel overwhelming, we must hold hope that it is the thousands and thousands of acts of agape that make the difference and create spaces for healing and wholeness.

My grandmother was the day-by-day agape love....making meals....mending cuts and bruises....reading me stories....believing in me when I didn’t believe in myself....calling me out for being too big for my britches. She’s been on my mind a lot lately. Gone now more than 40 years. I hear her voice and remember the hundreds of small acts she did that made things better for others and for me. She acted from the deepest Heart and leaves that legacy now to me and you.



About Spiritual Direction —

- Offers a space and time for you to explore, reflect upon, and deepen your relationship with God.
- Provides a haven from the daily busyness of the outer world and opens a time to be still and to reflect on your inner journey.
- Is a companioning relationship grounded in dialogue and discernment.
- Explores ways you may integrate spirituality into your daily life.
- Is not limited to any one spiritual practice or tradition.
- May involve one or two meetings or multiple meetings over time.

You may wish to consider spiritual companioning if you are —

- Longing for a deeper relationship with the Divine
- Looking for a place to dialogue about spiritual questions
- Seeking ways to connect with the Spirit in a more intentional way
- Discerning ways to live in a more integrated and whole way
- Standing at a crossroads in your life
- Exploring new or fresh ways to be in relationship with God

For more information about Spiritual Direction, please feel free to contact me by phone
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*Me and my paternal grandmother who lived with my parents from the month
before I was born until she died when I was 30.*

