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STAYING WOKE, STAYING HUMAN - Marc S. Mullinax

EXODUS 1:8, 13-22

Well, Hell ... has frozen over. Our Nightmares have become Daymares. It's like open season on the the truth, the most vulnerable, on science.

Hell will freeze over: Way too often we come to a moment like ours today, when our darkest forebodings invade the light of day. How many of us find ourselves taking cover? And speaking of cover: have you seen these recent magazine covers?

Harper's Magazine pictured a woman holding up a huge scrunched-up comic book picture of the president with the bold, revolutionary typeface at the bottom, "DISOBEY".

Ms. Magazine & Mother Jones chose these urgent words to splash across their covers: RISE UP!

Variety asks "Now What?" on its cover.

Esquire? "Hater-in-Chief".

Time Magazine? A picture of the recently-inaugurated president with the words: "Nothing to See Here."

Atlantic Magazine's entire March issue instructs a would-be dictator on "How to Build an Autocracy."

[Careful here: may be a bit much] The German magazine Der Spiegel shows the current president holding a bloody machete in one hand and the bloodied, just-severed head of The Statue of Liberty in the other.

Increasingly we find ourselves in an alternative-fact land few patriots recognize. Where one's worth is determined only by size: of voice, of pocketbook, of military might, and Twitter followers.

This is no surprise. We were adequately apprised.

Even if we said with Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here*,

Our Karma has awakened, and bitten us, once again, in the rear. (Sorry, Karma, nothing personal!)

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Blessed Low Sunday, my dear fellow fools for Christ! Christ has risen! [*Christ has risen indeed!*] You don't know how good it has been to be with you in these past few months. And have you noticed, as I have, that there is a renewed energy around the Circle's mission & purpose? We, a called-out community, find ourselves a refuge and harbor for many ships like you in these days, wondering aloud, often, and together what kind of spiritual responses we can take on and

practice in this new day. I commend the Immigration Mission Group as a very timely way to demonstrate how Christ has risen in these not-so-positive days.

Thank you, my fellow pilgrims. You encourage me by the ways you rework the passion of Jesus into passionate mercy these days. But now, perhaps more than ever in our short democratic history, we have entered the era of threat. Rarely has the body politic taken so many body blows.

What really keeps me up at night is that we are fewer than 100 days in. This is the Honeymoon! How do we prepare for our Sisyphean quests to roll the stones of reasonableness, of critical thinking and of compassion up the Koolaid Mountains again, and again? How do we not give in to rage and outrage, to anger and danger, and to resignation for our nation?

Well... I want to set the contextual stage for how going radically dark, remaining radically woke and staying radically human just may be the faithful habit and practice required for the living of these days. I want mercy and I want change-with-mercy, please feel that. Like you, I search for ways to bring such change that is both accountable to the Kindom of God, and to those who are not invested in it, or aware of it.

I shall briefly outline, and then refute, three temptations for those opposed to the direction of our world today. One extreme for many is the temptation to fight: RISE UP! Get in touch with your inner anarchist, and throw Molotov Cocktails of words, signs, and gestures, hoping they will find a target. This extreme's mantras include By any Means Necessary, and Extreme times make for extreme measures. Because, for some in our nation, Martin Luther King's phrase, "We cannot wait," is quite apt. Justice delayed is, to some, justice denied. However ... might our hot zeal and impatience curtail others' civil rights, and hurt our own cause in the process? Is not history littered with many impaled on their swords of self-righteous anger? Their brief flashes of meteoric light illumine nothing. In the words of John Lennon,

And if you go carrying pictures of Chairman Mao  
You ain't going to make it with anyone anyhow.

We are here to listen to, and to love, the millions of activists and loyal supporters of the status quo. If we give into fighting, we make our pledge of allegiance to the flag of anger. And anger is not our renewable energy resource. We can and should pay attention to anger like we should to a canary in the coal mine, but anger alone is the gateway drug to hate. As James Baldwin put it, "Most people discover that when hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with their own pain."

After fight, the second extreme is to escape. Flight. To Canada! The Netherlands, Drugs, Netflix. Close the shutters, turn off the News, Deny. "Na na na na na na!" If it doesn't get in, it can't affect me, right? My students are great arguers for the quick returns of denial. *What is paramount is my peace of mind, they pontificate, and I am entitled to a peaceful existence. Even if I must erect walls, and deny painful truths.*

True: **Escape happens**. And we all have our momentary check-outs, our vacations from reality. But most denial and ignore-ance only delays the moment of truth, and we live in this fantasy/Disney world of being separate from each other, and I mean a false separation from our president and all his MINions. Because here's the truth, my co-conspirators in truth-seeking: *we discover only deep inside ourselves the very enemies that we loathe outside*. There is no escaping what is true -- yet unexamined -- about ourselves. It doesn't help to escape, for our baggage comes with us. Maybe it's time to do the TSA screens on ourselves, my fellow pilgrims. Flight, like fight, is not a sustainable way to be a pilgrim in this foreign land.

I am actually glad, in a weird way, that these are days of Nightmares and Daymares. It means that we are given an obvious chance to field-test the Kingdom of God as an actual way to rearrange culture and life in the here and now. Like Clarence Jordan did at Koinoina Partners, we can develop demonstration plots for the Realm of God. When we are given policies of hate, shock-and-awe, and exclusion, we have a chance in the batter's box to swing for the fences, but with another rule-book: the Sermon on the Mount.

The third extreme in this quick tour is Freeze. The evolutionary purpose of "freeze" is to allow a quick assessment of a dangerous situation, giving one time to decide to fight or flee. When animal prey has been caught and feels helpless, it freezes to **fake its death**, which might give it the chance to escape. However, when prolonged in us, "freeze" deepens into a paralyzing permafrost of helplessness, disassociation, and numbing. All that wonderful you is just frozen energy & icy potential.

So, if I have made my three points well, then I have called into question the traditional (and hard-wired) reactions to trauma – fight, flight and freeze. And if you have been a member of this congregation for any length of time, you already know that we are much more than these automatic reflexes. We are born into royalty, daughters and sons of God, beautiful enough, strong enough, blessed and gifted enough. We are already more-than-enough for these times. When a great ship is in harbor and moored, it is safe, there can be no doubt. But...that is not what great ships are built for. (Clarissa Pinkola Estes)

So, my fellow ships, built for deep and long voyages in the worst of storms, we are right to feel dismay, bewilderment, and astonishment that hell has frozen over. But you knew, deep down, it would. So, what now, my fellow travelers? I suggest we treat our times as a conversation partner, & we ask, ***what is it that these times are wanting us to know? When the reverberations of November's shock subside in us, might it shape a new space in our hearts to embrace these days as a teacher who has come to open our lives to new worlds? Can we find in ourselves a courageous hospitality towards those who lie, and are difficult? May we find how more natural it is to build bridges instead of walls!***

***May these days be used as a lantern to illuminate the new qualities that will and must emerge in us, within us, among us. May we shed and release whatever has become false within us, uncovering a confident tranquility that calms our storms to stillness. May we find***

***the wisdom to listen to these troubled days, and ask “Why did you come to us? Why seek out our friendship? Where do you want, oh troubled times, to take us? What do you want us to know, and create in us, so we may be more fully alive?” (Adapted from John O’Donohue, “A Blessing for a Friend on the Arrival of Illness”)***

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Don’t hold your breath for change. The issue is how to breathe in change. Thank you, Mr. President, for speeding up the day when we realize that our political leaders are not our saviors. This is THE TIME, the Kairos time to hoist the sails and breathe into them the winds of change. From our lungs, with our breath. Don’t wait willy-nilly for the change you want. Be the change instead... The prayers of change answered. Be the Hope that is the caboose at the end of the long train. It’s a comin, though you may not see it as you wait at the crossing.

We are challenged in our practices of hope, however. No longer do we have the long, deep and unconsciously engrained habits of agriculture, with its season-after-season-after season of life, death, and rebirth. No longer do we march in our days to the tempo of the farm, its animals, its calendar. We have shed the 10,000 years of agri-culture in just 2-3 generations. What connections to the deep processes of nature, and thus the key practices of hope, have we lost? Leonardo da Vinci observed prophetically 500 years ago that ‘We know more about the movement of celestial bodies than about the soil underfoot’. My model for us is a rather humble animal, located in the humus (HYUmus). Underfoot is where I’d like to point us.

Earthworms. While hate as national policy trickles down, polluting the ground of our being, let us remember the earthworm. Down in the dark, amidst the muck, mire and mud, there are untold billions of earthworms doing one thing, and that one thing is the utter foundation of all life. To make my point into a bumper-sticker: Earthworms turn crap into fertilizer.

Charles Darwin counseled: “It may be doubted whether there are any other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the world, as have these lowly organized creatures...” If we ask “Which group of organisms would cause the most disruption to life support systems on the Earth if lost?” my answer would be that — rather than fish, birds, bees, or humans — it is the earthworms.”

Without earthworms there would be no healthy soil in which any crop could develop in the first place. Earthworms condition the soil for the healthy seeds we know our generation and the generations to come are to harvest.

They are irreplaceable links in food chains. They act as hosts for diverse symbionts and parasites, and they are the major detritus feeders responsible for soil mineralization, aeration and recycling of organic matter. They take that which is dead, and make it into something that supports life. Sounds like the practice of resurrection, to me.

Tireless, day and night, earthworms swallow decaying matter. They never sleep. They never cease burrowing; riddling and honeycombing even the most dense clay and compact soils.

As they tunnel, they ceaselessly devour the earth with all that it contains: dead leaves, dead roots, dead vegetable and animal remains, mineral elements, and all the microscopic vegetable life of the soil. These they ingest, digest, and excrete as topsoil.

They turn crap into fertilizer. Need I belabor the metaphor? Without fanfare, or permission, nor complaining, the humble earthworm in the humus makes human life possible. They transform the bad, the most vile, and the smelliest into topsoil. They eat their way forward!

Like the earthworm, do we not have the innate capacity to turn trickle-down Hate into floods of Mercy? Loneliness into Community? Fake News & Alternative Facts into Truth? Disease into Health? Refugees into People of welcome? Prisoners into Restored citizens?

So, Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy. (St. Francis of Assisi)

Sounds like an earthworm résumé to me. Sounds like Shiprah and Puah, those quiet, behind-the-scenes heroines of faith. Though they're remembered for their dissenting actions as midwives, the meanings of their names helps us to better understand what it means to be in cahoots with God. Shiprah, meaning to comfort and swaddle in beauty; and Puah, which means to coo but also to cry out in warning, suggesting these women knew how their actions were to reveal the language of God for their times.

Likewise, our genius is the human, in the humus, in the dark, skillfully creating beauty and good deeds under cover. Like the two midwives, may we take the pharaoh's evil intents and neutralize it into the fertilizer we need for the spring a-coming. So, may we keep teaching someone to read. Keep on visiting the prisons. Feeding the hungry. Praying like nobody's business. Loving the unpopular. Keep on finding the victim on the road to Jericho, but also work like heck so that the road to Jericho is safe. Inch by inch, drop by drop. With agricultural patience, may we find the earthy, earthworm work to do in the humus of the world.

'Human' and 'humus' have the same word origin. "Of the earth." Jesus became human, living and dwelling among us, showing us with ultimate earthworm-like patience how to change the world, not with weapons but with outstretched arms; not with hatred and complaining but with active love. Then he was executed, put down in an earthy grave. And his humus, earthworm work was complete. He transformed his state execution into mercy, the hate that killed him

into love of enemies. Let us likewise worm around this earth, and create from below the conditions where compassion and justice get firmly rooted. Let us have Global Worming, not Global Warming. Be like the earthworm: take in the crap of the world, and render blessings out of it.

A story, and I'm out of here: My best friend is the Navigator for a nearby retirement facility. Folks there got concerned last month when a woman suddenly went down fast, and it was determined that she needed some radical brain surgery to save her life. So brain surgery happened. And tongues wagged that she was on her last legs, and all. [You know how contagious rumors are in small communities.] While my friend visits her and her husband at the hospital, the woman asks for a hairbrush. Her husband asks her why: "Honey, you are completely bald from your surgery. Why do you need a hairbrush?" Without a moment's hesitation, she retorted, "To stimulate growth."

That's it, my friends ... the faith to see what isn't there. To turn dreams into deeds. Hate into mercy. Let's "go humus," stay woke, stay human, "go dark," getting out of the range of the cameras and microphones and the CIA or the NSA, and just do our quiet humus/human duty to find the crap, take it in, and transubstantiate it into goodness.

That's who we are. And that's what we are made for. And I am confident as I've ever been: We are made – and ever re-made – for these times. Amen.

Benediction:

They tried to bury us, but they forget we are seeds. Let's go sprout!