

Message from Robin+

I grew up in Richmond and when I was really young, I remember that sometimes on Sundays we would all pile into the car for a ride. Thanks to the Blue Laws, nothing was open and we were bored. We'd drive out into the country looking for cows, to the airport to see the planes, or we'd go to the cemetery to visit our deceased relatives. Sometimes we would drive on the bumpy cobblestones of Monument Avenue to see the statues. I loved the horses! Nothing much was really said about the statues except that they were of the Confederates and my mom would tell me the names of all the men. Those statues seemed so permanent.

This has been a hard week for my mother and all of her friends who grew up in Richmond. It's been a hard week for me because I love my mother and her friends, and I also support the removal of the statues. I have listened to my mother and her white friends who are good people. I have listened to my black friends (and I do not have enough of them) and I have read a great amount, and prayed, and studied scripture. Everyone is hurting, or angry, or grieving, or out of patience, or determined to be right. What is happening in Richmond is just one example of how the world is visibly changing all around us right now.

I don't have all the answers, and I have come to believe that we just need to listen more, forgive more, and love more. One of the daily reflections I read by Richard Rohr, Franciscan priest and spiritual writer, helped me gain some perspective on all the change and the ways we react to it. And so I am sharing it with you, just in case you are having these kinds of conversations with your family and friends. May it speak to your heart. Robin+

Change Is Inevitable by Richard Rohr, OSF

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The word change normally refers to new beginnings. But the mystery of transformation more often happens not when something new begins, but when something old falls apart. The pain of something old falling apart—chaos—invites the soul to listen at a deeper level, and sometimes forces the soul to go to a new place. Most of us would never go to new places in any other way. The mystics use many words to describe this chaos: fire, dark night, death, emptiness, abandonment, trial, the Evil One. Whatever it is, it does not feel good and it does not feel like God.

We will normally do anything to keep the old thing from falling apart, yet this is when we need patience and guidance, and the freedom to let go instead of tightening our controls and certitudes. Perhaps Jesus is describing just this phenomenon when he says, "It is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:14). Not accidentally, he mentions this narrow road right after teaching the Golden Rule. He knows how much letting go it takes to "treat others as you would like them to treat you" (Matthew 7:12).

While change can force a transformation, spiritual transformation always includes a disconcerting reorientation. It can either help people to find new meaning or it can force people to close down and slowly turn bitter. The difference is determined precisely by the quality of our inner life, our practices, and our spirituality. Change happens, but transformation is always a process of letting go, living in the confusing, shadowy space for a while. Eventually, we are spit up on a new and unexpected shore. You can see why Jonah in the belly of the whale is such an important symbol for many Jews and Christians.

In moments of insecurity and crisis, shoulds and oughts don't really help. They just increase the shame, guilt, pressure, and likelihood of backsliding into unhealthy patterns. It's the deep yeses that carry us through to the other side. It's that deeper something we are strongly for—such as equality and dignity for all—that allows us to wait it out. It's someone in whom we absolutely believe and to whom we commit. In plain language, love wins out over guilt any day.

<https://cac.org/change-is-inevitable-2020-07-05/>