Opinion
Spirituality
Soul Seeing



(Unsplash/Priscilla du Preez)



by Pauline Hovey

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2020 was a year we'd probably like to bury deep under the sea. Its stormy arrival gradually picked up the tempo, eventually turning into an out-of-control tsunami.

And yet, surprisingly, this tempestuous time taught me how to live a more grounded life in 2021. The key is to release my grip on the helm and trust in the providence of God.

My need to let go became clear the night of our presidential election. Lost in the television results, I felt anxiety creep in like an uninvited guest. But rather than let it drag me down under, I turned to the "welcoming prayer," a body prayer in which I identify and feel the sensations in my body, welcoming and embracing all as I allow God's presence and action in my life.

The practice involves focusing inwardly, accepting and welcoming all that arises, no matter how uncomfortable it feels, until the energy lessens. Then, symbolically opening my hands, I release whatever the emotion or sensation is, using words that express my desire to let go of trying to control or change what is before me.

I've used it often since my husband's sudden death more than 11 years ago, in deep feelings of grief, loneliness, anxiety, sadness when my only son went away to college — in all those tough and out-of-my-hands situations that I can't change.

And yet something *does change.* Something changes *within* me. Something more spacious, more flowing, arises. Something akin to freedom.

Acceptance, it turns out, is freedom. It's not defeatist. It's not about giving up. On the contrary, far from being passive, it's an active choice to freely let go and give until there's nothing left to be attached to.

And then you open to the grace — the hope — that was always there.

As I practiced this prayer on election night, the shakiness I'd felt in my body as I welcomed the anxiety brought on a small taste of the fear Jesus must have felt the night he spent in the Garden of Gethsemane as he grew more intensely aware of the painful, humiliating, evil thing that was about to happen. I found myself wondering, who wouldn't run from the scenario Jesus was about to face? Yet he was still willing to accept what lay before him. To say, "Your will be done." To empty himself and give it all to God.

I understand that to not cling to your own life nor to a desired outcome takes immense spiritual maturity. To willingly enter into a painful or risky scenario out of love for others, even strangers, seems unreal. And yet it is real.

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And we know how to do this. We know people, just like us, who have offered this kind of extravagant love, a self-emptying, self-sacrificing love that makes no sense to someone who doesn't understand, to someone who wonders what you personally got out of it.

Yet this kind of love will save us from tumbling in any current or future tempest. It's the kind of love that momentarily enabled Peter to walk on water, before his fearful emotions took over and his inner constriction sent him sinking into the sea.

Someone reminded me recently, "We are not here to fix the world, but to love it." Love can't operate in a container. Love's unfolding requires my self-emptying.

As theologian and mystic Meister Eckhart wrote:

> There, where clinging to things ends, is where God begins to be. If a cask is to contain wine, you must first pour out the water. The cask must be bare and empty. Therefore, if you wish to receive divine joy and God, first pour out your clinging to things. Everything that is to receive must and ought to be empty.

Granted, emptying oneself — whether it's of possessions, positions, or personal agenda — isn't easy. But I'm willing to practice releasing my grip. And that's what I know this will take — lots of practice.

Although I can't conceive what will emerge on the other side of this threshold we find ourselves teetering on, I do know I want to be part of this love's unfolding. I'm willing to do the hard inner work to feel my own pain, my sorrow and grief when I or others are suffering and I can't control the situation.

And from this surrendered place, I can love more graciously and generously, neither clinging to nor identifying with the outcome. This is the stance I must take if I want to offer the best of who I am, with my heart open, for the remainder of my time on

this planet.

My hope is that others will join me in emerging out of the tempest of our times with their best and truest selves. That each of us be accountable for our thoughts and actions, for how we show up in each moment. That we let go of our own clinging and identifying, keep our hearts open, stay grounded in our Source, and show up open and available for the journey ahead. Love's unfolding depends on it.

Then this truly will be a time unlike any other.

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