



Day 9 | Wednesday, March 16, 2022
Presenter Anna Johnson

Last week, I sat down and wrote a letter to our unborn child. In it, I wrote, "In these last 11 days alone, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change came out with a new report outlining how bad climate change is for so many people around the world already. Russia invaded Ukraine, and people are fleeing in terror. People continue to die of COVID because we can't seem to unify to protect those who are most vulnerable around us. Divides seem deeper, many people I love seem hopeless.... Will your life be so hard, with food shortages, more extreme weather events, massive movement of peoples around the world, increased warfare, anxiety, depression... that you will wonder why we brought you into it? Will you wonder why we brought you here?"

Last night, Bill talked about how so many of us feel really disempowered during this time, due to the many situations we're facing that Leonetta walked us through so powerfully. It is easy to see where God's kin-dom is not yet flourishing. Is it any wonder that so many of us struggle with paying attention to the world around us and sticking with the pain? How many of us oscillate between fear, anger, anxiety, depression, and a deep desire to "numb out" to the world?

A Maryknoll priest who is also a somatic therapist recently told me that everyone is experiencing trauma right now, which moves us into the fight, flight or freeze response that so often leads to black and white thinking. He posits that this is how the majority of us are operating at this point, in a "scarcity" mindset.

In today's Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples, "Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?" And I wonder, do I really want to sign up for MORE pain and suffering?

But Jesus rarely speaks in ways that have only one or two interpretations; instead, he usually speaks with complexity and nuance. Dichotomous thinking rooted in scarcity, as in our trauma response, is never what Christ calls us towards. Throughout the Gospels, we see him respond to people who are feeling called out, stressed, or threatened, with a "third way." Christ asks us to slow down and move out of the "black and white" into the "gray" complexity, towards abundant wholeness.

So, sitting with this question again, I wonder, what is this cup he is asking us to drink from?

I had the opportunity to live in Uganda for a couple of years, where I worked in an Internally Displaced Persons Camp with children who had fled from the horrors of war. Someone asked

me, “How do you maintain hope? Day in and day out, witnessing so much pain and suffering?”

In answering, I realized: I could walk with the people because it was not just pain and suffering. They shared their stories of struggle, grief when we lost loved ones, and anxieties in moments of PTSD, BUT we also played red rover and made mud pies and sang and danced and laughed. Drinking daily from this cup with these wonderful kids, who have been victims of war, was of course incredibly heartbreaking at times, but it was a drink of the fullness of life.

So, what if Christ didn't just mean suffering? What if he means the cup contains the full complexity of human life and human emotions? Perhaps drinking from this cup means that we give ourselves fully to love, each and every day. In doing so, we know that our drink will include both joy and suffering. Because, in drinking from this cup, we will glimpse the Kingdom of God, and we also will come face-to-face with the ways in which God's Kingdom is not yet here. So, is Christ asking, can we drink from the cup of radical presence, love, and relationship?

My partner and I struggled for a long time in discerning whether it was moral to bring a child into this world, because of the realities of the world and our changing climate. But God revealed to us over time: we are called into the fullness of love, of drinking from this cup, with the joys and the challenges.

In the face of hopelessness, we experienced the deep love of our family and friends, we reveled in the beauty and resilience of creation on hikes, we worked together with so many others for a better world, seeing how it's a step-by-step journey.

There are stunning time-lapse videos that show how the body moves to make space for the baby, over the course of 9 months. The liver raises, the lungs and stomach go way up in the body and shrink in size, the intestines crunch down... over these 9 months, to make space for the baby. At full term, even the heart moves by half an inch. The body has to be fully present to the growth process, and it certainly is not always easy. It comes with nausea, joint pain, and lots of stretching. Doing it all at once would be too much. But at the end, after 9 months of the body moving and stretching in preparation and so that the child can grow enough to live in this world, after an intense amount of pain, we get something wonderful and joyful.

Climate change is too overwhelming to take on if I only look at the horrific images of wildfires, climate refugees, cracked dry ground that once was fertile. But when the last climate report came out, I took the afternoon off and went for a hike in the mountains, because I knew I needed to spend time in the beauty and relationship of nature, moving my heart towards love.

The war in Ukraine is terrifying and heartbreaking, but I feel hopeless if I only focus on the terror and fear of the people fleeing. If I can remember that they are also resilient humans, with families, love, laughter, and song, then I can also be resilient, and make space in my life to make a difference, such as through advocating against our reliance upon fossil fuels which play a part in what brought us to this war.

Each of us in our own way have been changing the way we move in the world in the last two years, in order to protect ourselves and those around us. What if we see that movement not as moving away from something, but instead as moving in order to create space for something new? To allow something new to grow into a big enough size that it can live in this world?

Perhaps this is what drinking from the cup is. Perhaps these daily acts of solidarity are rooted in knowing that our realities are tied up with each other. As people of relative privilege and peace, perhaps we have to move ourselves a bit to make space for the growth of others, and the growth of justice, peace, and love? There are moments of pain and moments of joy, but we can continue, even if, like Francis, we do not see the resolution of his goals.

So, what will we tell this child of ours, should they ever ask us why we brought them into this world? We will tell them it's because we are a people of movement, a people of hope, a people of love, invited to drink of the abundant and shared fullness of life.

For reflection this evening, we invite you to reflect:

- Who has made space for you and your fullness to be born into this world? Who has moved their heart, half an inch, for you?
- What might the growing pains, stretch marks, nausea, and stretching that you have lived these last two years be preparing you for? Who or what are you moving your heart for?
- Will you drink of the fullness of this cup, the richness of the drink, knowing that it will include both struggle and joy, pain and healing, death and resurrection?