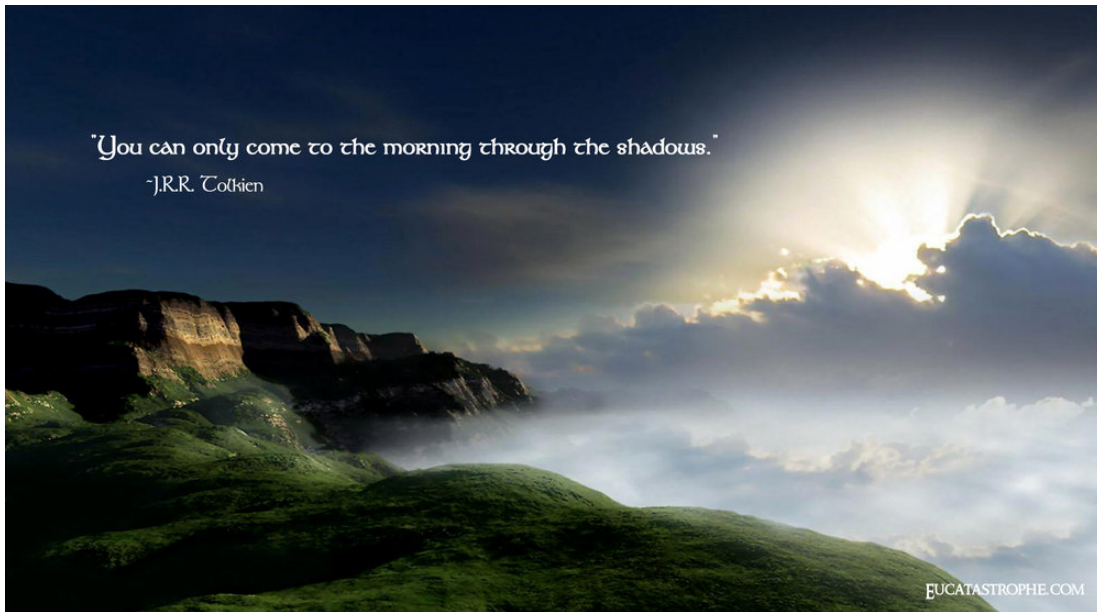


Mid-week Reflection #5
April 28, 2020
By the Rev. Nancy Yee



Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus, the Christ!

I don't know about you. But, are you thinking about getting a hair cut, yet? I certainly need one! My last hair appointment was Dec 10, 2019. Oh, those were the days when you didn't think twice of making appointments. Just pick up the phone and voila!

I remember I had an hair appointment scheduled for March 17, 2020. In an Episcopal letter, dated March 16, 2020, our bishop suspended all church services and activities. On March 17, I woke up and texted my hairdresser. I said, "Given what's happening with closures, I feel I need to cancel our appointment. My hair can wait 2 more weeks, if necessary." Sigh! Only two more weeks. How ignorant I was. Who would've guessed at the magnitude of this catastrophe.

And it **IS** a catastrophe. A world-wide one. Here's a couple of definitions of the word "catastrophe": *an event causing great and often sudden damage or suffering; a disaster. Or, a momentous tragic event ranging from extreme misfortune to utter overthrow or ruin.* Catastrophe. An appropriate word for these times.

But, there's another definition, one that's used in literary criticism: *the final event of the dramatic action especially of a tragedy.* Wikipedia says a catastrophe refers to the "unraveling" or conclusion of a drama's plot. Things are certainly unravelling in humanity's story now.

It's kind of weird, isn't it? It does feel like we're in a tragic story, a disaster movie. But, we're not. Real people are dying in real time. Real people are scared, tired and desperate. The Hollywood movies about pandemics that are currently on Netflix, like *Outbreak* and *Contagion*, reflect back to us a reality we find hard to comprehend.

We're in a catastrophe. And there's nothing we can do about it. We're in a labyrinth of pain, suffering, fear, uncertainty and waiting. We move through this labyrinth, created by a novel coronavirus, surrounded by tall hedges we can't see over. We walk through this labyrinth each day, as a global humanity, making turns which way, hoping to find the escape. Yet, we have not found the way out. We're in a labyrinth, built by a disease that is highly contagious, deadly, with no vaccine or cure in sight. This is a labyrinth of catastrophe.

However, I'm comforted by another word, one coined by J.R.R. Tolkien, a Christian writer who authored the famous trilogy *The Lord of the Rings (LOTR)*. I want to share this word with you in the hope you will be blessed. This word is *eucatastrophe*.

According to Wikipedia, a "*eucatastrophe is a sudden turn of events at the end of a story which ensures that the protagonist does not meet some terrible, impending, and very plausible and probable doom.*" J. R. R. Tolkien coined the word by affixing the Greek prefix *eu*, meaning good, to the word "catastrophe." The prefix *eu* in *eucatastrophe* is the same prefix in the Greek word, *euangelion*, meaning "gospel", or "good news".

Here's a short, animated, well-produced video from the Bible Project people.
It's a word study on *euangelion*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HT41M013X3A&vl=en>

In the climax of *The Lord of the Rings*, the eucatastrophe occurs in the struggle between Frodo and Gollum for the ring. Frodo, in mercy, previously saves Gollum's life and befriends Gollum. But, Frodo fails to destroy the ring. It looks like all is lost for humanity.

Then, in a eucatastrophe, Gollum seizes the ring and falls into the lava, destroying himself and the ring. Wiki says, "Evil is inadvertently and unforeseeably defeated through a small act of kindness and through its own corruptive machinations."

We are in a catastrophe. The world is grim and desperate, without joy and, for some, without hope. But, we must remember our God is a God of eucatastrophes. We worship a God in Christ Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith, who is the God of all that is seen and unseen, the God of all catastrophes and eucatastrophes. When we let God write our story into the book of life, eucatastrophes are our guarantee of faith.

In Luke 10:20, the disciples are thrilled they were able to cast out demons. They run back to Jesus, rejoicing. But, Jesus wasn't surprised at their ability to perform exorcisms. He said to his disciples, "Of course you did. I gave you the authority and power to cast out demons. Nothing will hurt you. But, don't rejoice because you can cast out demons. Rejoice because your names are written in heaven.

Our hair maybe long, our beards scraggly, our nails chipped, and our teeth may need cleaning. Death, decay and depression all around us. No matter. Our catastrophe will be soon be a eucatastrophe. Let the story unfold as God wills, knowing God's will is good, pleasing and perfect. All we need to do is offer our bodies as living sacrifices, renew our minds (Romans 12). I invite you to read Romans 12. It's a powerful passage on what life with God needs to look like, even in the midst of a pandemic.

I invite you this week, to enter into the drama of this pandemic with grace and mercy and joy through prayer with the Holy Spirit. As Tolkien says, "You can only come to the morning through the shadows. To help you to embrace all that is, both good and bad, I've attached in this email a pdf of "**The Welcoming Prayer.**" Welcoming all things, including our suffering and pain, and learning to let go, is a step towards sanctification and sainthood.

And let Jesus, the author of our faith story, write you into the Book of Life. Confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that he was raised from the dead. This is your salvation. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10. 9, 13) When this pandemic ends, don't rejoice because you survived COVID-19. Rejoice because you are God's beloved and your name is written on God's heart in heaven.

God will make a way through the labyrinth. So, I say to humanity, keep walking, keep looking for the way out of this catastrophe and be not afraid. For the Lord your God is with you. As St. Julian of Norwich says, "All shall be well, in all manner of things, it shall be well."

A eucatastrophe is when a story looks like it's going to end badly and then, there's a sudden turn of events where the end is good.

Here's a video of one of my favourite hymns, *The Canticle of the Turning*, based on the Magnificat (Mary's Song). For me, this song speaks to a eucatastrophe of justice in an unjust world.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXyGh1MW2OM>

+++++

MEDITATION MOMENT

In keeping with the LOTR theme in today's reflection, I invite you to listen to this video, called "Music Of Cathedrals and Forgotten Temples | 1-Hour Atmospheric Choir Mix". The video's creator made a tracklist and gives you titles and times where each song shows up in the video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4oZZhpMXP4&t=2104s>

Someone wrote the following in this video's reply section...

My wife doesn't understand why I sit alone in the dark watching the two candles on the mantle piece dancing their flame against the brickwork of the fireplace while listening to this. Meanwhile she's in the bedroom watching X Factor. I love her dearly but we are worlds apart.

For those who resonate with this, why don't you do the same. Pick a time to be alone. Turn out the lights, light a couple of candles. Say the Lord's Prayer or the Prayer of General Intercession on p. 683 of the BAS in preparation. **[I've included it in this reflection. See below.]** And listen to this video. Watch the flames dance. Let the Holy Spirit bring you the peace our Heavenly Father so desires to give you.

32 The General Intercession, BAS, p. 683

Remember, Lord, your people bowed before you, and those who are absent through age, sickness, or any other cause. Care for the infants, guide the young, support the aged, inspire the faint-hearted, and bring the wandering to your fold. Journey with the travellers, encourage the oppressed, defend the widows, deliver the captives, heal the sick. Strengthen all who are in tribulation, necessity, or distress. Remember for good those who love us, and those who hate us, and those who have asked us, unworthy as we are, to pray for them. Remember especially, Lord, those whom we have forgotten. For you are the helper of the helpless, the saviour of the lost, the refuge of the wanderer, the healer of the sick. You know the need of all and have heard each prayer: save us in your merciful loving-kindness and eternal love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

+++++

EASTER APPEAL CHALLENGE

In my last reflection, I offered a challenge to St. James and St. Philip. The challenge was this: Send me your thoughts on what you're learning about yourself, others, life and/or God in the midst of this pandemic. For every response I received, I would donate \$5 to the bishop's Easter Appeal.

I would like to thank the four individuals who responded. However, I thought I would get a bigger response than this. I can only think of possible four reasons why the response was so low:

1. People don't read my reflections. That's ok. Maybe I should send a separate email on this challenge.
2. People read it and haven't learned anything they want to share. That's ok, too. I should've said an acceptable response would be to say, "I haven't learned anything new during this pandemic." Some people aren't comfortable with reflection.
3. People read the challenge and didn't care to respond. This is sad. I hope the spirit of apathy and indifference hasn't claimed the hearts and minds of parishioners in our churches. : (
4. People read the challenge and wanted to respond but didn't want to "bankrupt" me, thinking I would be inundated with replies. Not to worry. That didn't happen. Besides, God has been gracious with our finances. We can afford it.

So, having said this, please respond to my challenge. It will do your heart good, knowing you can still do good, even in the midst of a crisis. But, if you're too stressed to write anything, I understand. Maybe just say so in an email to me. I would love to hear from you!

+++

OTHER MUSINGS

* For the curious and the strong of heart, here's a link with a list and review of pandemic movies that might be playing on Netflix <https://filmschoolrejects.com/pandemic-movies/>

** *Desiderata: A Life Changing Poem for Hard Times*

A nice reading of a poem that hung on every college dorm room wall during the 70's.
<https://youtu.be/CaVaF6TkSUU>

*** Take in some culture while you're self-isolating. Visit a museum at home
<https://youtu.be/1IZxr6eGJqk>