

When Inner Resistance is Persistent—What Then?

Jonah 3:1—4:4 and Acts 9:1-19

During this pandemic, you would have to be a modern Rip Van Winkle—sleeping through the entire crisis—not to have heard of Andrew Cuomo, the governor of New York, who has led his state during the pandemic—**or** his younger brother, Chris Cuomo, the CNN news anchor who, last spring, fought through his own Covid-19 infection in his basement in front of a national television audience.

I remember their father, Mario Cuomo, also governor of New York, who, 30 years ago, was considered to be one of the most likely people to become President of the United States.

He was a spell binding orator.

He possessed a powerful intellect.

He was a pragmatic progressive.

Under Cuomo's leadership, a public health plan that tackled the AIDS epidemic was the most intense in the nation.

Under his leadership, New York State was the first in the United States to integrate both environmental protection and energy conservation goals.

He was the first governor to support legislation that provided for people with disabilities, full integration into community life.

Under Cuomo, New York was the 1st state to enact seat belt laws.

Governor Mario Cuomo was always on the verge of announcing his campaign for President.

He was always on the verge of running.

He was always talking and thinking about running.

But he never ran.

He never actually announced and started a campaign.

He was a superb candidate who didn't run a campaign.

For whatever reason, there was some resistance within him to the idea.

It was a shame. He was electrifying. (pause)

There are painters who don't start painting.

Writers who doesn't sit down and write.

An exerciser who buys a treadmill and lets it become a place to hang clothes.

An advocate who doesn't advocate!

An investor who doesn't invest!

A lover who doesn't love.....

Resistance!

As Glenn Stewart put it in her poem in "The Dancing Word" 2 weekends ago:

My wall! Invisible wall! Psychological resistance?

Let's think about this persistence of inner resistance in our own situations and circumstances.

Let's say that you come to a moment when you are quite sure you know what you want to do in a certain matter.

You realize what you are truly called, motivated, **to do** in some important dimension of your daily living.

You are at the starting gate.

Yet opposition suddenly arises.

An immovable, invisible wall is in the way!

An irresistible opponent—prevents you from beginning.

Author Steven Pressfield calls this the experience of *Resistance*.

It's that experience of internal conflict when— knowing what you really want to do—knowing what you really need to do—you cannot get going.

An opponent without!—but just as likely—an opponent within!—stands in the way.

Doubt from without! Doubt from within!

Sabotage by someone else!

Self sabotage!—Prevents you from beginning to begin.

You were going to call someone up who might be a possible friend!

You were going to start an exercise program!

You were going to quit smoking!

You were going to start or stop some self harming habit!

Do something in your community!

Write!

Paint!

Sing!

Become a mother! A father! Grandparent!

A committed lover of another!

A guitar player! Piano player!

You were going to start a little venture you've always thought could make a little money!

But....you didn't do it!

At the moment when the only way to get started was to start—you didn't start!

Why?

What then?

Being a 12 step person, my first step is always to pray, in this case, the middle prayer line in the Serenity Prayer: “God grant me the courage to change the things I can.”

There is a prayer which works!

God is going to give you the courage you need.

Keep praying to God to make you brave!

God always answers—either the prayer—or the person praying.

Here’s an example of danother way that prayer works.

You have probably heard the phrase “writer’s block”.

Steve Zeoli, an elder here, a dedicated shower ministry person, often meets with me to discuss writing and to share writing.

We agree that “writer’s block” is actually about problem solving.

A problem in what you are writing has arisen.

That’s the resistance.

The answer though isn’t to say, “Oh that’s writer’s block. I will just wait, anxiously for the blockage to magically end.

No, you have a problem to solve, that’s all.

Some facet of a character, the story, a transition, a dialogue—needs to be problem solved.

Once you realize that, then you can start thinking about you have solved a problem before—what some options are now—try this one out. Try that one out. See what works.

You are learning—from what is resisting you—to solve the problem.

Resistance can be a very good problem to have.

Resistance can put you back in the hands of God.

Which is where you belong anyway.

Consider Jonah's encounter with resistance.

Jonah felt the call from God to do something about injustice in the city of Nineveh.

God wanted Jonah to go to Nineveh and, in contemporary terms, lead a decisive protest against social evils in Nineveh.

March on Nineveh!

But Jonah couldn't get started.

Why? Because he hated the Ninevites.

Jonah actually did not want them to change.

Jonah wanted to stay mad at them.

Jonah did not want God forgiving those rotten no good people.

Did Jonah want those nasty Ninevites to start turning over any new leaf that might get them forgiven by God?

No!....I think we can understand this.

We feel your pain, Jonah.

We don't want the people who are sending pain and hate our way forgiven either.

As a result, Jonah turned around and he went—*thataway!*

He ran as far as he could run.

Then he jumped in a boat.

You know the rest.

Jonah ended up in the belly of the whale.

Jonah couldn't get going.

Something inside Jonah—kept stopping Jonah!

In fact, he was whining and complaining right up to the end of the story.

Even at the very end, God has to take him aside and tell him:

And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”

Resistance!

You've got to Let Go and Let God.

Stop putting yourself and your little ego in between you and what needs to get done.....

Here is a common feature of dreams.

In your dream, you are trying to accomplish something.

You are trying to go somewhere.

You are exerting all the power you have within you to make something happen.

But like a Tsumani, there is some vast energy resisting you.

The Deep within you is trying to teach you something.

The One Who is Deeper Than All Knowledge has some advice for you.

Take it.

Resistance of this kind is good.

You are being swept in a direction in which God wants you now to go.

Take it.

Go! Go! Go!

This is what happened to Paul on the Damascus Road!

Paul was off on one of his usual errands, persecuting people who were following Jesus.

All the sudden, he gets knocked off his feet!

God said, “I’m gonna shake this boy up!”

You’re messin’ with the wrong God.”

The resistance was so bad, so harsh, that Paul temporarily went blind.

God made sure he wasn't going to keep going the way he was bound and determined to go.

Paul couldn't even see where he wanted to go anymore.

He had to be led by his traveling companions to Damascus where, after three days, he regained his sight and changed the course of his life to be aligned with what God wanted of him.

What is the lesson here?

The lesson is counter intuitive.

It's like the advice a person who has lived his life resisting fascism gave his daughter:

"If you have two paths to choose, choose the harder one."

Why?

The persistence of inner resistance is the friend whom God sends

To lift you to heights to which you might otherwise never go.

Amen.

There is no getting around the fact that today's Gospel passage begins with some decidedly bad news: "Now after John was arrested...."

That wasn't good news to anyone.

It was terrible news to Jesus, who had become closely associated with John the Baptist and his movement.

It meant that whenever was the last time anyone had seen John—talked with John—had a meal with John—gone on a walk with John—been baptized by John—that was the last time they were ever going to have seen John alive.

He was in the hands of a mortal enemy!

So how does this dark moment become the opportune moment for Jesus to begin his work?

It doesn't appear to make sense.

A moment of severe setback is the moment Jesus begins to work?

A time of fierce resistance to everything he and John were doing together is the time Jesus gets started?

Let's think about this for a minute in our own situations and circumstances.

Let's say that you come to a moment when you are quite sure you know what you want to do in a certain matter.

You realize what you are truly called, motivated, drawn **to do** in some important dimension of your daily living.

You are at the starting gate. But opposition suddenly arises. An immovable obstacle! Irrepressible opposition! An irresistible opponent—prevents you from beginning.

Author Steven Pressfield calls this the experience of *Resistance*.

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It's that experience of internal conflict when— knowing what you really want to do—knowing what you really need to do—you can't get going.

An opponent without!—but just as likely—an opponent within!—stands in the way.

Doubt from without! Doubt from within!

Sabotage by someone else! Self sabotage! You sabotaging yourself! –

Prevents you from beginning to begin.

Think of it this with respect common predicament as it arises in everyday matters!

Think of the last time you started to do something that you really felt called to do?—**and you didn't do it!**

You were going to call someone up who might be a possible friend!

You were going to start an exercise program!

You were going to quit smoking!

You were going to start or stop some habit!

Do something in your community!

Write!

Paint!

Sing!

Become a mother! A father! Grandparent!

A committed love of another!

A guitar player! Piano player!

You were going to start a little venture you've always thought could make a little money!

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But you didn't do it!

At the moment when the only way to get started was to start—you didn't start!

Some of you probably read or heard the recent news that the one-time popular governor of New York, Mario Cuomo, died. At one time, in the mid-1980's I believe, Mario Cuomo was thought to be one of the most likely persons to become President of the United States.

He was an outstanding orator.

He was a leader.

He had a powerful intellect.

He was always on the verge of announcing his campaign for President.

He was always on the verge of running.

He was always talking and thinking about running.

But he never did.

He never actually announced and started a campaign.

He was a superb candidate who didn't run a campaign.

He was like a painter who doesn't start painting.

A writer who doesn't sit down and write.

An exerciser who bought a treadmill and let it become a place to hang clothes.

An advocate who doesn't advocate!

An investor who doesn't invest!

A lover who doesn't love.

Do any of those profiles fit any of us?

Any part of us and our lives?

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If so, we know what it means to encounter what the author I mentioned—Steve Pressfield—calls Resistance!

The story of Jonah illustrates this common human problem.

But now come over here and consider a different scenario—In the hour of resistance that Jesus faced—when John was arrested—Jesus did the exact opposite.

Jesus seems to have realized that in that Resistance to what he and John were trying to do—**there was actually a tremendous amount of energy.**

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There was a great reservoir of energy that could be converted from Resistance into Renewal.

From Resistance energy into Renewal Energy!

Some of you remember our Tai Chi Group leader at the old church—Chun Man Sit and his wife Mary Ann Sit who led a class in the downstairs community room every Saturday morning. They led a Sunday morning program for us once and Chun Man Sit led an evening of Peace Quest as well.

I was reminded of them the other day because they sent in a nice donation to help our rebuilding effort.

Chun Man Sit had a remarkable way of taking the force of someone who was attacking him and transforming that force—or energy—into energy that neutralized the attacker.

He used the energy that was resisting him to re-establish and even strengthen his own position and balance and stability.

How do you do that? How do we do that?—in the things we are wrestling with—the things that are wrestling with us?

In the Christmas Eve Illuminated Nativity Story, the work of art that really transfixed me this time was Rembrandt's painted interpretation of Jacob Wrestling with The Angel.

Do you remember that moment in the story in Genesis?

After many years, Jacob was going back home. He hadn't seen his brother Esau in a long time. The last time he saw him, he had cheated him. Now he was going to have to encounter his long-ago cheated brother. He was distraught over the prospect. Esau might kill him. The threat becomes real the next day because when Esau arrives for the meeting—he isn't alone. He has 400 men with him. Yikes!

But what happened the night before—in the wrestling match with the angel of the Lord?

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Jacob got a new name! His new name was Israel.

He went from being *Yah-Kove*—to *Yis-Rah-El*.

Why the name change?

A change in name is a change in God's description of you.

A name change usually means God changing your circumstance—or changing some part of your life—or changing some part of you—in order to bring your life into fullness in synchronicity with God's hope for you.

That's what the Resistance does!

You have to see the Resistance as arising, not as a means of stopping you, but as way for you to find renewal.

Still, after all that happened in that fateful night of wrestling, Jacob had to get up the next morning and put himself at risk by going out and meeting Esau and his four hundred men.

The way to get started—is to start!

And you are not alone!

Jesus' initial message is still filled with power today!

Then, when John was arrested,

Jesus returned to Galilee where he started working toward the goal.

"Time's up," he said. God's power is at work in what you have to do!

The goal is really close!

Change your life!

Believe the message!

It's going to be awesome."

Amen.