

What happens to people when traumatic events happen?

Some may get stuck there, living and reliving events. Some may try every way they can to restore what they knew before. Some attempt to move forward, even though they are changed forever.

We've all been through a traumatic 2 years of pandemic, death, fear and isolation. The disciples went through the death of their dear friend and teacher, the leader of a new movement of love, healing, and justice for everyone.

But first-- let me tell you about the story of Spirit Lake.

Spirit Lake is at the foot of Mount Saint Helens in Washington State. This lake was used for recreational purposes for many years, though the biodiversity in the water was declining. They finally had to import fish for recreational purposes, because the oxygen level in the lake was declining.

Then Mount St. Helens erupted, and Spirit Lake took the full impact of the lateral blast from the volcano. It was covered with ash, logs, and debris. Spirit Lake contained highly toxic water with volcanic gases seeping up from the lakebed. A month after the eruption, the bacteria-carrying water was devoid of oxygen. That's the first picture on your bulletin cover.

Spirit Lake seemed to be a dead lake. Scientists predicted that lake would not recover quickly, but just a couple of years later the oxygen levels began to rise from the decay of the logs and debris underwater. Sooner than anyone expected, the Lake had not only recovered, but was full of a new diversity of plants, animals and fish. The oxygen levels have never been higher. You can see a recovered Spirit Lake in the second picture on your bulletin.

The resilience of the Lake surprised everyone.

In this morning's reading from the gospel of John, we see the disciples in the aftermath of the crucifixion.

Even after Jesus had visited them in hiding, they couldn't figure out a way forward. So, they moved backward—doing exactly what they had done before Jesus had changed their lives by asking them to follow him. It was as if the oxygen was sucked out of their spirit. They were beginning to think that Jesus' death was a tragedy they would never recover from. Even the fish weren't biting.

Then they see a stranger on the beach. He encourages them to throw their nets to the other side of the boat. That caught their attention. They had heard these words once before. Once before, Jesus—had given them the same seemingly ridiculous suggestion.

This time they didn't hesitate—as some of the men threw the nets into the sea again, Peter dove off the boat to meet the person who was the source of the suggestion. Could it be Jesus?

The rest of the disciples carried the fish—153 of them—to the shore and then began a conversation none of them expected.

Jesus, for Jesus it was, knew that Peter could not go forward until he put down the load from the past he was carrying. Peter had denied this man, their leader, their Savior, their friend, three times. He couldn't forgive himself.

But Jesus could. Jesus already had. But Peter is given the opportunity to accept Jesus, to love him, and to show his faith in him three times. This way, perhaps he can forgive himself.

The disciples discover that in hardening themselves after their trauma—constructing a fortress that can withstand the storms, hasn't worked. They need to become resilient, to adapt. The Spirit will blow them where it will, but only if they can bend with that wind.

Or as the old proverb goes: "The bamboo that bends is stronger than the oak that resists."
Resilience.

And now we come to us.

The world is shifting and changing rapidly. The pandemic didn't cause that, but it certainly exacerbated it. For two years there have been some people in the world that have dug in—believing that loving Jesus means that God wants them to reinforce the way things have always been done.

There have also been those in the world who have tried new things, trusting that God would give them the ability to bend with the buffeting winds of Spirit while still rooted in the resilience of God's love.

Which path is right? Only time will tell. It's difficult to see from our perspective of being in this stream of change.

But nature has taught us that everything created needs to be resilient. Jesus seems to concur; only with great love comes the ability to adapt from current circumstances and move forward.

Can we use the logs of the past to support the biodiversity –if you will- of the future—like Spirit Lake did? Like the disciples did?

Again, I don't know. But I do know our community has shown great resilience. And we can and will continue to do what Jesus suggests to all his disciples: we break bread, gather the fish, feed the sheep, and step forward and follow him.

Amen.