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Reading this story today, in the aftermath of controversies like the one caused by Bell's book and the steady exodus from the Church of people who find here only judgement and hypocrisy, I wonder: is the very idea of Hell itself a stumbling block that is keeping these "little ones" from knowing Jesus? Have we fundamentally misunderstood what Jesus is trying to say, and is that misunderstanding holding us back from a deeper relationship with Christ? Is that doctrine of the Church a hand that needs to be cut off to keep the Body of Christ from ending up in the proverbial corpse pile of Gehenna?

As Rob Bell knows all too well, asking questions like these are enough to get a person labeled a heretic. No one wants to cut off something so familiar and useful as a hand, or a foot, or an eye; but I wonder if Jesus is asking us to consider what are the consequences for *not* asking these questions? Is it better to follow Jesus lame, to live in God's Commonwealth with one foot, or to be buried with all your parts intact?

The question is not simply religious, either. The COVID lockdowns forced us to experience life in a different way, at a different speed. All those things we took for granted before suddenly were interrupted or stopped. Suddenly, things we considered necessities—like commuting to work or all the activities with which we filled our calendars—were shown to be expendable. Some things we looked forward to getting back, but others... we were left pondering whether we needed them.

I wonder, as I think about the state of the world and where we're headed, what necessities—what hands and feet that I'm used to living with—can or should be let go of. In a warming world, how badly do we need daily commutes or next-day shipping? How necessary is it to have everything wrapped in plastic, or to dispose of things that are in need of repair? What other things are keeping us trapped in Gehenna every day? Is it our desire to live in the right neighborhood? Or to bring home a bigger salary? Is our insistence that racism is not a problem, or our dependence on a constantly growing economy that are keeping us here? What are we willing to amputate to get out of the Valley of Hinnom and enter into life?

Maybe amputation is not the best metaphor. I think Jesus uses it to grab our attention, to convince us of the immediacy and the gravity of our situation, but the violence of it can be off-putting. So, let's set that aside for a moment and consider another image.

Maybe like me, you've heard a lot about Marie Kondo, the tidying consultant. Kondo has a Netflix show where she goes into people's homes and helps them declutter and organize their lives. One of the ways she does this is by asking people to consider each thing they own and ask, "Does this give me joy?" If the answer is yes, she says, keep it; but if not, maybe it's best to let it go. She encourages people to thank the items before getting rid of them. It might seem silly, but it's an acknowledgment that, just because the thing is no longer needed doesn't mean it never had value.

I wonder if that is a key to how we can move forward as the Church, as a society, as a species. Perhaps instead of talking about chopping off appendages, it's time for us to talk about thanking those things that have gotten us where we are, the things we have loved in the past, but which are no longer helpful. Then we can let them go to make room for something new. We can recognize how these things have helped us while giving ourselves permission to move beyond them to the next thing.

Some things are "evil" or "toxic" or "problematic," but not everything is. I wonder if what holds us back is the thought that if we get rid of something like this, that means it was always "bad." Maybe some things, like the idea of eternal conscious punishment, or like a way of life that prioritizes consumption and values greed, have had some value and helped make us who we are, and we can thank them and let them go as we grow beyond them. Maybe those things are holding us back from welcoming what is next, from moving into the future together. In fact, what if some of those things are unnecessarily cutting people out of our life together? What if it is some of these things that are amputating our hands and our feet and our eyes, and the invitation in the story is to put down the bone saw and enter life?