

Growing up, we had a fairly large garden in our backyard for a few years. One of my chores each spring was to pick up rocks before we planted. I could not understand how our garden managed to “grow” more rocks after I spent what felt like hours picking them up the year before. Now I know that they are moved up to the surface as the ground freezes and then thaws. I read recently of a farmer referring to this as the winter's way of healing the land.

What a beautiful way to think of something that I always saw as a nuisance! This year, our Ministries Council has chosen as our Lenten theme “Tell Me Something Good.” Perhaps it can frame how we think about the winter storms that have caused us to stay home for yet another week.

There is much to make us unhappy about this weekend's weather: it is COLD!, we are going to have to shovel and deal with the mess on our sidewalks and driveways, and there are many who have no safe shelter. Those are legitimate concerns, and we all need to be checking on neighbors, keeping ourselves safe, contributing to ministries that are feeding and sheltering the unhoused, and praying for everyone to weather the storm.

That is all true...and also, there is something beautiful about winter. As individuals and as a society, we all need winter seasons to heal us, times of silence and stillness that allow the Spirit to bring to the surface things in our lives that need to be removed. I know the last week has been lonely and hard for many of you. We need community! And, times like the past week allow us to change our routines and take time to listen to God's Spirit. Both are true.

Perhaps that is why the writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us that “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1) We need times of quiet as well as times of action. While I have been home this week, I have read a little about both Benedictine monks and the desert fathers and mothers. These two groups of faithful followers of Jesus approached faith differently, but we can learn from them both. The desert mothers and fathers often withdrew from society – not to avoid it, but to listen and learn how to live in the world without being shaped by it. The Benedictines emphasized the importance of living in community. Both are necessary. From the elders, we can learn to see silence allows us to see our own reactions clearly: how quickly anger justifies itself, how easily fear pretends to be wisdom, how often ego disguises itself as courage. We can't be free of this until we recognize it in our lives. The next step is one the Benedictine monks show us: “once we see clearly, we live in community with prayer, work, shared meals, mutual care, accountability, humility, and repair.”¹

Rather than simply enduring this winter storm, may we find the good news that Christ is present with us, even in the cold, and may we ask the Spirit to still our hearts and minds and show us things that we need to remove to make room for the new growth of spring – and to prepare us to act to bring about justice in all the ways we can when it is our time to do so.

1 Thanks to Rev. Cameron Trimble or this insight.