



Simple Gifts

Words to Inspire the Spirit

IMMANUEL CHURCH-ON-THE-HILL

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God Will Not Let Us Sink

By The Rev. Susan D. Parsons

Over the last few summers, I've been watching my grandchildren learn to swim. One of the first things they need to learn is to float on their back. It was fascinating – and frustrating – to watch as they struggled to trust the water, their sweet faces a mixture of fear and excitement.

Their parents were in the pool with them of course, their hands under the kid's back, holding them at first, then slowly lowering their hands so only the water held the child. When the child tensed up and started to sink, the parent quietly reassured them, "Don't worry, I've got you. My hand is right here. Try to breathe slowly and relax." Pretty soon the children learned they had to relax and breathe in order to float.

To me – and maybe to you, too – the year of our Lord 2020 feels much like trying to float on my back in a busy, public pool. Just as I begin to get my equilibrium in the water, and the sun is warm against my skin, some kid jumps in next to me, and sinks me. I have to get started all over. Then, just as I settle into my reverie again, my body floating effortlessly, held by the

water, a large unicorn float runs over my head, and I once again fold up and sink.

I don't believe I'm alone in feeling like this. We feel frustrated, fearful, irritable, even despondent about constantly being swamped by one crazy thing after another. And then, just as we feel exhausted by it all, we have moments of grace. We take a long, deep breath, say a prayer, allow ourselves to trust and hope, and remember how God has kept us from drowning in the past. And yet, this floating and sinking, just like the pandemic and political landscape, are exhausting. We want out of this public pool, this stormy sea.

In the Bible, water often represents chaos that must be tamed or overcome. Moses parts the waters with a stick; Jesus tames the stormy sea and then later walks on it, which is almost like floating. Jonah survives the watery deep in a whale when he allows God to lead him; and at creation God is described as moving over and separating the deep, dark waters from the land.

Taming these unpredictable waters is what we're called to do right now, as well. We have some control over these rough waters we find ourselves in. We wear masks; we practice social distancing; we do all those things we know to do; and we can float on the water.

Something else we can do is to be mindful and work to remind ourselves to breathe, to trust, to be hopeful, to relax into the lift of the water and float. Most important, we must always remember that God's hand is at our back to lift us up even in turbulent waters. God will not let us sink.

"The Avowal"

As swimmers dare
to lie face to the sky
and water bears them,
as hawks rest upon air
and air sustains them,
so would I learn to attain
freefall, and float into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,
knowing no effort earns

that all-surrounding grace.

~ Denise Levertov (1923-1997)