



September 2021

2021-9

Interbeing

As I remember, the purpose of these ramblings from your abbots are to be about what is going on in our lives--thoughts and experiences we are having on our own particular Journey. At this moment in time my soul, my brain, my heart, and my body are working passionately in several directions. I am planning a move to Colorado, I am baffled by the lack of humanity in our country and humility in my church, but most importantly I am teaching classes on understanding the roots of racism in our country and I have been rewarded by many new "learnings" in myself and in others. Through these teachings, I have become aware of the role that those of us of Northern European ancestry have played in the silencing of cultures and voices that have created this country. From the dispossession of the Indigenous Peoples of this continent, to the cultural marginalization of other ethnic groups, such as Latinos and Asians, we have created a nation that is trained to see people with one skin color as more deserving of the bounty of this land.

My heart tells me that we are all part of the intricate web of creation, which is manifested at the level of the very essence of all things. In a daily meditation from Richard Rohr, published in May, he offers the words of Thich Nhat Hanh that focus on the deep unity of all things. Logion 77 of the Gospel of Thomas tells us in the words of Yeshua, "I am the sum of everything, for everything has come from me and towards me everything unfolds. Split a piece of wood and there I am. Pick up a stone and you will find me there." This understanding is repeated in these beautiful words from a Buddhist master.

If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud with sunshine in it. Without sunshine, the forest cannot grow. In fact, nothing can grow without sunshine. And so, we know that the sunshine floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper inter-are. "Interbeing" is a word that is not in the dictionary yet, but if we combine the prefix "inter-" with the verb "to be," we have a new verb, inter-be.

If we look into this sheet of paper even more deeply, we can see that it is also in this sheet of paper, the paper and the sunshine inter-are. And if we continue to look, we can see the logger who cut the tree and brought it to the mill to be transformed into paper. And we see wheat. We know that the logger cannot exist without his daily bread, and therefore the wheat that became his bread is also in this sheet of paper. The logger's father and mother are in it too. When we look in this way, we see that without all of these things, this sheet of paper cannot exist.

Looking even more deeply, we can see ourselves in this sheet of paper too. This is not difficult to see, because when we look at a sheet of paper, it is part of our perception. Your mind is in here and mine is also. So we can say that everything is in here with this sheet of paper. We cannot point out one thing that is not here—time, space, the earth, the rain, the minerals in the soil, the sunshine, the cloud, the river, the heat. Everything co-exists with this sheet of paper. That is why I think the word inter-be should be in the dictionary. "To be" is to inter-be. We cannot just be by ourselves alone. We have to inter-be with every other thing. This sheet of paper is, because everything else is.

Suppose we try to return one of the elements to its source... Without non-paper elements, like mind, logger, sunshine and so on, there will be no paper. As thin as this sheet of paper is, it contains everything in the universe in it.

These words have helped me to see that we are all so bound together in mutual harmony and need for survival, that we cannot discount even a blade of grass as precious and meaningful. Each of us must see that we all need, grow, and thrive from this mutual inter-being. It is to our peril and the peril of our culture to ignore this. We can no longer hunker down in our little corner of safety and expect to flourish. Our only choice is to reach out in deep and sacrificial love to this web of creation—to people who don't look like us, to the people who don't vote like us, to the very air we breathe and the water we crave, to ice sheets and butterflies, iguanas, and Koalas.

And God will say again, "It is good."

~~ Abbot Ann Johnson