

One night this week, I had a crazy dream. Andy and I were in a different place than what looks like our home now, but I had the sense that it was our home. There was a house on a span of land that was dry and desert-like. Small desert shrubs and a dirt road. Andy was especially busy, moving animals, a horse in particular. The only animals we currently have are dogs, cats, and a few chickens, but in the dream, we apparently had a horse and a donkey. It seemed as though we were going somewhere, so we had to put up the animals. So, Andy led the horse into the garage, which I know makes no sense, but he had to contain the horse while he went back out for the donkey.

But he never found the donkey. There was a lot of movement and chaos going on, and I noticed a horse hoof on the side of the dirt road. Apparently, the horse had gotten out, and I motioned for Andy to come down the road. We saw the horse, whimpering, and lying on its side, obviously dying. We didn't really know what to do. It was too late to save it. We knew the horse was suffering and at the end of its life. We just stood there, feeling helpless, and, I said, "It's in vitro." And, then I woke up.

Which, I know makes no sense at all. I told you it was a crazy dream. But, as I was lying awake at 2:30 in the morning, recalling the dream and going over the details, I was really struck by what I meant by "in vitro." In scientific terms, it's the process of fertilization outside of the body. The attempt at creating life, which is the opposite of what we were witnessing. Why did I say it was creating new life when it was obviously ending one?

Well, I could've just said the wrong word. I have been known to say the wrong

word, at the wrong time, more than once. Or, maybe I was following the pattern that we learn from Christ, who dies before he is brought back to life. Through Christ, the world is in the process of being reborn.

Today, we enter Holy Week, which recalls the events that began this process, that showed us the pattern, the way to new life. Before Jesus was resurrected, he had to die. Before we receive new life, there are things that must die in us, in our lives, in our world.

Right now, the "non-essential" things in our lives have been put on pause or have been forcefully cut out of our lives. We thought these things were essential. Some, we may have enjoyed, but others perhaps not. There are many things we don't like to do, but we do them because we think they are essential in order for us to live.

But we are finding in their death that there was actually new life waiting to be born. The new "essential things" give us the new life we were always waiting for – like being present with our families, doing things we always wished we had time for, connecting with friends and family through new ways, connecting with the divine in nature. Our lives have been reduced to these bare necessities, but they are key in our process of being reborn.

This process began when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem. This wasn't the first time he passed through the gates. He had been making this pilgrimage his whole life. Remember when Jesus was a boy, probably around twelve, and got separated from his family? He lingered at the temple and began teaching when Mary and Joseph thought he was in the crowd that journeyed together. That was the same

pilgrimage they took every year to Jerusalem for Passover.

This time, it was different. Jesus made the pilgrimage from Galilee with the disciples. As many people were making their way to Jerusalem for Passover, a crowd formed. Crowds typically followed Jesus because they witnessed his miracles. He healed people and fed people. But this crowd was going to celebrate Passover. Jesus was part of that crowd, yet he pulled the disciples aside and told them what was going to happen when they got there. He tried to prepare them for what was unfolding, for what they were about to witness.

Matthew 20:17-19 says, “While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised.”

Jesus knew what he was walking into. It would not be the same joyous Passover celebration that he had always experienced before. In fact, he would suffer and die by the end of the week. Yet, he courageously follows through.

The courage it took to set the pattern for us is astounding. He arranges to ride through the gates in the humblest way possible, into a cheering crowd that would soon turn on him. Love enters the city. Love passes through the gates, but will be met with opposition and death. Yet, God’s love could not be contained nor destroyed. New life was waiting to be born. Jesus’

world was in the process of being reborn through his death.

Our world is in the process of being reborn right now and will follow the same pattern the world has ever known. New life follows death. Some are truly experiencing what seems like a death right now – the end of jobs, no active social life, the death of the life we once knew just three weeks ago. Many extroverts may feel like they are dying inside. Some are experiencing literal death as they or their loved ones are in a health crisis, and I don’t speak of that lightly.

We’re in a rare opportunity when we can participate in the process of rebirth. Most of us can choose how our lives will change from this crisis. Are we just on pause until we are forced back into our daily lives? We just pick up where we left off. Or will we have the courage to hold on to the truly essential things that have created new life in our families and in our lives? Will we have the courage to pursue new opportunities, new jobs, and the new life that was created from the death of the old one?

O God, we stand at the gate, hesitant and uncertain; we are reluctant to answer your invitation; we are slow to embark on the journey toward your reign. Grant us the help we need to be your people—the courage to join you in the procession; the selflessness to lay our cloaks before you; the freedom to lift our palms to your glory; and the knowledge that by your grace we receive new life. Walk with us through this Holy Week and surround us with your presence, each and every day. Amen.