

Restart

Will you please pray with me: Holy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing and faithful unto you, for you are our rock and our salvation. Amen.

My daughter Emily was a super curious child. It was the kind of curiosity that I loved, but also feared. She developed large motor skills early, so she was walking by 10 months, which is a gift and a curse. Whenever we'd go somewhere new, as I was greeting the hosts, taking off my coat, etc., Emily would immediately run off and start exploring the house, opening all the closed doors and cupboards. This could be seen as cute, but she also had a knack for finding anything dangerous. When she was about two, we visited one of my friends in Washington D.C. I set her down for a second to get a tour of the kitchen and after about 30 seconds, I told my friend we needed to go see what Emily was doing. "Don't worry," said my friend, "there's nothing in the living room that could hurt her."

But I knew my Emily and so went into the living room. In those 30 seconds when I was gone, she had managed to pull the chair out from the desk, climb up onto the desk, find the one medicine bottle that was hidden behind some books, and take off the "child-safety" lid. We found her before her curiosity encouraged her to try the medication. I have about a thousand stories like this.

As you can imagine, this meant that Emily's young life was full of restrictions and of "no-s," but I didn't want her to feel that her world was dangerous, and I didn't want to stifle her curiosity. So, when I could, I encouraged it in positive ways. When she got to that age of asking questions, I decided to make a game of it. You know that age—the one where kids ask "why" all the time. Our game was called, "Maybe," and it would go something like this:

Restart

Let's say we were in the car on the way to somewhere. Emily would look out the window and say, "Why is that man walking out there?" I would say, "I don't know...maybe he's going to library to get a book. Maybe." And she would say, "Maybe...". Then we would start coming up with more and more possibilities for what he might be doing, "Maybe he's going to visit his parents, maybe...." And they would become more and more outlandish... "Maybe he's an explorer and he's starting his journey to explore Michigan! Maybe..."

The game helped keep both of our minds open to new possibilities and to think in creative ways. It's a game I've been thinking about a lot recently, as I think about how to respond to the fact that this pandemic doesn't seem to be going away any time soon.

You see, one of the things I have a tendency to do is to be aware of potential future problems. This might come from having raised a child whose curiosity would lead her to find the most dangerous thing in the room and eat it, but I think it also came from the various types of training I have had. I was a lifeguard and a girl scout, and we were taught to be prepared and to see danger before it happened, so that we could prevent it. As a professor of persuasive writing and a writer myself, I had to constantly think about potential negative reactions to arguments, so that I could figure out how to address them. In none of these cases was I trained to think about potential good things because the idea was that I didn't need to prepare for good things. Prepare for the worst and then when good things come, we get a happy surprise, right? These experiences left me with the very useful skill of often being able to see the way that things could go wrong, potentially.

The problem with this skill is that if you don't balance it out with an equal ability to foresee potential good outcomes, you can have a pretty depressing view of the world. A depressing view is

Restart

something I think I don't need right now, so I've been thinking about a restart. What if I restarted my thinking about the pandemic, about what normal life is, and about what life in the future looks like? This positive view of the future doesn't mean that I will blind myself to potential problems; it's not a hide-my-head-in-the-sand thing. Instead, it's a both/and thing or a since/then thing. Since this pandemic is sticking around for a while, then...what are the potential good things that can happen? This kind of thinking has caused me think about that game I played with Emily and how it fueled a creative and hopeful sense of the future.

Our scripture today asks us to look into the future with creativity, hope, and trust in God. Our Old Testament lesson shows us Jeremiah's call. Jeremiah's initial reaction is to say, "I am just a boy," meaning that he is not just young, but he doesn't consider himself wise or mature. It looks like he is looking at the future and thinking about potential problems, right? If he is young or immature, people (especially leaders) won't listen to him. If he is unwise, he might give poor advice. It makes him afraid of people. But God asks him to look into a future with positive possibilities: "You shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." God promises that Jeremiah won't make a fool of himself because God will help him find the words to say. Perhaps more importantly, God calls Jeremiah in the first place by telling him that God knew him even as he was being formed in his mother's womb. The message is clear: Jeremiah does not need to look forward into the future with fear, thinking about potential negative outcomes of his call, because he was made for this, for precisely this.

What if we were made for this moment? Maybe God looked into time, saw the pandemic coming, saw the racial tensions in our

Restart

country, saw the environmental problems we are facing and made each and every one you and all your uniqueness specifically for this moment? Maybe...

Likewise, the author of 1 Peter calls us all to serve God bravely, stepping forward into our calling of service with trust in God, imagining potential good. What gifts and talents do you have? Maybe those gifts have been cultivated specifically for now, specifically so that you, with your gifts, could bring a little light to this darkened world. Maybe...

I have noticed that there are visionaries in our church, people who have looked at the changes the pandemic has caused and have looked at the potential good we can make from this moment. In August of last year, seeing the potential benefit of using Streamyard for our live streamed services, Karen Holcomb-Merrill reached out to us to see if we'd like to use it. Chad Frost immediately looked into it, learned it and, as you know, started using it to great effect, making our live-streamed ministry much more engaging and spiritually uplifting! Then, in the spring of 2021, seeing the way that our online services were helping so many in the community, Chuck Byam started thinking about how we could keep it going, even after we returned to in-person worship, and asked for advice from Kraig at Good Fruit video. Kraig then donated his time for a camera demonstration and his advice. Charlynn Walker saw the potential good of this system and started looking into new ways to improve our sound quality, donating hours of her time. Kelly Stuible-Clark also saw the benefit of new audio and video systems and connected us with Joe at Over the Ledges Theater, who has given us advice on sound systems and donated ethernet cables to make sure our internet could function properly. David Gruner, although new to our church, knew the potential good that good quality video could have, as his family came to our church through

Restart

our on-line worship services. He has put in many, many hours to set up the cameras, run tests, and teach others how to use them. Mae Clark, seeing the potential good for this new sound & video system, did research to find a desk we can lock and store it all in, thus protecting our investment and got it here with the help of Phillip, Chuck and Troy. And Thea Oatman, knowing how important an online presence is for our unvaccinated children and at-risk adults, has volunteered her time to learn our video system so that she can help when needed. And all of this work has been supported so strongly by our Executive Board—a group of people who is carefully stewarding your pledges to make sure that we invest in good quality, but affordable equipment, and who has helped organize and administer all of these efforts. I'll never forget when, at one meeting when we were struggling to figure out how to do hybrid worship, Lynn Hart said, I believe we can do this. We have the resources and the energy to make this happen.

All of these people looked to the future positively, trusting in our collective energy and goodwill, believing in the various gifts and insights of our congregation, and hoping in God to help us not only make the best of a bad situation, but to actually make our ministry better. It was a collective “maybe...,” which helped us restart our ministry year in a truly exciting way.

My Dear Ones, I know that there are a lot of things in our world right now that can wear us down and we are tired. But perhaps we could find some energy in looking creatively and positively at our future, imagining how we might serve a world with those problems. Remember that God knew you in your mother's wombs and gave you gifts foreknowing what you would face. Maybe we can restart our approach to this new normal with hope and, as we talked about last week, thus, restore the world...Maybe...