

The Bag

History is the unfolding of our never-ending struggle between re-membering and dis-membering.

Re-membering is driven by compassion, kindness, mercy.

The early Christians who founded hospitals, cared for victims of the plague, welcomed strangers, are examples of re-membering.

Just so in our times, the civil rights movement, the women's rights movement, Black Lives Matter and prayer groups and peace vigils are all examples of re-membering, because all these things gather people back together, toward unity and solidarity and equality.

Dis-membering is driven by ego and self, and greed and insecurity and fear.

Rejecting alliances, distinguishing the worth of people based on the absurdity of differences in skin color, and angry rhetoric, are all examples of dis-membering.

Racist and baseless claims like "only white people have contributed to the good of humanity," only serves to dis-member our human family, creating false divisions rooted in rank ignorance.

How do folks so easily forget that the Arabs gave us our numerical system, India and China gave us deep philosophy, and Polynesians learned to navigate the world's largest ocean, colonizing specks of land on a vast sea by learning to interpret the wind, stars and currents?

It surely seems like we are living in an era of dis-membering every time you look at the front page or turn on the evening news, as basic facts are under assault, while power and money seek to rule the day.

It comes too in our personal lives.

When we are little children, we are fully alive.

Just watch a loved child experience the joys of life and what you will see is wonder and surprise.

You will also see bursts of anger or tears of anguish or cries of hunger because children of that age have not yet learned how to cut off, how to dis-member, parts of themselves.

The cutting off is taught over time, by parents, teachers, and peers.

So that over time, as we are told "can't you sit still?"; and "it's not nice to smack your brother"; and "eat your peas!" — well, we start to put the more spontaneous, the more genuine parts of ourselves, into a bag, which we drag behind us as we go through life.

We put these things into a bag so we will be accepted, loved, made part of the family at home, in school and in the wider community.

We stuff our joys and angers, one after another, into that bag.

For some folks, like me, for whom being seen as nice and responsible is a huge priority, the bag I drag behind me can be a mile long!

And the thing is, the stuff in the bag doesn't just sit there.

Oh no!

It leaks out in ways that are usually destructive to myself and to others.

The stuff in the bag, we come to discover in the course of our spiritual journey, needs to come out of hiding, it needs to be integrated with my life, held, hugged, acknowledged, as parts of who I am, as we walk this rocky road whose goal is to become a complete human being.

Failure to do this hard work of examining the contents of my bag means failure to become the complete human being God intends me to be.

Refusing to face what we carry in our bag comes in many forms and wears many faces.

Some folks reject the inherent goodness of their bodies — as one writer noted about his neighbor: “Mr. Duffy, who lived a short distance from his body.”

Others reject any emotions which bring pain or pleasure, and end up living lives of walking anesthesia, numb to whatever life brings their way.

Others refuse to face the fact of death, and the certainty of our own individual deaths — because while everyone knows that everyone dies, everyone also thinks that there will be ONE exception!

Themselves!

Yet failing to face death is the surest way of failing to live this limited life to its fullest.

Still others remain in the closet because to reveal a particular sexual orientation risks offending family or friends, and thus they live their lives reading someone else's script, performing in someone else's play, all while avoiding the life God intends for them to enjoy. Shea, *The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels*, 40, paraphrased.

This brokenness, this dis-memberment, is what Jesus comes to heal.

And so it's no accident that Jesus is called the second Adam.

Where the first Adam got all caught up in doing things "my way," which led to each and every human made disaster in history, Jesus comes to show us how to live a life surrendered to "God's Way," which is the way of joy.

Jesus takes us back to what creation was intended to be; a creation that, once completed, brings God to marvel at all that she did, and then declare all of it: "Very Good!"

There is nothing that exists that God did not create, and therefore there is nothing in God's creation that is not good, not even the stuff in our bags.

All of those feelings and emotions and beliefs that we have stuffed into our very long bags that we drag behind us — all of that — in its essence, is very good.

And Jesus comes to show us how that is so.

He comes to show us how to integrate all that we are into a complete human life.

He comes to show us how to become whole.

"A monk late at night in his room, alone, suddenly hears a booming voice asking: 'What are you leaving out?'

He looks around, sees nothing, but again that voice: 'WHAT ARE YOU LEAVING OUT?'

He runs down the hall, knocking in the next monk's door, and the sleepy voice says: 'what do you want?'

The monk replies: 'What am I leaving out?'

'Me,' the sleepy one says.

He goes to the next room, same question, same answer!

Third room and the fourth, all the same:

What am I leaving out?

Me!

He runs outside just as the sun is rising over the horizon, pleading:

What am I leaving out?

And the sun says: Me!

He throws himself on the ground, and the earth says:

Me!" Id.

Becoming whole means leaving behind the blindness that comes when we refuse to examine all of who and what we are, the other word for which is: Me!

Becoming whole, becoming "me," means piercing the clay that deafens our ears, clay we pierce when we summon the courage to embrace every good, bad and ugly part of ourselves; facing our peccadillos, embracing our weaknesses, our fears.

Because it's in the facing of all of this, taking them out of our bag and holding them up to the sunlight, that these things that used to cripple us become the very things that allow us to stand up and walk.

And when we do, we come to see that if God can love all that I am, then surely I can learn to love all that I am too, and all that you are.

Even when it isn't easy.

Even when we really need to work at it.

We are entering a challenging time in world history.

The powers of dis-membering are on the rise.

And that means there will likely be great pain and sorrow coming our way.

Our job, as followers of Jesus, is to become the healing ointment of re-membering.

Begin with yourself.

Empty your own bag first.

Then be there for one another.

For when we do,

“the eyes of the blind shall be opened,

and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

the lame shall leap like a deer,

and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

And waters shall break forth in the wilderness,

and streams in the desert.” Isa. 35:5-6.

+amen