

February 21, 2020

Impermanence

Years ago, I took a group of teens from Plymouth Church to Nicaragua on a service trip. I don't remember the nature of the meeting, but we visited a group of artists who had just completed a beautiful mandala made of colored sand. It was intricate, bright and beautiful. It took days to make, and then, after a presentation in Spanish that I did not understand, the creators bent over the table and began blowing it away!

A few years later I saw a similar thing in India only with flowers. A couple of artists created a beautiful mandala out of marigolds and red carnations on the street outside of our hotel. It lasted only a couple of days before people started walking on the wilted flowers.

I have never forgotten these mandalas . . . I think because it was deeply powerful to witness the dismantling of those mandalas. It hurt. I wasn't sure I would be able to destroy or dismantle a creation after so much time and energy was used to create such beauty. For example, I still have a picture I painted in kindergarten because I can't let it go.

But, as we know, impermanence rules everything. Everything is susceptible to change, everything transforms. Nothing lasts forever. Without impermanence, all of life would be impossible. A seed could not grow into a fruit, for it would forever remain a seed. A child could not become an adult. An idea could not become a plan. Spring would never arrive, and winter would never leave.

We set ourselves up for great disappointment and personal disaster when we cling to things and hope they'll never change. If we ignore the fundamental transient nature of things, we're living inside of a dream. One of my favorite quotes is by Anaïs Nin, who said, "And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom." Is it possible to let go of those things we cling to so tightly and embrace impermanence . . . and, by embracing impermanence, open ourselves to the possibility of new life?