

April 24, 2020

Sitting with Not Knowing

One of the things that we have heard repeatedly during this pandemic is that we do not know exactly how things are going to go. We do not know exactly how the pandemic spreads. We do not know how long this is going to take. We do not know when we will have a vaccine. We do not know the best approach in allowing certain sectors of our economy to continue while asking others to stop. We do not know the long-term effects of the pandemic on our economy. We do not know the long-term psychological effect on our psyches, and so forth.

It's easy to get bogged down by the "not knowing." In fact, most days I feel like I am drowning in it. I enjoy at least some level of certainty in my life, and I still struggle with "not knowing." One of my favorite folk singers is Carrie Newcomer. She has a song called "Learning to Sit with Not Knowing." Here are some of the lyrics:

*I am learning to sit with not knowing.
Even when my restless mind begins jumping
From a worried
What next,
To a frightened
What if,
To a hard-edged and impatient,
Why aren't you already there?
I'm learning to sit and listen.*

What does it mean to "sit with not knowing"? It reminds me of my Grandma Alma. She was a Class A worrier, but every afternoon she would just sit in her rocking chair. When we were visiting, she made us sit too. I remember the clock ticking, her stomach growling, the creak of the rocker and her shushing our whispers. I asked her why she just sat there . . . being quiet. She said she was listening. Listening to what? I asked. She said, "You will know when you hear it."

That last line of Newcomer's song caught my ear: "I'm learning to sit and listen." So often when I think I am listening, I am not. During this time of extreme "not knowing," I invite you to just sit and listen. And like my grandmother said, you will know when you hear it.

Paula