

Matthew Horton

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Extreme times like this exhibit our calling to serve more than any other time. There are those who are in the medical field or are in forms of caring or other essential businesses working incredibly through all this. The rest of us probably feel useless right now sitting at home doing next to nothing. That feeling of uselessness is actually kind of amazing, not the actual feeling of it, but the fact that we are feeling it. It demonstrates how we all want to get out there and do something to help out the world and our communities. And yet, if we all actually did that, suddenly we would probably hurt the world even more since no one would be staying at home. This is such an odd time in which the best thing we can do is not to do anything at all. Conforming to social distancing and staying at home is what the vast majority of us can do to serve. But for all of us in this position, even whilst I say that is what helps, it doesn't feel that way. We are watching idly as the world and people in it struggle. And it is hard. It feels like we are stuck.

It is undoubtedly extremely easy to have the feeling of falling apart in time like this, as the world around us seems to as well. Our individual worlds have changed significantly, and there is a pressure that we all impose on ourselves that we need to hold it together, or put it back together to resemble what it was. I have personally never dealt with change well. I try to map things out, as to either avoid change as much as possible or anticipate it and be ready. With something like this, doing that is simply not a possibility. I love sports. I was watching the NBA the night that the first player tested positive, which then developed into the season being postponed, which then developed into every major sport being postponed or cancelled within the next 24 hours. If something as large as the entire sports world could fall apart within days, I'm not giving myself good odds to anticipate this change either. And yet I think it is impossible not

to try to. No matter how hard you try to get a grip on life and what is going on, it simply seems as though it always slips away. And the mental state required to regain that grip simply cannot be found at times like this. I think it is important to try to take care of yourself as much as you can, so that you can be fully there for others if they may need some help. And if you truly can't get that grip and handle on things whatsoever, then maybe someone will be there for you.

The Wild Hope Center of Vocation defines vocation in the section "What is Vocation?" as "being called into relationship with others to promote human and ecological flourishing." The obvious problem with this at the moment is that we are called to not be in relationships with others. Everyone knows, long distance relationships never work. All jokes aside, it truly isn't the same. Social distancing and being in isolation is more the promotion of preventing the opposite of flourishing, which is decay. Being on Zoom with people is awkward. Texting people is tedious and sarcasm is basically impossible. It is near impossible to flourish in this way. Those truly real elements do not exist in the same way digitally. It is simply not the same thing as being there with people. We have lost that sense of vocation.

There was one word that stuck out from the university's core element of "Service to the Advancement of Life, Health, and Wholeness" that I couldn't get away from. I think it is the root to those feelings I have had and maybe others have had, which is wholeness. More accurately, the lack thereof. Being whole means that you are complete and have not lost any pieces or parts of yourself. I'm not sure if there is anyone in existence who that actually applies to. Everyone breaks and suffers loss. But, if there is a puzzle and if a piece gets lost, that puzzle is not incomplete. It is just a 999 piece puzzle now. A whole 999 piece puzzle. If anything, it gets a little more complex and has more depth, because now you actually have to think about where to

put the final piece, rather than that 1,000th piece having no question of where it went. We have lost the piece that is to be in real relationships with people. We have lost the ability to go out and help people. That piece will return, but what can we do in place of it right now?

I always find it interesting how sometimes the smallest things are the most impactful for me, good or bad. When I am at the lowest of lows, it is always that one extra little dumb thing that makes me break. I am amazed at the fact that some of my most prominent memories are when someone said some short little sentence or did some little tiny thing and it made my day, and the fact that I still remember to this day. I do believe there is a great opportunity to do little things to help people out. I notice people are taking lots of walks lately in my neighborhood. Some random person said hello to me as I was putting some recycling out to get picked up. It was nice. Not nice just to be nice, but genuinely nice. It is nice to have some positivity right now. One of my professors made a comment about how much he liked the way I wrote testing for a programming assignment, and it made my day because it felt like I actually accomplished something. My mom had picked up groceries for the elderly couple across the street from us. She had noticed they hadn't gone out in a while and asked if they needed anything. It's all about care, which is one of the core components of the Pacific Lutheran University mission statement found in "About PLU": "PLU seeks to educate students for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership and care - for other people, for their communities and for the earth." Caring is where we can get that fulfillment of our vocation, when the service and relationship part is tied to social distancing. Take the opportunities when presented with them, because they might end up meaning a lot to that person. The world feels very cold and distant right now, and it needs a little more warmth and light in it.

Ultimately, while the world may feel as though it has stopped, and time is standing still, all of our lives are still continuing. We do not get some nice little refund of all this time spent in a pandemic back after the fact. There is no mail-in rebate. This time is just as valuable as any other, so don't let it be a complete waste. A reciprocation of care can do wonders for being able to find that grip on life. Remember this time in the future too that care and the little things can go a long ways. When the world comes back, come back to it better than when you left it.

Word Count: 1,246

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