Columns
Spirituality
Social Justice



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The omicron virus continues to spread here in the United States. Hospitals are overwhelmed and elective surgeries are postponed. Schools have returned to remote learning in many places. The cost of food and gas continues to rise. Supplies are facing shortages once again. Friends, relatives, people throughout the world continue to die, most unvaccinated.

Not much has changed politically — in fact, it seems to be getting worse. Civil rights legislation is stalled in Washington, D.C., even as state legislatures pass laws that make access to voting more difficult rather than easier. The Senate is not even united in how we are approaching the situation with Russia and Ukraine. Soon, very soon, the only focus will be the 2022 elections.

Even the climate continues to challenge us. The year 2021 saw starvation in areas of Kenya where a multiyear drought affects farming and livestock. A volcanic eruption under the ocean near Tonga caused a tsunami that extended thousands of miles, even threatening the west coast of the U.S. Strange weather patterns bring snow and frigid temperatures to Southern states unprepared for such conditions.

In the middle of all of this are people like you and me — sad, frustrated, angry, fearful, depressed — trying to make meaning out of all of this and wanting this to be a "new year."

Perhaps it is the January gloom of the Great Lakes region and frigid temperatures that I'm experiencing that have me reflecting like this and searching for a way forward.

I found comfort and inspiration in two poets, Amanda Gorman and Jan Richardson, and a songwriter, Carrie Newcomer.

Gorman writes the following in her latest poem, "New Day's Lyric":

> Tethered by this year of yearning,
>
> We are learning

That though we weren't ready for this,

We have been readied by it.

We steadily vow that no matter

How we are weighed down,

We must always pave a way forward.

This hope is our door, our portal.

Even if we never get back to normal.

No one was ready for what we have been experiencing these past years in so many areas of our life. But living through it with an awareness and a commitment to go forward has readied us for what is emerging, unfolding. We are at a threshold walking through the door, the portal, and the future is not where we came from. It will be new and we will be shaping it.

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In Richardson's poem "For Those Who Have Far to Travel: An Epiphany Blessing" (from her book *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*), she writes:

If you could see

the journey whole,

You might never

undertake it,

Might never dare

the first step

That propels you

from the place

You have known

toward the place

You know not.

Had we known on March 13, 2020, what would transpire in the years to come, could we have gone on? The months of lockdown. The months of the U.S. presidential election. The months of disruption and violation of our democratic elections. The months of family life disrupted and loved ones sick and dying.

I doubt it. Rather, we took each day at a time. We took the first steps and then the next. As the past disappeared behind us, we became more prepared to enter the future. To take the next step and move forward. We found within us the energy to propel us forward.

And what might we be looking for? In her song "A Light in the Window," Newcomer offers us this:

Off to look for a light,

For a light

In the window.

Now the old has already passed away,

But the new is too new to be born today.

So I'm throwing out seeds

On the winter snow

As the cold wind begins to blow,

Standing here on a new threshold.

The old has passed away. It will still take time for some things to die, to be transformed bringing forth a spring like rebirth. That newness takes time and we can play our part in its unfolding.

We can *throw out seeds on the winter snow*.

Standing at the threshold, readied by all that has gone before, propelled to take the next step, I find that the seeds for the birthing of the new are reflected in the fruit of the Spirit.

I invite you to join me in throwing out these seeds on the winter snow ... *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

Take time these winter months, to sit in contemplative silence and allow these seeds to take root in you, nourishing you, readying you, to take the next step. Cross the threshold, step through the portal, become a light for others to see.