

Thoughts from the Garden – January 2016

It was 7:15 on a rainy Sunday morning – a pouring Sunday morning, actually. It was the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, and I was scheduled to sing at Mass at 8:00. With my pajama pants tucked into my rain boots and my nice shirt on underneath a jacket and a poncho, I went about the morning routine of feeding the chickens, rabbits and goats. The waterfall that was steadily gushing from the sky had already drenched my pants and the end of my jacket cuffs all the way through to my shirt sleeves. Every once in a while I would give my head a good shake so the water that collected on my hood would fall to the ground instead of down my back. I felt thoroughly baptized.

It was in this state that I walked into the chicken coop to give the hens fresh food and water. As I stepped all the way inside, a gust of wind blew the door shut behind me with a loud bang, and the darkness set in. Untroubled by this, for I knew there was a string attached to the gate-like lock that would open the door for me when I pulled, I finished pouring the fresh food into the feeding bin. When I turned to leave, however, I discovered that the string, my way to freedom, was trapped behind the inner screen door just beyond my reach.



A moment of panic and claustrophobia arose within me and I took both sopping hoods off of my head. I breathed deeply and settled in. 'Ok,' I thought, 'Ernie already saw me this morning, and people will know I am missing if I don't make it to Mass. And, if worse comes to worse, Mary Lou will be here at eight tomorrow morning to take care of the chickens.' I wondered for half a second if I might fit through the small side door that the chickens use to go in and out and realized that I would rather my whole body be trapped inside the coop than half my body be stuck inside and half outside with chickens at eye level wondering why they couldn't get through. Plan B - I couldn't see much because of the small windows and the heavy clouds and rain, but I tried to use a bungee cord that I threaded through the chicken wire doors in order to hook the string and pull it towards me. With a little more light and patience, I think I might have gotten this to work, at least before eight o'clock the next morning.



Fortunately, though, I heard Ernie's footsteps and called out for him. After a small perplexed pause as he discerned where my voice was coming from, Ernie opened the door. I was free. When our laughter subsided, I thanked him profusely and made it to the choir loft in time, not only to sing the opening song, but to rehearse the psalm and use the music closet to change out of my soaked pajama pants and rain boots.

In addition to causing me to chuckle each time I remember this occasion, I find myself thinking about being trapped. How many times have I been stuck – in my own unhelpful thought pattern, unhealthy habits, or inflexible beliefs? How many people are trapped in oppressive systems with that string to freedom just out of reach? How many prisoners of war or society and victims of human trafficking are literally in bondage? I question my role in the world's oppression as I am nudged to the part I am invited to play. Am I the gust of wind that blows the door closed? Am I the screen door that unknowingly blocks the way to freedom? Or am I the string itself, insulated in my own privileged world unwilling to be reached? Not long after his baptism, Jesus proclaimed that he was sent to 'proclaim release to the captives' and to 'let the oppressed go free.'

As I reflected on this, I became fixated on the string. How can I help people to reach that string? And then I remembered Ernie. Maybe the call is simply to open the door.