

Year of Wonders

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Priests' Gathering

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Year of Wonders

or “The Great American Trauma”

or “The Perfect Storm”

or “The Year from @\$#?”

or Year of Wonders, by Geraldine Brooks

*“When an infected bolt of cloth carries plague from London to an isolated village, a housemaid **named** Anna Frith emerges as an unlikely heroine and healer. As she struggles to survive and grow, a **year** of catastrophe becomes instead annus mirabilis, a “**year of wonders.**”*

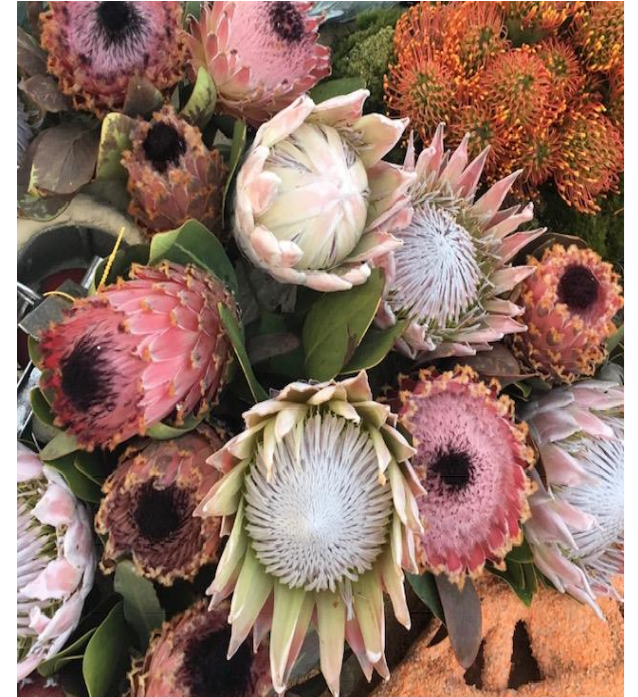


All of us...

Some of us...

Individually...

- “UNPRECEDENTED STRESS”
 - American Psychological Association
- All
 - COVID
 - Racial injustice
 - Economic downturn
 - Political context
- Some
 - Fires, hurricanes
 - The McCarrick Report
- Individual
 - Losses
 - Weddings, funerals, baptisms, birthdays
 - Jobs, plans, opportunities

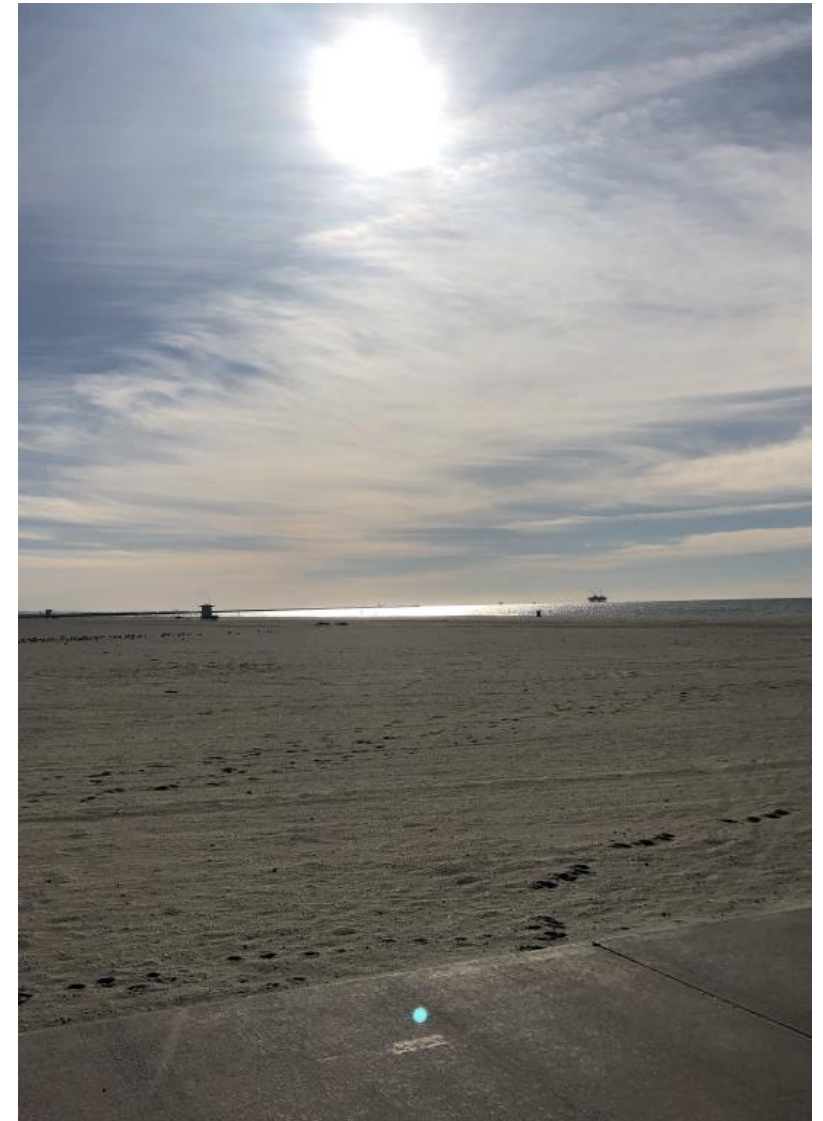


Scale and scope

American Psychological Association

“The sheer magnitude of the COVID-19 crisis is hard to fathom. As of the published date of this report, the death toll from the COVID-19 pandemic has topped 215,000 in the United States, according to Johns Hopkins University. This is more Americans than died in World War I (116,516 deaths), the Vietnam War (58,209), and the Korean War (36,516) – combined.” <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress>

Nearly 1 in 5 adults (19%) say their mental health is worse than it was at this time last year. Gen Z adults are the most likely to report experiencing common symptoms of depression, with more than 7 in 10 noting that in the prior two weeks they felt so tired that they sat around and did nothing (75%), felt very restless (74%), found it hard to think properly or concentrate (73%), felt lonely (73%), or felt miserable or unhappy (71%). <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2020/10/stress-mental-health-crisis>

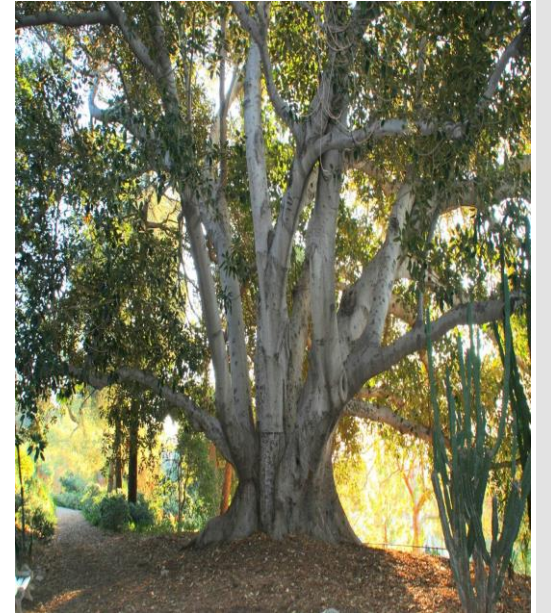


IMPACT

“Despair is a cavern
beneath our feet and we
teeter on its very brink.”

— Geraldine Brooks, [Year of Wonders](#)

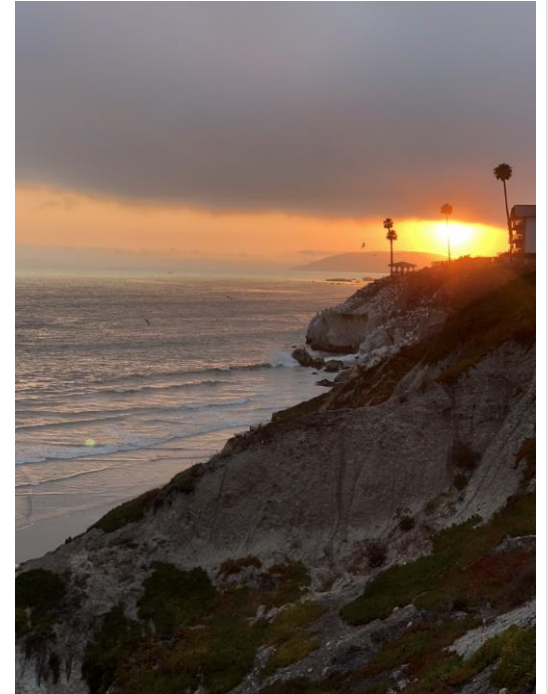
- According to Johns Hopkins University study, the number of adults reporting psychological distress has increased by 3x over what it was in 2018
 - 2018: 3.7% as compared to 2020: 24%
 - Almost 80% of adults say the pandemic is a significant source of stress, and Almost 70% of Americans report government response to the pandemic is a significant source of stress
 - Parents report more stress than non-parents
- Confused, overwhelmed, disoriented, dislocated
- Sad, lonely, lost
- Angry, trapped
- Depressed, anxious
- Scared
- Exhausted – physically, emotionally, mentally
- Exacerbation or triggering of ACEs or previous trauma



ALL OF THE ABOVE ARE COMPLETELY NORMAL RESPONSES TO A COMPLETELY ABNORMAL SITUATION

TRAUMATIZING

- For some of us, this year has been one of trauma
 - Separation from loved ones
 - Loss of loved ones
 - Threats to one's well-being or that of loved ones, and more
 - Loss of one's sense of control, purpose and agency
- These struggles are often layered on top of existing challenges, obstacles and vulnerabilities putting an inordinate strain on our mental health, both individually and collectively, which can lead to *depression, anxiety and even PTSD.*



Living through trauma

Trauma becomes a burden carried forward in time – the question becomes how is it integrated (or not) into one's narrative AND how dominant (or not) it is in one's day to day lived experience.

"These memories of happiness are fleeting things, reflections in a stream, glimpsed all broken for a second and then swept away in the current of grief that is our life now. I can't say that I ever feel what it felt like then, when I was happy. But sometimes something will touch the place where that feeling was, a touch as slight and swift as the brush of a moth's wing in the dark."

— Geraldine Brooks, *Year of Wonders*



Trauma-sensitive theology

- By its very nature, trauma challenges our meaning making systems.
- *"The realization that the core presumptions of faith are inadequate in providing clarity of meaning or support in the face of traumatizing crisis events is for many people part of what makes traumas so destabilizing."*
 - *Jennifer Baldwin*
- Consider the ways in which sacred texts and sacred stories of trauma, and the language and imagery framing them, hold trauma and all its aftermath within their patterns and constructions, and within the understanding of the faithful person.



CHALLENGING

- 2020 has also brought opportunities for:
 - Refocusing
 - Renewing
 - Reflecting
 - Refreshing
 - Simplifying
 - Quieting
 - Prioritizing
 - Discovering
 - Discarding
 - Reclaiming
 - Innovating

- “It was a voice full of light and dark. Light not only as it glimmers, but also as it glares. Dark not only as it brings cold and fear, but also as it gives rest and shade.”

— Geraldine Brooks, [Year of Wonders](#)



Stress Systems

Wired to run from a hungry bear

There's no way to run from a pandemic

Wired to seek comfort from others

Pandemic interferes with comforting others

Past experience can prepare us to respond

Past experience can make us more vulnerable



COPING



- *“Coping refers to the human behavioral process for dealing with demands, both internal or external, in situations that are perceived as threats.”*
 - Psychology Glossary at alleydog.com
- *“Here we are, alive, and you and I will have to make it what we can... I cannot say that I have faith anymore. Hope, perhaps. We have agreed that it will do for now.”*
 - Geraldine Brooks, [Year of Wonders](#)
- *“We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.”*
 - St. Teresa of Kolkata

Resilience

“Here we are, alive, and you and I will have to make it what we can.”

— Geraldine Brooks, [Year of Wonders](#)

Innate and learned

Can be cultivated, taught, diminished

The ability to “bounce back”

<https://uncw.edu/studentaffairs/committees/pdc/documents/the%20road%20to%20resilience.pdf>

The capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out.

A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities.

Skills in communication and problem solving.

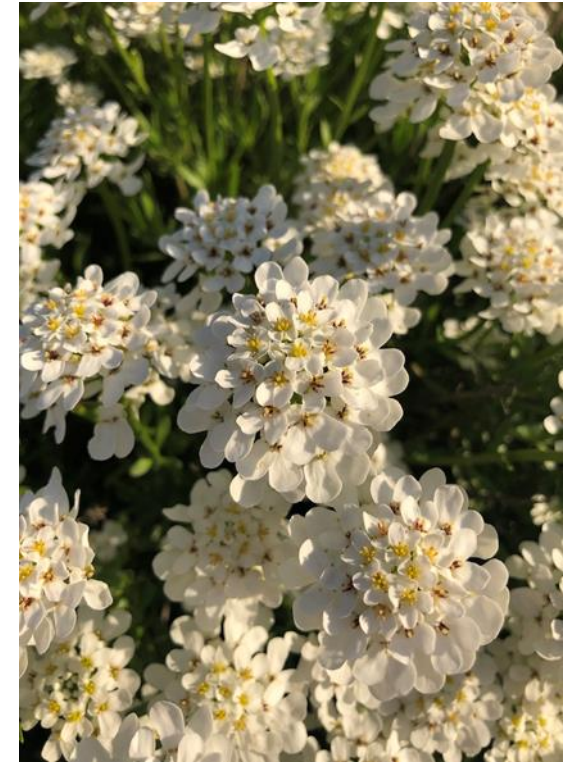
The capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses.

Spirituality is a significant component of resilience



Resilience: Qualities and Practices

- Spirituality
 - Rituals
- Connection
 - Relationships
- Perspective
 - Meaning
 - Narrative
- Intentionality
 - Self-care rituals
 - Other-care rituals
- Creativity
 - Reimagining
 - Recommitting
 - Repurposing
- Honesty
 - Acknowledging
 - Seeking support



Practicalities

- Set up a schedule
- Learn new technologies or learn how to use familiar tools in new way
- Identify and access resources
- Extend yourself in new ways
- Rest
- Engage in rituals and practices that nourish, sustain and inspire
- Move – your body – exercise – get out into nature – walk, run, meander – just move
- Create a new narrative – tell a new story
- Explore the upside
- Choose your attitude and find meaning – Viktor Frankl
- Explore new ways to put your values into action – positive psychology – U Penn Website
- Practice gratitude
- Learn something completely new
- Seek and offer support from/to family, colleagues, others
- Seek meaning
- Seek support, offer support and if needed ask for professional help
- Express gratitude



Vocation and vulnerability

- First responders, clergy, helpers, caregivers
- Agency, purpose, control
- Resentment, disorientation, loss of purpose
- Diminished capacity for self-awareness
- Reluctance to seek help

- “I open the door to my cottage these evenings on a silence so thick it falls upon me like a blanket. Of all the lonely moments of my day, this is the loneliest. I confess I have sometimes been reduced to muttering my thoughts aloud like a madwoman when the need for a human voice becomes too strong.”
— **Geraldine Brooks, Year of Wonders**



Spiritual fortitude

“Here we are, alive, and you and I will have to make it what we can.”

— **Geraldine Brooks**, [Year of Wonders](#)

Spiritual fortitude can be described as:

“(a) committing oneself to a deeper engagement of their spiritual beliefs and practices during adversity,

(b) surrounding oneself with a supportive spiritual community,

(c) allowing one's spiritual beliefs to be shaped, in part, by the reality of their hardship (i.e., a willingness to revise beliefs that simply don't hold up to reality), and

(d) embracing the difficult times in life and allowing this pain to help them do the hard work of growth.”

Dr. Daryl Van Tongeren

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hope-resilience/201901/resilience-and-spiritual-fortitude>

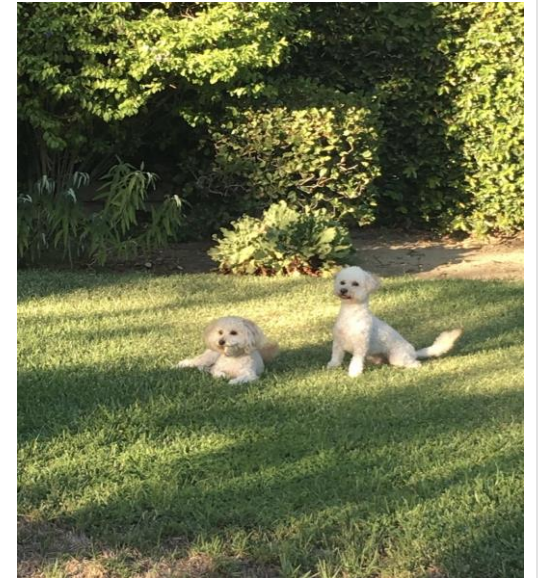


Thriving

“I do not propose to go on as I have been, feeding on the gall of my own grief. For you grieve, and yet you live, and are useful, and bring life to others.”

— Geraldine Brooks, [Year of Wonders](#)

- **Well-Being Theory: PERMA**
- *In the new well-being theory, human flourishing rests on five pillars, denoted by the handy mnemonic PERMA:*
 - *Positive Emotion*
 - *Engagement*
 - *Relationships*
 - *Meaning*
 - *Accomplishment*
- *These elements, which we choose for their own sake in our efforts to flourish, are the rock-bottom fundamentals to human well-being.*
 - Excerpt from Dr. Martin Seligman, University of Pennsylvania



PATIENCE WITH SELF

- *"I open the door to my cottage these evenings on a silence so thick it falls upon me like a blanket. Of all the lonely moments of my day, this one is always the loneliest.*
- *I confess I have sometimes been reduced to muttering my thoughts aloud like a mad-woman when the need for a human voice becomes too strong. I dislike this, for I fear the line between myself and madness is as fine these days as a cobweb, and I have seen what it means when a soul crosses over into that dim and wretched place.*
- *But I, who always prided myself on grace, now allow myself a deliberate clumsiness. I let my feet land heavily. I clatter the hearth tools. And when I draw water, I let the bucket chain grind on the stone, just to hear ragged noise instead of the smothering silence."*

— Geraldine Brooks, *Year of Wonders*



Greeting God in a Year of Wonders

"For if we could be allowed to see the Plague as a thing in Nature merely, we did not have to trouble about some grand celestial design that had to be completed before the disease would abate. We could simply work upon it as a farmer might toil to rid his field of unwanted tare, knowing that when we found the tools and the method and the resolve, we would free ourselves, no matter if we were a village full of sinners or a host of saints...Even the ordinary business of cleaning house seemed somehow to have become sacramental."

Geraldine Brooks, Year of Wonders

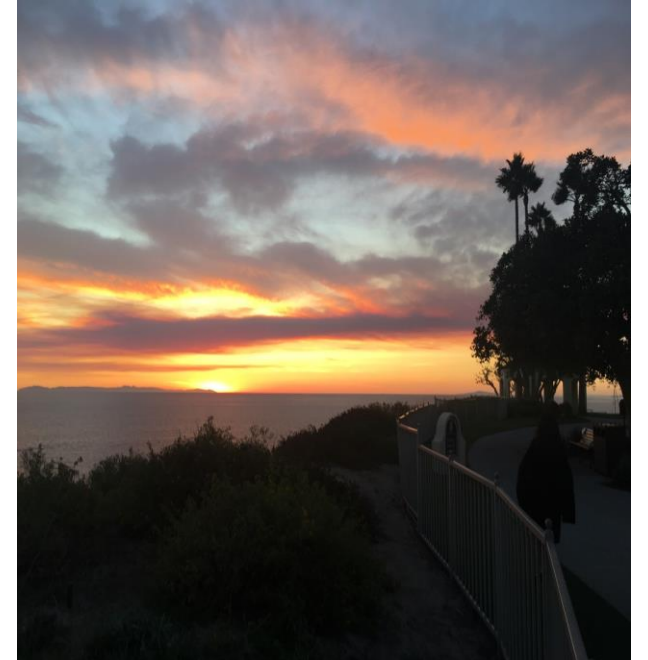
"...every morning I sit, I kneel, waiting, making friends with the habit of listening, hoping that I'm being listened to. There, I greet God... and I greet the God who is more God than the God I greet."

Pádraig Ó Tuama (poet, theologian, peacemaker)



Resources

- <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress>
- <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml>
- <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help/index.shtml>
- <https://www.mhanational.org/get-professional-help-if-you-need-it>
- <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/dtac/supplementalresearchbulletin-firstresponders-may2018.pdf>
- Local departments of mental health
- Community resources
- Vicars for Clergy
- Victims Assistance Ministry



Grateful

- For your presence,
your curiosity,
your wisdom,
and your faith-filled
leadership.
- Blessings...
 - Heather

