

In the Meantime

by *Erin Dunigan*

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Do you remember back at the beginning of this all? Back when people were joking about how to keep from touching your face (cover your hands in jalapeño) or how to know how long to wash your hands (sing happy birthday all the way through)? It seems like a lifetime ago, in many ways. Sure, we knew what was coming – or so we thought. But the actual experience of these past few months is something that we could not really have imagined. For some people the major challenge has been how to get their needs met while staying isolated – ‘needs’ such as almond butter, red wine, and freshly caught fish. For others, the challenge has been how to feed their family when the government dispensas only come every few weeks, and even when they do, can hardly feed a family for any length of time. For some of us it has been a time of being able to work in the garden, take life at a slower pace, and explore new learning. For others it has been almost maddening to not be able to go out, see people, connect, and have their routine social interactions. We are all, of course, unique in our personalities and their various ups and downs, and so it makes sense that our experience of this time would be varied as well.

Back toward the beginning of it all I had the realization that I had not sufficiently stocked up (aka hoarded) on two very essential items – red wine and coffee. So, I made a trip to Costco in Ensenada (back before there were checkpoints and temperature checks) to make sure I was stocked up. The coffee was whole bean, dark roast – a daily necessity. The red wine was a cheap Merlot from Italy, in a box of 6. I bought two boxes, just to be safe. I figured, hoarding wine, in the grand scheme of things, wasn’t all the bad. Upon arrival home from Costco I was so relieved. Phew. Exhale. Now I can handle this situation. Now I can breathe a bit easier. (The privilege of this is not lost on me, but that’s a different article.)

And then a funny thing happened. Maybe it was because the wine was not that great. Who knows? But that night when I opened a bottle to enjoy a nice glass of wine I got only a couple of sips in and...I didn’t want anymore. In fact, I haven’t had any since. It was as though once the ‘scarcity’ was removed, once the fear of not having enough was solved, the desire actually disappeared. It was as though the ‘need’ was based less on actual desire and more on fear of not having enough. It puzzled me and I began to ponder – what exactly was going on?

The more I thought about it, the more I came to realize that it was as though the idea of having to ‘go without’ somehow loomed as a threat, but on some sort of deeper level – almost like an, ‘Oh no, how will I survive?’ kind of level. It wasn’t really a desire for wine, but rather a fear of scarcity.

I’ve been thinking about this a lot during these past months – how many of our actions in this time of crisis are based out of fear – and the need to assuage that fear. Stocking up on toilet paper, for instance. Hoping that by storing up something tangible we might fend off that which we can’t see. Trying to find a

way to buffer ourselves from the invisible threat of a mysterious virus. I realized that I had unconsciously begun to assume that if I could keep the virus at bay I could somehow keep death at bay as well, somehow forgetting that of course we will all die, of something, someday. There is no amount of toilet paper or red wine that will prevent that.

Now, please don't misunderstand me – I do not then mean that we should throw caution to the wind like unmasked revelers crowded into nightclubs for 'we will all die anyway so what's the big deal?' Not at all. I continue to try to take measures to protect my own health and the health of those around me. I've got many close personal friends that have contracted Covid and I have no desire to enter into their experiences. I am maintaining 'healthy distance,' wearing a mask in public to protect myself and those I come into contact with, and trying to limit my time in public places.

But I am also trying to sit with the reality of the fact that no matter how many precautions I take, no matter how I try to protect those I love during this time of global pandemic, my loved ones (as well as myself) will all one day face death. I hope that day is far off in the future. But I also don't want to live in fear of that day. So in the meantime, while sipping my morning coffee I continue to hold this tension and try to live each day well.

Erin Dunigan is founder of Not Church. For more information regarding gatherings and events, please see www.not-church.org or www.facebook.com/notchurchbaja

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