

Trimming the Roses —Laura Urista

A person who is good at reviving dead plants (or keeping plants healthy and vibrant) is often known as a “green thumb.” If there is such a nickname for someone who’s not very good at taking care of plants, I suppose it might be a “brown thumb.” That would come closer to describing my ability (or rather, inability) to take care of plants, bushes and flowers. My husband teases me that I have trouble just keeping silk plants alive!

But here in Southern California even a “brown thumb” like me can somehow manage to keep rose bushes alive, so that each spring we enjoy beautiful, vibrant rose blooms in front of our home.

We first moved into our house in the winter. The rose bushes in front of our house were spindly and withered. I accidentally trimmed them back too far—so I thought. I trimmed until it looked like there wasn’t much left but a stump, and I thought they wouldn’t survive. But I fed and watered them, and along with a little rain and a lot of sunshine they survived. Not only did they survive, to my surprise and delight, that spring our rose bushes blossomed with the largest, most vibrant and fragrant roses I had ever seen.

TRIALS, SETBACKS & STRESS

When we go through trials, setbacks and stressful times—health issues, a job loss, a divorce or broken relationship, perhaps even the death of a loved one—it can often seem like we won’t survive. We can feel like we’ve been trimmed back too far to ever return to normal. But we can take a lesson from the rose bushes.

Feeling like we’ve been trimmed back too far can actually help us grow! Trials, setbacks and stressful times can help us be more aware of God’s presence and receptive to promptings of the Holy Spirit in our lives. That is, if we recognize and choose to listen to that “still, small voice” within.

As we become more receptive to God’s presence, we can allow Christ to live in us and water us like a fresh spring rain. Trials, setbacks and stressful times can make us more aware of our true

dependence on God—so that our parched souls truly thirst for the living water that Jesus described to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:10-14:

“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?”

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

IN THE GARDEN

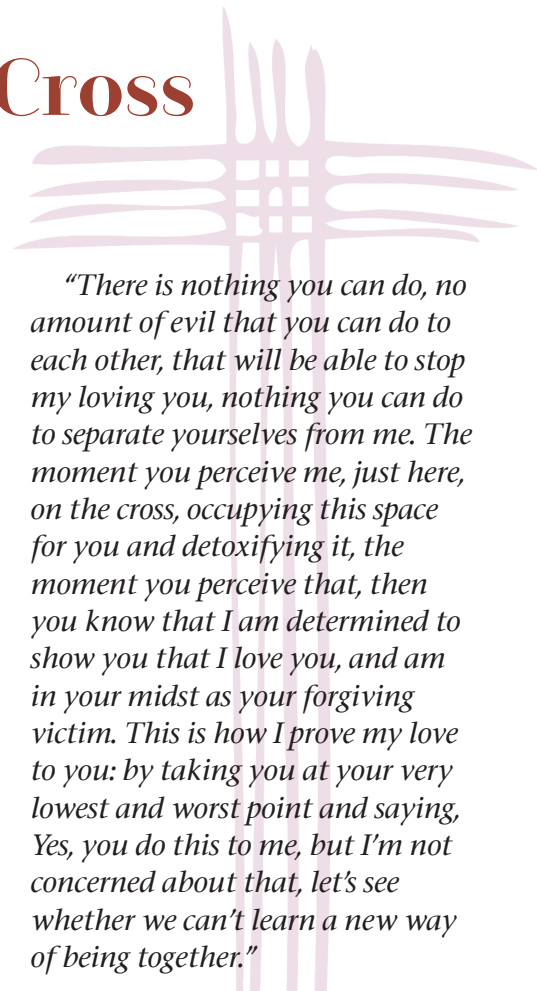
Just like roses need sunshine to grow, we also need the “Sunshine” of a vibrant relationship with Jesus. Spending time walking and talking with our best friend and Savior can help keep that relationship alive and healthy. Which reminds me of these lyrics from the old familiar hymn, “In the Garden.”

TRIMMING THE ROSES (cont’d on p. 6)



The Saving Power of the Cross

Richard Rohr



Today the primary human problem is both revealed and resolved. It is indeed a “good” Friday. What is revealed is our human inclination to kill others, in any multitude of ways, instead of dying to ourselves—to our own illusions, pretenses, narcissism, and self-defeating behaviors. Jesus dies “for” us not in the sense of “a substitute for us” but “in solidarity with” the suffering of all humanity since the beginning of time!

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The first is merely a heavenly transaction of sorts; the second is a transformation of our very soul and the trajectory of history.

In “Jesus the Forgiving Victim: Listening for the Unheard Voice” (DOERS Publishing: 2013), my dear friend James Alison writes about the true power of the Cross:

[Jesus] went to death as a victim. ... And the reason that this is important is that it catches us at our worst, as it were. The space of

the victim is the kind of place none of us at all ever wants to occupy, and if we find ourselves occupying it, it is kicking and screaming. More to the point, we spend a great deal of time pointing fingers and making sure that other people get to occupy that space, not us.

Now by Jesus going into, and occupying that space of the victim, deliberately, without any attraction to it, he is not only proving that we needn’t be afraid of death, but also we needn’t be afraid

of shame, disgrace, or of the fact that we have treated others to shame and disgrace.

It is as if he were saying “Yes, you did this to me, as you do it to each other, and here I am undergoing this, occupying the space of it happening, but I’m doing so without being embittered or resentful. In fact, I was keen to occupy this space so as to try to get across to you that I am not only utterly alive, but that I am utterly loving.

“There is nothing you can do, no amount of evil that you can do to each other, that will be able to stop my loving you, nothing you can do to separate yourselves from me. The moment you perceive me, just here, on the cross, occupying this space for you and detoxifying it, the moment you perceive that, then you know that I am determined to show you that I love you, and am in your midst as your forgiving victim. This is how I prove my love to you: by taking you at your very lowest and worst point and saying, Yes, you do this to me, but I’m not concerned about that, let’s see whether we can’t learn a new way of being together.”

On the Cross, the veil between the Holy and the unholy is torn and the “curtain of his body” becomes a “living opening” (Hebrews 10:20). We all can enter the Holy of Holies, which is the very heart of God. Nothing changed in heaven on Good Friday, but everything potentially changed on earth! □

Adapted from Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditation. UBP.

TRIMMING THE ROSES (cont’d from p. 5)

“I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses... And he walks with me and he talks with me and he tells me I am his own. And the love we share as we tarry there, no other has ever known.”

I’ve often heard we should stop and smell the roses in life—meaning, take time to notice the blessings all around us. That’s good advice and well worth the extra time and effort. But next time you happen to see some roses blooming in the sunshine, I suggest you don’t just stop and smell them. Take a moment to also ask God to show you where you might experience new growth. Thank him for the *Son-shine* that nourishes and helps us enjoy closer relationships with Him and with others. Praise him for providing the living water of Christ that he promises will become *“a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”* □

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