

*We Do What We Can
In A World
Nobody Controls*

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Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

I John 4: 7-8

Our country, our world, is an exceedingly complex place. And our future is filled with gigantic question marks.

To take one example, just think of how many of us are saying, “anything can happen between now and November to effect the outcome of the election.” But not only can *anything* happen, *a lot* can happen between now and November. All over the world at any time, people can do things or circumstances can arise that will somehow affect the outcome of the election.

We just don’t know. We keep our fingers crossed. We hope for the best. We do what we can to effect the outcome.

And beyond that, who knows what will happen after the election? We can imagine all kinds of scenarios playing out over the next several years if Donald Trump becomes president, or if Hillary Clinton becomes president.

Our country, our world, is exceedingly complex because everyone and everything in the world is interconnected. And because the world’s getting smaller and more crowded, with more people rubbing up against each other than ever before. And because change, occurring in many dimensions of life at a faster and faster pace, makes so much seem so unstable.

The world’s interconnectedness is becoming more intricate and more intense. Events reverberate, traveling further and faster throughout the world than ever before, creating more effects on more people in more places than ever before.

Who can count all the variables, and all the possible outcomes? Who knows what will happen later today, tomorrow, or next week? Who knows what life will be like on this planet 20 years from now?

Sometimes it seems as if the world is out of control.

That’s a good question to ask one’s self, “Is the world out of control?”

After pondering the question for a while, my Zen answer is, “it is wrong to say, ‘yes, the world is out of control,’ and it is wrong to say, ‘no, the world is not out of control.’”

From a certain perspective I can say, “yes, it is out of control.” And from another perspective I can say, “no it isn’t out of control.” These perspectives aren’t right or wrong, they’re just different. And there’s no one privileged perspective, no one answer to the question that’s definitive and true.

So for me, the world is out of control, the world is not out of control.

Or, from a different perspective, everybody has some control, nobody is in control.

Here’s how I’m looking at it. All of us have some control over our lives. We don’t have complete control over our lives. We have *some* control over our lives.

We have *some* control over our bodies. We have some control over our thoughts and feelings, our appetites and desires. We have some control, but not complete control, over ourselves.

We have some control over other people. Maybe a commanding control. Maybe a gentler, more subtle influence. Maybe manipulative. We have some control, but not complete control, over other people.

And the same goes for the circumstances of our lives. We exert some control, but not complete control, over our life circumstances.

The flip side is also true. Our bodies, our thoughts and feelings, our appetites and desires, other people and our life circumstances, they all exert some control over us. Maybe commanding. Maybe gentler, more subtle. Maybe manipulative. Not total control, but varying degrees of control.

We all live our lives somewhere within this equation, somewhere within this tension between exercising some control over our lives, and being somewhat controlled.

Some people in the world exercise far more control over their lives, others far less. Some people’s lives are far more constrained by who or what is controlling them, others far less.

I suppose the extent to which we control our life is the extent to which we control the world. It may not be much. Most of the world is out of our control. But we do have some control.

Everybody has some control, yet nobody is in control.

Some people believe God is in control of the world. It’s not something I believe. From my perspective, nobody controls the world, including God.

David Ross is famous for his question, “what does God do?”

It’s a fascinating question. What does God do? And how does God do it?

There are many ways to answer that question. From my perspective, there’s no one definitive answer. However, it does seem that one answer many could agree on, including many in the Christian faith, is that God loves.

God loves. God is love. Those who love know God.

Somehow, God and love are intimately related. Or, God and love are somehow one and the same.

What does God do? God loves.

How does God do it? At a minimum, God loves through the human heart, through human expressions of love.

I'm not saying the human heart expresses the full capacity of God's love, or that God's love is limited to human expressions of love, but at a minimum, God loves through the human heart, through human expressions of love.

And the human heart, the human person, can express love in many different ways. The different ways are inexhaustible. And each one is personal.

Every week in my offertory prayer, I lift up what I consider to be three powerful dimensions of love when I pray for us to embody and express liberating, healing and reconciling love.

Love liberates. Love heals. Love reconciles.

Think of all the different forms of captivity in this world.

Think of all the different wounds here on this earth.

Think of all the different conflicts around the world.

Love seeks to liberate from every form of captivity, to heal every kind of wound, to reconcile every conflicted relationship.

What an aspiration. Kind of like a Christian version of the Bodhisattva vow.

The truth is, we can't by ourselves liberate the entire world, or heal the world's countless wounds, or reconcile every conflict.

We don't control the world. Nobody does.

But what about those parts of the world where we do exercise *some* control? Those parts of the world where we are intimately related to other people, where we live within actual circumstances with other people?

Can we seek to liberate there? Can we seek to heal there? Can we seek to reconcile there? In all those places where we *can* make a difference because we do exercise *some* control? Can that be our aspiration? Can that be our Christian vow?

I went to Boston University where Howard Zinn was a professor. I got to know him somewhat, and I respected him greatly. One of his teachings was this: "I cannot liberate the world, but I can liberate the spot of ground on which I stand."

That made a big impression on me.

What about the spot of ground on which I stand?

Can I vow to liberate the spot of ground on which I stand by liberating the person standing on that spot?

Can I vow to heal and reconcile the spot of ground on which I stand by healing and reconciling the person standing on that spot?

Can I love the spot of ground on which I stand by loving the person standing on that spot?

And from there, from every spot of ground in this world on which I stand, can I be an agent of liberation, healing, and reconciliation?

Again, what a vow to make. I vow to liberate, heal, and reconcile every spot of ground upon which I ever stand. It's a vow we can never completely fulfill in our lifetime. It's a vow we never stop trying to fulfill in our lifetime. It's the very nature of a vow. We never complete our vows, and we never stop trying to fulfill our vows.

This is but one answer to the question, what does God do?
God loves through *your* heart. God loves through *your* unique, personal expressions of love.

And through *you*, God has an effect on the world.
Through *you*, God produces certain outcomes in the world.
Through *you*, God moves the world in certain directions.
Or to rephrase it.
When *you* open your heart, when *you* love, *you* have an effect on the world.
You produce certain outcomes in the world.
You move the world in certain directions.
You strive to liberate, heal, and reconcile this world.
Don't simply pray for God to do it. *You* do it, with God. God does it, with *you*.
That too is part of the interconnected reality in which we live. You do it, *with God*. God does it, *with you*.

Nobody is in control of this world. Which is a good thing. It means everybody makes a difference in this world. Because everybody has some control over this world, and because the world is so interconnected, everybody makes a difference in this world.

More importantly, because the world so interconnected, and because everybody has some control over this world, people in this world can work together to make a positive difference.

You, and me, with God, and with Texas Impact, and Austin Interfaith, and the Equal Justice Center, and the Nueces St. Mosque, and the Interfaith Environmental Network, and the people of Alegria, El Salvador, and Lifeworks, and Micah 6, and the United Church of Christ, and everyone who is mobilizing for a certain outcome in the November election, working together we can make a positive difference in this world.

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We just don't know. We keep our fingers crossed. We hope for the best.
And we *do what we can* to effect the outcome.