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Patrick Fleming

HON 112

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“Don’t expect life to be predictable or fair. Don’t try to tame the situation with some feel-good lie or confident prediction. Embrace the uncertainty of this whole life-or-death deal.”

“Why did we tolerate so much social division before? Why didn’t we cultivate stronger social bonds when we had the chance?”

We are all victims of a robbery, a case in which we come to find that no judicial system can minister justice. Freedom was taken from us, the people of the world, as we were extracted from life as we knew it and locked in the confinement of our homes. The entity responsible for all the pandemonium, a virus invisible to the naked eye.

Life teases us with the ploy that it is predictable. I sit in quarantine with my mother who vouches for the unpredictability and unfairness of life. Twice she has been diagnosed with cancer, leaving her immune system at high risk to the virus after the ensuing treatments. Twice, she has been dealt an unfair hand that no one could have foretold.

These last months are proof, to all, that life is unpredictable and often unfair. More importantly it emphasizes that life must be embraced the way it is, because the only guaranteed prediction about time, is that it will keep moving. From this, I am able to cope and accept that life is different now - not necessarily worse, just filled with much more hand washing, mask wearing, and a desire for human interaction. Albeit, fear is a dangerous poison; rather than acting with fear, grasp caution tightly and embrace the unknown because the unknown is now all that we have for certain.

As an employee of a grocery store, I am given the opportunity to observe all walks of life. In doing so, I am confronted with an unsettling amount of us that are not acting with sufficient caution and in turn, putting our team at a disadvantage.

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and a quarantine is only as safe as its most hazardous citizens. We must act with solidarity to strengthen the chain of safety.

The virus is not smarter than us, it is not even alive. In fact, it is our guest and we are it's host; yet even the virus treats all humans the same, why don't we?

Quarantine has left me isolated on a multitude of levels. Longing to say hello to my friends with a handshake, missing out on the activities I love, and desiring intimacy without paranoia. Leaving me to wonder why I took these things for granted when the ability to spread love without repercussion was the normal way of life. With this, through the means of caution and love I believe that anyone who uses any tool of judgement, such as racism, classism, sexism, or any other prejudice way of thinking, is both matching and surpassing the selfishness, ignorance, and idiocy of the people who endanger others through the disregard of safe self-quarantine practices.

In the midst of a pandemic, humans are confronted with an inevitable sacrifice of certainty. We sacrifice control of our situation, which we seemingly so naturally strive for. We make this sacrifice for our hypothetical safety, in spite of the fact that this safety is not solidified. We embrace uncertainty to grow. We embrace uncertainty to because it is more sought than the punishment of the virus. We embrace uncertainty on faith alone. The only certainty we have is that if we choose to persevere, we will do so together. We must love each other because love is a common denominator of human success over time, as it seems to always prevail over negativities.

Uncertainty must be embraced, because uncertainty is what waters the seed of growth. Tara Westover highlights the beneficial attributes of uncertainty when she says this. “To admit uncertainty is to admit weakness, powerlessness, and to believe in yourself despite both. It is frailty, but in this frailty there is a strength: the conviction to live in your own mind and not in someone else’s.” (Educated). The sacrifice of control and the uptake of uncertainty is coupled with the gain of strength, in the form of responsibility, to think and act for yourself. Westover also adds, “My life was narrated for me by others. Their voices were forceful, emphatic, absolute. It had never occurred to me that my voice may be as strong as theirs.” (Educated). This is comparable to the current day obstacle faced by any being, in that there is always going to be a voice advising you what to do. When in fact, one’s own voice or actions are just as strong as these instructing voices; it is instead the challenge of understanding the voices message and analyzing what has been heard, in order to use your voice accordingly. Tara Westover battled with the uncertainty of who’s voice to succumb to. One voice wrote in her journal, accounting for the torturous events of her days in a way that belittled the experience that she had endured. The other voice, her voice, would come to learn that she should not suppress the actual recollections of those days because in them she sought strength and found herself. Westover struggled with the uncertainty of believing one voice over another to show that being submitted to uncertainty will bring out a strength. A strength from which a determination about one’s true voice can be learned. When applied to an experience like that of the human struggles today, one could interpret Westover’s story as a testament to embrace the unknown and seek the strength of one voice, or action.

To confide in uncertainty is more wise than to reject it based upon other known certainties. It is right to say that one may know the possible outcomes of uncertainty as good or

bad, lest it is the opposite to say that one knows the outcome of uncertainty will be a particular result. As previously highlighted, certain positive qualities can be extracted from uncertainty and used as fuel for growth. Another perspective, one that adheres to Socrates' philosophy, would suggest that the uncertainty itself is the fuel for knowledge, both the good and bad. This harbors the idea that pretending to know the unknown is just the opposite of wise. Plato cites Socrates to say, "For to fear death, men, is in fact nothing other than to seem to be wise, but not to be so. For it is to seem to know what one does not know." (Plato's Apology). When faced with death, Socrates does not flee. Socrates does not flaunt to know what follows uncertainty, instead he explores the outcome in search of betterment. This is a reassurance of our actions while living through the pandemic, in that, people have been faced with death and are not captivated by fear. Rather, we further explore the issue, explore the uncertainty, in hopes that we can learn some good out of the matter. Humans have measured the situation and acted accordingly, as suggested by Socrates' philosophy when he says "I do know that it is bad and shameful to do injustice and to disobey one's better, whether god or human being. So compared to the bad things which I know are bad, I will never fear or flee the things about which I do not know whether they even happen to be good." (Plato's Apology). When it is already known what is good and what is bad, the bad action should never be assumed over the action with an unknown outcome. This idea of Socratic thinking is very applicable to dealing with the uncertainty of life and death, health and sickness, and known and unknown, in a pandemic climate because we should pursue the unknown in fighting the virus rather than succumbing to the harm it can bring.

When there is nothing else to lead one to embrace uncertainty, finding reassurance in blind faith is a better alternative than facing a known negative. A theme of holding faith through

uncertainty is a theme expressed throughout the Torah. For example, in an absence of danger Abraham is called on by the Lord to leave his home with his family in search of the land that the Lord will show him. Abraham leaves behind his home, a place absent of immediate fear or danger, in a blind faith that the Lord will not bestow negativity on him, in an act of uncertainty. “Go from your country and your kindred and your fathers house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families on earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1, The Torah). Said the Lord to Abraham. In a different circumstance, the Israelites were faced with danger and incited with fear, they were called on to trust that the Lord would lead them away from this fear. By trusting the Moses, the Israelites embraced the uncertainty ahead of them. “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you only have to keep still.” (Exodus 14:13, The Torah), said Moses to the Israelites while fleeing with pursuit from the Egyptians. The Israelites knew that being captured by the Egyptians was something to be afraid of. In the face of fear the Israelites embraced the word of the Lord and the uncertainty that it entailed. The people of the pandemic struggle with a similar challenge; we know the virus should be feared, but we still pursue a faith in the uncertainty that leads us to believe we should seek perseverance rather than fear. If there is nothing better to direct a belief in, blind faith should be assumed on the position that the embraced uncertainty will lead to a more advantageous outcome.

Paying no matter to the situation we find ourselves in, we will always be with each other, so we must love each other because we are all we have. This alone belittles the idea of prejudices and judgments, and makes them seem counter-productive. Unfortunately, it took the

absence of human interaction to realize how that same interaction was taken for granted when it was available. It only makes logical sense to cultivate stronger bonds with anyone and everyone from this point on; why wouldn't we spread love after opening our eyes to how much intimacy is missed when it is obstructed. The theme of love stands the test of time, illustrated by the Bible, for example. In the words of the Lord in the Book of Matthew, "You shall love the Lord our God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second like it 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37, The Holy Bible). The foundation of Christianity is built upon the commandment to love, with all you can, the Lord and your brothers and sisters in the same fashion. This idea may be growing through the means of quarantine, it will be important to continue to practice love even when the threat of sickness is not looming overhead.

The prevalent idea of love through time only reinforces the idea that humans are bestowed with love upon creation. The Qur'an, a religious text often critically acclaimed to be violent, says this about coexisting with each other as people. Mohammed says in reference to the words of Allah, "And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts." (Surah 30:21, The Qur'an). Not only does Allah put love between people, he also gives mercy. The roots of social divide stem from disagreement and anger. All people are put in a position to harm others, as we are also put in a position to forgive. By confiding in merciful acts, acts of retaliation are slowly erased and replaced with peace. The times we find ourselves a part of serve to teach this lesson by uniting us as one team against a virus. Once the pandemic

has passed, we should continue to uphold the unity that was forced upon us, not because we must, but instead because it will eliminate hate and cultivate peace and love among humans.

The favored spread of love and the eradication of fear is more than likely more easily spoken than performed; throughout history it seems that hatred and war is inevitable. As we each lead our own lives it is important to ask ourselves, why we should choose to spread love over hate?

Machiavelli writes in his book, *The Prince*, about the balance between being loved and feared as a leader:

Upon this a question arises: whether it be better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with. Because this is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely; they will offer you their blood, property, life and children, as is said above, when the need is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you. And that prince who, relying entirely on their promises, has neglected other precautions, is ruined; because friendships that are obtained by payments, and not by greatness or nobility of mind, may indeed be earned, but they are not secured, and in time of need cannot be relied upon; and men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which never fails. (The Prince)

In a battle of love and fear, love will triumph. Machiavelli argues that being both feared and loved, as a balance, is optimal; however, if the balance cannot be attained than it is better to be feared than loved. His rationale being that mankind is naturally fickle and more liable to flee in the face of danger from someone who they love rather than from someone who they fear. As Machiavelli proposed, it is optimal to be regarded with a balance of love and fear. Humans should live with a balance of love and fear in each other to best coexist. We should love each other; we should not fear each other, instead we should fear what we are capable of becoming if we do not strengthen our bonds with peace and love by using the fear of hatred as our fuel for love.

In any pandemic or quarantine, one is subject to outside voices attempting to direct his or her actions; it is most important to gather and analyze from these voices to determine what happens in succession. Do this while taking into account that one voice is not as quiet as once thought, and in fact, directly effects all of the surrounding people in such an uncertain time. There is strength and knowledge to be acquired from uncertainty. It is always better to seek uncertain gain than to accept certain harm from something else. When there is nothing else to motivate us to do such, there will always be love. Just as the virus kills us now, divide has killed us before. The hate that sprouts divide should be feared more than a virus that takes our lives. The spread of love enforced by the fear of mass division, will cultivate strong enough social bonds to lift us to prevail over any challenge with which we are faced.

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I, Patrick Fleming, give permission to excerpt from my essay for the future issue of the Honors College Minerva.