

*“Uncertain and Ambiguous Times”*  
*A homily by The Rev. Sb. AJ Jonah Buckley*  
*For St. Martin’s Episcopal Church, Lebanon, OR*  
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*“But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”*

I have lost count of the number of commercials I’ve seen that have started with “In these uncertain times...” so I hesitate to begin my sermon that way, but...  
In these uncertain and ambiguous times, we’re kinda not left with other options,  
but to hope for what we do not see.

I haven’t been much of a garden person...that was until this year.

This year I went all in on the whole garden thing.

And, being a beginner gardener, I sowed the seeds with wild abandon.

And, then, I waited for what I could not see.

It gave me hope to see things pop up out of the ground.

But, the thing is, with gardens, especially in Oregon, comes weeds.

And I couldn’t tell the difference, so I simply let them grow.

I figured I could sort it out later.

And to make things even more of an adventure,

the labels all washed off the pots,

so some things I wasn’t even sure WHAT I was looking to pop up.

As I said: beginner gardener.

But, I don’t know, there was just something about planting my garden back in March (when we thought we’d only be closed down for two weeks), that gave me hope in unprecedented times in my life.

Checking daily for signs of life.

I hadn’t even seen things close down that long for a blizzard back east.

I don’t even have living relatives who’ve been through anything like this to ask, which is my other back up solution when I run into new adulting obstacles.

And, yet, despite all that’s happened,

despite the continued uncertainty and ambiguity,

I can still say with confidence, “surely God is in this place”

like Jacob did when he, too, was a wanderer,

leaving everything behind to get away from his brother Esau.

I guess it may be seeing that times of  
uncertainty and ambiguity are not new that gives me hope.  
They've been cropping up in people's lives for thousands of years.  
That connects me to the greater arc of the human story.  
And, so, in these uncertain and ambiguous times,  
We wander, yes.  
We wait anxiously.  
Despair tries to overpower hope.  
It can feel like not only is this our new normal,  
But that it'll last for years to come.  
It is in times like these that we can look to this story of the wheat and the  
weeds for hope.  
Yes, there are weeds,  
there are things that are not desired,  
things that are changing the dreams and expectations and outcomes we'd had  
in mind for 2020.  
But...  
It's not for the servants to try and separate out; it's for the harvesters to do.  
What I hear in that is that we are called not to mourn what might have been,  
but to harvest what still can be.  
By that I mean that all is not lost.  
No, we cannot gather in person, but we can gather in other ways.  
We can still grow as people of faith, still grow as a community,  
Still bring about the kingdom of God through love of God, self, and others.  
When it feels like everything is a loss,  
When it feels like we might as well write this year off,  
Wake me up when it's 2021,  
We must remember that just because something's not what we hoped for,  
Because something's not what we imagined or expected,  
Doesn't mean that God is not present.  
God is surely in this place.  
This I know.  
I have been asked how I can have hope in a time like this?  
In times of uncertainty and ambiguity?

And I guess, for me, it's in knowing that God knows us better than we know ourselves,

in knowing that God is in this place,

in knowing that something new is being born out of this which may not have a lot in common with the old, but that God will still be in it.

I cannot claim to know how.

I cannot claim to be unwavering.

I am not.

But, I am willing to go all in on God being in this with us.

I will dare to claim that God does not abandon us in our times of need, in times of ambiguity and uncertainty and loss.

I will dare to claim that God is our refuge in times like this.

I will dare to claim that we, as children, as heirs of God, are rescued.

It is not our job to do the separating; it is up to God.

It is not for us to have a clear answer of the origin of evil,

But rather to know that it can disguise itself as good,

Goodness and evil can be entangled.

That does not mean we're excused. Class dismissed.

Nothing to do about it.

Instead, we are called to look deep into our hearts, into our motives, into our choices and see where things are all tangled up, to see where evil is disguised as good, to see where we might need to do some weeding with God's help.

It's as if our heart is a garden that needs tending.

We need to care for it, or the weeds will quickly become overgrown.

Things can get out of hand when we're not in conversation with our hearts.

So, this week, I urge you to try to take a few minutes, to meditate on God's presence in this place, on a hope that is unseen, and tend your heart as if it were a precious garden.