

Sometimes, You Feel Like A Nut

By Rev. James M. Truxell, M.Div

“You must be nuts to do this job! And I must be nuts too! It’s taken me half my life to realize I needed to make some important changes, and that if I could, my life would go better. I don’t know why I waited so long.” Something like that is what my client said as we moved toward the end of our work together in that springtime many years ago. I thought about what she had said and looked at myself. She was right on both counts.

First off, I do have to be nuts to do this work, otherwise how could I ever understand the people who come to me for help in other than a theoretical, bookish sort of way. (Of course, it’s also true that it helps for the counselor to know about their own “nuttness,” or else they’ll wind up being part of the problem and get in the way of finding solutions. And that’s why I . . . and my colleagues . . . have experience being the “client.” That’s why we practice ongoing consultation too: to make sure we’re using our own experience of being nuts in ways that help our clients.) In some regards, I’m just the client with the most experience. It’s also true that I joined my client in lamenting how long it has sometimes taken me to realize my needs for growth and change. Did you ever feel that way? Lots of folks have.

That’s why there’s the old Pennsylvania Dutch saying: “Ve grow too soon oldt, und too late schmart!” Or, to put it another way, “Life sure is a funny game: by the time you learn the rules, you’re too old to play!” Nuts, isn’t it! Aren’t we! More narrowly, whenever we try to make changes in our lives, our courage and determination arm-wrestle with our fears as we consider what making those changes will cost us.

All change involves saying goodbye . . . and represents a sort of dying . . . to the comfortably familiar . . . to the well-worn ways that we’ve employed to keep ourselves safe. Even when we see quite clearly that those old ways have eventually stunted our growth and messed up our relationships . . . even then we may take our time trying out new things . . . even when we see how they really might lead to a more promising life. And so it is that we are reluctant to give up blaming others for what is ours . . . it’s always more comfortable if it’s somebody else’s fault. Or perhaps we can hardly bring ourselves to assert our need, set our boundaries, or speak directly of our fear, our sadness, our anger. After all, avoiding all that is perhaps how we first learned to survive.

Let go of it? Say goodbye to all that? Die to those old ways? You’ve gotta be nuts! Precisely. We are. Nuts, I mean. For a nut contains New Life. That’s our birthright. Yet the shell of the nut also resists that new life emerging. It needs to, for creation requires a resistant medium. After all, you can even sculpt in water . . . but first you have to freeze it. And the granite sculpture that dulls a dozen chisels outlasts the figure carved in pine. Yet if the shell never yields, that new life dies. We’re nuts alright . . . and quite paradoxically so!

So the week following the session in which my client observed that we were both nuts, we met. I shared with her this poem about the paradoxical nature of being nuts . . . a poem that her observation and our conversation had inspired. I offer it to you as well . . . from one nut to another.

Nuts!

“Unless a seed fall to the ground and die, it cannot bring forth new life.” -- Jesus

Spring begins with a CRACK! of the bat
In a park with the cheers. . . .
Spring begins with a CRACK! in the heart
That breaks, spilling tears. . . .
Spring begins in the dark
Where there's no one who hears
The shell of the nut going CRACK!
Listen!
The green shoot appears!
Behind brown hardness since the Fall,
It waits. . .silently. . .darkly
And wishes for
All it's worth to be known. . .
Its secrets bare. . .
But not here! Not there!
Not now! It is too soon.
(The sun, at noon,
Yet is slanting low.)
And so, defended 'gainst the mortal cold,
Its own counsel keeps, and sleeps
Down within the humus
And the mold:
Where it is grateful for th
at structured, strictured,
Boundaried husk which
Gives not life,
Yet saves it by the purchase of some time:
Swaddling time. . .holding time. . .
Until, in time's fullness, ready,
It answers the subve
rsive call of Spring
(That perverse Mystery of death and birth so mingling.)
CRACK! the shell's embrace is broken free,
Releasing -- in giddy, adolescent mirth --
Into the damp and warming earth
A new, green wger that now the sun is right.
But what of that now-spent shell,
Whose broken, ugly shards repel

The notice of squirrels and
Other connoisseurs of Spring?
A funeral of dignity and celebration
Is its due.
So let the word go forth,
Sounded by the trumpets on the vine,
That it gave up its life in the fine
Service of protecting what it could not give:
Abundant liveliness to live!
Above let its marker be the green,
Rich extravagance that once was only dream
In silence and in secret.
And on that marker let its epitaph be read:
"I held on not too long, too tight,
But broke and bled,
To let the green life out. . .
Certain that the sun was right!"

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name and original sources are retained, including this statement. Thank you.

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