

MERIDIAN STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

When Life Forces You to Reboot

The headline in a Newsweek Magazine read: Way Cool Phones: the Computer of the Future?

If you have not stepped in to the desktop personal computer age, time is running out. Those bulky desk top computers are on their way out and computer/slash/phones are in. According to Newsweek, there are 1.5 billion cell phones in the world today, more than three times the number of personal computers. More and more cell phones have computer-like features allowing people to send and receive email, browse the internet, and work on documents. Cell phones are coming onto the market with small keyboards bringing them closer and closer to the reality of a personal computer. In many ways it will be ever more convenient to be connected, but then again, you will be able to get the dreaded "blue screen" anywhere - at dinner, while shopping, on the golf course, anywhere you travel with your phone. You are aware, I am sure, of the blue screen. It is the screen that comes up to let you know that you have just made a "fatal error" and you must reboot the computer. No one likes the blue screen. It means you have probably just lost all the data you were putting in the computer. It means you need to stop what you are doing and reboot, restart the computer. It means you **may** be having a very bad day.

I am the queen of the blue screen. I used to think it had to do with the computer equipment, but now I think I just have bad Karma. Somehow my aura is not compatible with computing. In retaliation, my computer feels compelled to take control and flash me the blue screen. It has happened on my computers at home as well as every place I have worked. The way I see it, computers have formed a conspiracy against me.

The Japanese created Haiku - poetry in narrative form usually 17 syllables long. You can find some great Haiku computer poetry. For instance:

"Stay the patient course, of little worth is your ire. The network is down."

"A crash reduces your expensive computer to a simple stone."

And my favorite: "Windows has now crashed. I am the Blue Screen of Death. No one hears your screams."

Trust me, when I get a blue screen, everyone in the neighborhood hears my screams! The "fatal error" or "illegal operation" message tells you it is time to reboot, time to restart the computer.

I can get very frustrated when the computer causes me to reboot. I do not like wasting time putting data in twice. I do not like wasting time waiting for the equipment to restart. I do not like wasting time and energy getting angry with equipment that does not care about my inconvenience. Rebooting the computer – not fun. However, it is a piece of cake compared to rebooting life.

We set out on a course and yet so often life does not go according to our plan. Every once in a while, life throws us such a curve that we literally have to reboot, we restart all over again. You think computing is frustrating, it is nothing compared to the frustration we feel when life does not go according to our plan!

Sometimes life forces us to reboot. Nobody wants to do it, it is usually painful and it takes time. Today we look specifically at rebooting and getting a fresh start based on our faith.

They had been married almost ten years. They so wanted a big family and by the time I met them, they were desperate for children. Reconciled to the reality that they were not going to have biological children, they began the long, arduous process of adoption. They were convinced that open adoption was the best option for them. The journey began. First they filled out stacks of paperwork, went through an interview process and then waited, and waited and waited. Finally, they were contacted by a young woman who was interested in moving to California and would be willing to offer this couple her unborn child for adoption. She was a couple of months pregnant and positive that she was going to put her child up for adoption. She came to California and the couple was ecstatic. They made great plans, bought furniture, painted the baby's room and were counting the days until the baby arrived, when late in the seventh month the biological mother decided to return home and marry the father of the child. It was probably good for the mother, the child and the father, but it was deeply disappointing for the adoptive couple.

The couple was crushed! Their plans lay in a heap at their feet. They were back at square one. They had to reboot. They took time to heal, considered their future and decided to **try** to adopt again.

Sometimes life does not go according to our plan. Sometimes there is an estrangement or a betrayal or a loss so devastating that we wonder if we can find our next breath. Sometimes we wonder if we can find the energy to move forward. Most everyone finds themselves having to reboot their life at one time or another.

It was true for Esau who lost his inheritance, his entire future to his conniving brother Jacob. It was true for Joseph who was sold by his brothers and was taken to a foreign land, a place where he knew no one. It was true for a teenager named Mary whose plan for her life was nearly shattered by a pregnancy. Rebooting may be a word that has come to us through computing, but it is a reality that has been with us since the beginning of time. It began when Adam and Eve were booted out of the Garden of Eden and forced to come up with an alternative plan for their lives.

Rebooting is a fact of life. The question before us - how do we go about making a fresh start when life leaves us devastated?

My friends picked themselves up and started the adoption process over. They were contacted by a second woman who had two children, was pregnant again and felt she must give this third child up for adoption. A spark of hope! The couple got their second wind and began preparing for this child to come into their lives. The couple assisted the woman through her pregnancy; they were there for the birth and rejoiced as they took a beautiful baby boy home with them. Life began for them just as they planned. A wonderful family, filled with love. Parental release papers were signed by the biological mother and all was well. This little boy was embraced by his adoptive parents, the extended family, their friends and their church. It was a joyous time. Then, just before the end of the six-month period before an adoption is final, the birth mother changed her mind and wanted the baby back. A court battle ensued for several months and eleven months after this couple had taken their beautiful adoptive son home, they were mandated by the court to return him to the birth mother.

Sometimes, life does not go according to plan. Sometimes, life is so painful that we wonder if we can take our next breath. Sometimes our hearts are broken to the place where we wonder if we can ever put the pieces together again.

When life forces us to reboot, we are standing in desperate need of a faith that is strong enough to navigate such turbulent waters. In such horrible moments of betrayal, or estrangement or loss, we are called to reach down within and find the love of God that is ever present. There is an imprint with us that reassures us we are not alone, no matter how isolated or defeated we may feel.

In the ancient wisdom of the Far East, the word for "crisis" in Chinese is made up of two characters. The character on the left means "danger" and the character on the right means "opportunity". Crisis then is a combination of danger and opportunity. To reboot our lives means releasing what has been which leaves us feeling very vulnerable and afraid and opening ourselves to what might be, possibilities we have yet to embrace.

A mature faith is strong enough to sustain us through our fear and open us to opportunity. Faith matures as we open ourselves to God and accepting our dependence on God's grace. Alice Miller is credited with writing, "Sooner or later all of us know the pain of shattered hopes and dreams. The human soul is virtually indestructible, and its ability to rise from the ashes remains as long as the body draws breath."

It is the presence of God, that Holy Spirit of God within us that enables us to rise from the ashes. It is Divine love of life deep within that calls to us in the midst of crisis, beckoning us to a fresh start, a new life. It is the grace of Jesus Christ that provides us assurance even when we are standing in the midst of a disaster. It is confidence in God's creative spirit that draws us to life anew.

The words are from the ancient Hebrew writings found in Deuteronomy, “choose life!” Choosing life is in that context choosing faith. Faith is a choice even in the midst of despair. We choose life and faith when we choose to make a fresh start. We wake up each day and put one foot in front of the other and choose to make a new path, try again, love again, live life to the fullest again even when we know there is danger in doing so. We choose life even when our plans are spoiled. We choose life even when we have experienced betrayal. We choose life even when our heart is broken. We choose life because our faith demands of us to live life in abundance. We choose life because we are loved by God through all things and no one, no thing can ever separate us from that divine love. Ours is a covenant with Yahweh, the God of Abraham, the God of Esau, the God of Mary, the God of Jesus, a covenant, an absolute guarantee that God is with us in the midst of the great days of life and the worst days of life.

Our faith is not an insurance policy against pain and suffering, but our faith is a relationship of love with the Divine that is stronger than anything this life can throw at us. Our hearts can heal, our dreams can be revised, and our lives can be filled with blessing if we but open ourselves to that reality.

I feared the couple would not be able to weather their grief together. Returning that little boy was by far the most difficult moment in their lives. They went home to an empty house and heard only the sounds of their own despair. They had to reboot again.

They healed, they stayed together and you guessed it, they started the adoption process all over again.

They are very wise people. They knew that they were putting their hearts at risk again. They had already been through thousands of dollars in their attempts to adopt. However, these two are deeply faithful people. Their desire was to have children and raise them in the Christian faith, but more importantly, they believe at the very core of their being that no matter what they face in life, God is with them. They may be discouraged, but they will not be destroyed, because with the love of God they can face anything.

We can depend too much on a day in the future when everything will come out our way. To attend to the present day with full awareness and a generous heart offers us the best hope of living life to the fullest. Things seldom turn out exactly as we’ve imagined, but the unforeseen can be less frightening if we are in the habit of entertaining new possibilities. We can pine for the day when happiness was ours and all was right with the world, or we can enjoy the journey of life with all that it offers us in this moment. This is the day that we have been given. Tomorrow is uncertain. We are given this moment to live with a sense of gratitude and hope and grace. We have been given this moment to choose life for all it is worth.

In her book *An Authentic Life*, Caroline Jones writes, “When you allow life to flow around you rather than locking it into a set of compartments, you are constantly startled into fresh wonder. The most effective response to change lies in redoubling attention to your own

sense of self, becoming clear about your values and maintaining your confidence, cultivating a positive mental attitude and keeping as healthy as possible. It is vital to attend to the care of your soul by nourishing your spiritual life.”

There is within all of us a spirit of empowerment by God. Esau was ultimately able to reconnect with his brother, forgive him, and live beside him in peace. Joseph was eventually placed in a position where he could do his brothers harm, but he, too, offered forgiveness and became a blessing in their lives. Mary, instead of living out her fears, sang a song of praise when she was faced with her challenges. All of these and millions more who have gone before us have found within their faith the ability to move beyond brokenness and fear, move beyond betrayal and loss and reboot to find a fresh start and new life.

The couple started over again. Eventually, they found a birth mother who was delighted to have them adopt her infant son. Now, many years later the couple have two children, both boys and the boys are biologically half brothers. They are fundamentally, thoroughly, and immeasurably blessed.

On this day when we honor the journey of fatherhood, of parenting, may we be clear that if we dream big and love deeply we will probably find ourselves needing to reboot now and again. However, if we are confident in the love of God within us and surrounding us, rebooting is more than just possible, rebooting is life-giving.

Embrace life, embrace hope and embrace the love of God that empowers us to see life with all its danger and all its opportunities as a gift. We can experience the “fatal error” of computing and know that our disappointment, even despair, need not be fatal, but rather an opportunity for grace to wash over us again and again and give us new life.

Live boldly this day, you are the beloved children of God.

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