

“We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new; and yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability. . .and that it may take a very long time.”

I have a copy of the poem-prayer “Patient Trust” hanging on the wall of my study. It’s a prayer that has spoken to me when no others have. It is a wonderful reminder for a recovering perfectionist like myself. So when I was asked to offer a reflection during this Novena based on the theme of “Trusting in the Slow Work of God,” I didn’t hesitate.

In hindsight, I see that the perfectionist part of me saw this as a golden opportunity to figure out once and for all how exactly God has been working in my life and in the world in the past two years. Won’t that be nice! By March 9, I’ll have the answers! But as the day to offer this reflection crept ever closer, I found my anxiety growing. And then I decided it might be a good time to actually read the prayer on my wall again. And I was reminded, as the prayer says, to “let my ideas grow, let them shape themselves without undue haste. Don’t try to force them on. Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming in you will be.” What a relief. I had been trying to muscle myself by myself to, as the prayer says, reach the end without delay. Instead, I offer you what is real now, even though it’s not complete or perfect, because only God can say what this new spirit gradually forming in me, in you, in all of us, will be.

**Ask and it will be given to you;  
Seek and you will find;  
Knock and the door will be opened to you.**

I’ve always loved this piece of scripture. Ask, seek, and knock, and you’ll receive, find, and be welcomed. It sounds so simple. But as I was preparing for today, I learned that a more accurate translation of the Greek might read:

**Keep on asking, and it will be given to you. Keep on seeking, and you will find.  
Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.**

It’s about a process, not a moment. It’s not about uttering the perfect password to open the door, but staying present and committed to the ongoing journey of trusting in the slow work of God.

In the gospel today, Jesus asks: which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asked for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asked for a fish? Jesus assures us that like a loving parent, God gives us what we need.

But at times, the last couple of years felt for many people, including me, like knocking on a door, lightly at first, then louder, then ringing the doorbell, and then eventually keeping one's finger pressed on the doorbell in frustration for a solid minute. It felt at times like asking for bread and getting not just one stone, but a pile. Like, yep, here's another stone for you! At times, it felt like the door I was knocking on opened a crack, only to quickly shut.

In my personal life, the pandemic coincided with a period of difficult medical circumstances in my family. My husband Mike and I have three kids, and over the last few years we could have used one of those punch cards at the ER to get a free visit after your first five. "Which orthopedic surgeon do you think we should go to this time?" is something I have said. But two months into the pandemic this string of bad luck took a turn for the worse. Just after his fifteenth birthday, my son noticed that he couldn't see well out of one eye. It quickly became clear this was not a typical situation of needing glasses. After a trip to the eye doctor and an emergency MRI to rule out a brain tumor, he was diagnosed with a rare disease that attacks the optic nerves and causes rapid vision loss. Within a few months, he was legally blind. A specialist predicted that he would eventually regain some of his vision, but couldn't say how much or when.

I'm thrilled to tell you now that that doctor was right, and the outcome has been better than we even expected. My son was legally blind for over a year, and then his vision began to slowly improve to the point that he was able to get his driver's permit, read books, and play sports again. And I would like to be able to tell you that I trusted in the slow work of God the whole time, but instead, I'm going to tell you what's real.

I trusted easily at first, even though my son's diagnosis was the hardest thing I had experienced. I prayed to find a way forward into this uncertain parenting journey, and while I absolutely hated what was happening to my son, I trusted in God. But then, without going into all the details, my family's bad run of luck just continued (think more orthopedic surgeons), and it felt like the stones and

serpents just kept coming, and at some point I slowly lost my grip on the thread of trust.

It happened gradually, so that I don't even know exactly when it happened. And I think what I most want to say today is that it's okay that we lose our trust sometimes. That's real. We are human. It's okay that we need to take a break from knocking on the door. Anyone would. It's okay not to understand what happened to the last two years yet.

And I would really like to be able to tell you that now I understand what happened, that my faith was shaken but now it is more solid than ever because everything worked out, and that I see now how my son losing his vision for a year was all part of God's plan. But that would be, as the poem-prayer says, to skip past the intermediate stages I am in now. It wouldn't be true to the place some of us are now after two years of pandemic. We're confused about what has happened and why. And that's okay, too. We can be confused and be sad and be angry, and we can be finding our way back into trust.

I think part of what has made this past two years so difficult was the loss of the community, spaces, rituals, and sacraments that can sustain trust when it flags. We sustain each other in these moments when our trust lapses. That's part of what the Body of Christ is and does. We're not all in the same place with things at the same time, so we can hold each other up.

I lost my grip on the thread of trust—but was it gone? I couldn't feel it for a while, that's true. But what I believe now is that that thread of trust was always there and was being held for me by others. People kept knocking for me when I couldn't anymore. People were holding me and my son and my family in their prayers when I had let go of the thread.

Maybe it's kind of like being on hold on the phone, where you've been on hold for a really long time and you really need to speak to an actual human being, but you also really need to go to the bathroom, so someone else holds to the phone for you in case an actual human being finally answers.

Or maybe, and this is definitely a better metaphor, it's like what Sarah Faux so beautifully described in her Novena reflection on Tuesday—you're in a choral

group and you're all holding the melody together and you have to take a breath because otherwise you'll faint so someone else holds the note so you can take the breath. But then you can join again.

You can always join again.

Part of what some of us need to do now is to go back and find God in the story. We might need to go back and look for the shards of light Lisa Chambers described on the second day of this Novena because we just couldn't see them clearly at the time. We might need to go back and look again at that pile of stones. Maybe we will find bread there. Myself, I'm thinking about how when my son couldn't play basketball anymore because he couldn't see the hoop or the ball coming, he started rock climbing. And I'm thinking about how when he couldn't read music to play in the school band anymore, he started learning the guitar. And I'm thinking about how when we were stuck at home during the pandemic and started playing poker as a family—it turned out my ten-year-old was scarily good at bluffing, but that's a different story—and my son couldn't recognize the cards anymore, his older sister ordered jumbo low vision decks of cards for us to use. And most of all, I'm thinking about the day we visited the doctor in California who told my son he was going to lose his vision and then maybe get it back but who knows when and probably he wouldn't ever be able to get his driver's license, and then that afternoon my son ran and jumped in the ocean, because he has always loved to run and jump in the ocean. And the other day, I was talking to him, and he said, you know, I think it was really a bigger deal for everyone else than it was for me. Because I never felt like it was that terrible. Even if I hadn't gotten my vision back, I knew I would be ok.

He was holding the thread all along.