

[Never Let A Serious Crisis Go To Waste](#) (2 Timothy 1:8-12)
Sunday, October 6, 2013

The title of my sermon this morning, “Never Let a Serious Crisis Go To Waste,” is a quote from the Mayor Chicago, Rahm Emanuel. The full quote goes this way: *You never want a serious crisis to go to waste....it’s an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before.* I love that. Do you? Do you believe it? I do. Over time, I have come to believe it.

I grew up with the thought that a crisis is something to be avoided. When I was a kid, my Dad once lost his job. That was a crisis. Then he got a better job. Oh, good, I thought, crisis over. It never occurred to me to think what I learned from the crisis – how to pull together with my family, how to think creatively about money. It was that winter I started snow shoveling in our Baltimore neighborhood and earned sometimes \$20 on a snowy day. Lot of money for a ten year old in 1960.

I also did not like conflict much. Conflict felt threatening and scary. So nobody was more surprised than myself when I stood up one morning in an all school meeting at boarding school (where I was a scholarship student) and spoke up about daily racism I saw practiced against the minority students in the school. I got called into the vice headmaster’s office the next day and lectured. I was a scholarship student. The broad hint was that scholarships are given to those who show loyalty. This reprimand felt like a crisis inside me at the time. As I look back on it, though, I remember only what it felt like to stand up and speak from my heart. Didn’t know I had it in me!.

There’s something that wants to protect us from crisis! Yet few of us would change and grow without one! .Crisis means risk! Risk could bring loss, abandonment, everything we fear most! Crisis means not knowing how it’s all going to turn out! Why, crisis may mean leaving old habits and relationships behind. Something in us asks, *Why would you want to put it all on the line? Don’t be an idiot! Why, I’m too old, too young, too dumb, too late, too soon, too this, too that!!*

But there’s another voice inside: the one full of love and truth. One you can trust. The voice that says: *I am not done with you yet.* It’s the voice that Paul hears in

the New Testament reading. As Paul is in prison, facing a possible death sentence for crimes against the state – that is to say, for preaching a gospel message threatening to the established religious order – Paul is not downcast. *I couldn't be more sure of my ground, Paul says. The One I've trusted in can take care of what he's trusted me to do right to the end.*

So when I say to you, *Never let a serious crisis go to waste*, I am inviting all of us to entertain the possibility that every crisis, every circumstance that feels challenging, every limitation we can't see our way around, is also an opportunity to find the blessing that meets us on the other side. You see, when we push the crisis away, we may lose the opportunity for growth that lies right in front of us. Instead, by partnering with what looks like a crisis and asking what the crisis might hold for us, we invite new perspectives and new paths. Who knows what God may do? We don't – unless we ask and trust.

There's a wonderful video on YouTube somebody told me about. . It's one of the TED Talks – a series of educational talks about life from people who have some pretty extraordinary reflections about their own lives and work. This one comes from a man named Phil Hansen. Phil is an artist. Often today he creates these powerful images of faces – faces full of anger and longing and hope and a wild beauty. The faces are often projected out on ordinary objects – a box or wall or street corner so you get a sense of transformation wanting to spring out alive right out of the wall or sidewalk in front of you.

A few years ago, while he was still in art school, Phil Hansen gave up on his art. Loved it, but gave it up. He had contracted some sort of nervous disorder that made his hands shake and he could no longer draw a straight line. He was incredibly frustrated and angry. So he gave up. What could he do? He was in an incredible funk.

After three years, missing his art so much, he went to a neurologist to see what might be done. The doctor confirmed that the nerve damage was permanent. No medical magic here. No miracle operation. The shake is permanent.

But the doctor posed a question to Phil. He said, *So, why don't you embrace the shake?*

Phil Hansen went home, deciding that the shake in his hands could open his art up instead of shutting him down. Watch the video yourself for the whole story. Not only did Phil Hansen begin to create amazing art in ways he had never dreamed of before, he recognized the power of limitation to set us free. You look at his art and you see that there are no straight lines – lines curl or dot or swirl – creating images that pop, full of feeling. So the shake became the message. Limitation became invitation. Phil says, "We need to first be limited in order to become limit/ess...Limitations may be the most unlikely of places to harness creativity, but perhaps one of the best ways to get ourselves out of ruts, rethink categories, and challenge accepted norms."

What does that message mean to you? Where in your life are you seeing only limitation? Where is there a crisis that invites your trust that something is opening up for you? You don't have to be an artist to "embrace the shake." All you have to be is a human being willing to see that your story is not done yet.

We are limited in this body and in this life. We think there is no reason to believe, no alternative to what we think is real. . If we wish to see transformation in our lives, there is no point in asking the world to provide it for us. The world cannot do it. But the world is not in control of our peace and happiness. The Lord whom we praise and honor this morning does not see any of us as limited, for love has no limits, and we are one with God who is our beginning and our ending. We have a God who looks at us in our limitations and says: "I'm not done with that one yet."

Remember you too are invited to "embrace the shake." What is your "shake"? What's your crisis? Imagine your crisis as an invitation to partnership. Imagine partnering with your crisis and letting it be your teacher!

Be unwilling to let a good crisis go to waste! Ask the God who has just been waiting for you to ask, *How can I see this as you see it!?* Amen