

Finding Grace in the Mundane

In this time of Corona, so many things we took for granted are now highlighted with tremendous clarity. I never considered that having 4 different options of what kind of ground beef to buy as being a luxury, but it was. It's amazing how fast we've learned to be happy with whatever brand we can get. Toilet paper that feels akin to using fine sandpaper is something I never thought I'd be ecstatic to find, and to gladly fork over whatever price is being asked.

I work at John Knox Village, a senior living community, where my job used to be event and program planning for the seniors who live there. We'd have monthly themes, and tapped our brains to get unbelievably creative to plan events that would entertain, engage and teach something new to our residents, within that month's theme.

We were so busy, planning and executing events, talking to vendors, making flyers and posters to promote our events, planning concerts and fabulous dinner outings, lifelong learning classes, art and culture. And then Coronavirus happened.

Suddenly we had had to stop what we were doing. Stop on a dime. Brake HARD. And it literally left us all stunned. How do you run an event department, when you can't plan any events? I felt like a painter whose canvas had been taken away. After a few days to cancel everything we had just finished planning for March and April, we regrouped. We had to rethink EVERYTHING. How could we be useful to our residents, now that events were off the table?

Like many of us, and many businesses, we've had to take a look at who we serve, and figure out, how can we best serve them?

Fairly quickly, many issues and obstacles came to light. Things that our seniors needed. And one of them was groceries. I had never myself used Instacart, but I became an expert overnight. When it becomes unsafe for your senior population to go out into the community, you come up with alternate plans. I now spend a good part of my days calling our residents and taking their grocery orders over the phone, while I shop on Instacart for them. Although many seniors are comfortable with technology, and quickly learned how to use it for survival at a time when everything has gone virtual, there are many who are not comfortable with that at all. To their credit, many residents wanted to learn, so they could be independent. Teach a man to fish... you know the parable. But there are many who don't own a computer, and would not be able to navigate a shopping experience like Instacart on their own. So, I spend a lot of my days ordering groceries.

My initial feeling was, how did I come to be here where I am doing this? One by one, the calls came in, flooding our switchboard. People were panicked at the idea of being cut off from their groceries. The other members of my team work with the residents who are interested in learning how to use Instacart. The residents I speak to are those who are not interested in learning new technology, and just need their groceries to be ordered by someone. Anyone.

I thought, this has to be the most basic, undynamic use of my skills, the most rudimentary task I could possibly be doing. Until I realized just how much this simple act was so deeply appreciated by those I am serving. The residents I have been assisting are so grateful that I realize, this is probably the most valuable thing I have done since coming to JKV. It is mundane, but within it, I see the grace. What feels

like a simple task is directly having an impact on people's lives. I order their yogurt, orange juice and bananas. I make them laugh. I assuage their anxiety. And we talk. Some have expressed their worry and feelings of helplessness. Some are really feeling the affects of isolation. My grocery call may be the only conversation they have all day. And in this, and fulfilling their tangible and intangible needs, I have found grace in the mundane. The beauty of how fulfilling it feels to just be there for someone, offer kindness and patience, and to be sympathetic and understand how unsettling all this change is for them, and the importance of helping them get what they need to retain some sense of normalcy in a world which at this moment, holds nothing normal.