Columns
Horizons
Spirituality

If I've learned anything in the past year, it's that I will have much more peace if I stop trying to control the things I don't have control over. (Pixabay/Asma)

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It was Tuesday, March 10, 2020. One of our sisters and I were scheduled to fly to New York that afternoon to spend a few days visiting with the students, faculty and staff at one of our Marianist high schools before spending the weekend attending a formation workshop. However, instead of following through with our plans, I dealt with my phone, which was abuzz with texts and phone calls asking me to cancel everything. "Don't come to New York." And within a week, our lives turned upside down.

I really didn't understand what was to come. How could any of us non-experts have known? Who could have predicted the many ways our lives would change in just a matter of days or weeks? Or how much we could lose in a year? From now on, our lives will be marked in terms of "before the pandemic" and "after the pandemic." The changes and losses for all of us have been staggering.

It was Wednesday, March 10, 2021. I walked out of the cancer center with a packet of information on the biopsy procedure, what to expect, and the steps to schedule it. The previous Monday afternoon, the doctors found abnormalities in the images from my annual mammogram. Tuesday morning, we scheduled a follow up appointment for Wednesday. More images. More explanations. An MRI followed, and the biopsy was scheduled. Like the events of last March, things seemed to happen very quickly. And yet, time seemed to move in slow motion — a feeling that has become so familiar to me now but still remains difficult to articulate.

As of the time of writing this article, the results are yet unknown. Once again, I don't know what's to come. I am the type of person who thrives on predictability, routine, order and controlled situations. None of which has been part of the past year. And I wonder whether or not the past year has taught me how to better deal with uncertainty?

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Last March and into April, I can remember nervously joking with people that it was the longest and "Lentiest" Lent we had ever been through. Lent is a time of purification, deepening, leaning into God's mercy, acknowledging that there are

areas of our lives that need repairing or healing. The whole past year has felt like that to me. We celebrated Easter last year, true. Advent and Christmas as well. But even those celebrations felt like there were elements of purification and leaning into God's mercy to them. A stripping away of excesses. A stripping away of control, really. And for me, a stripping away of false notions about hope.

If I've learned anything in the past year, it's that I will have much more peace if I stop trying to control the things I don't have control over. A lesson one would think I'd learned long ago — when surprise parties I'd meticulously planned were ruined or when the choir microphones weren't working for the celebration of my final vows and no one could really hear the music I spent months choosing. Apparently, this is a lesson I have to keep learning. Along with the fact that the list of things over which I actually have control is a lot shorter than I often imagine.

I've also reflected on hope — the necessity of hope and the source of hope. Maintaining hope has been very important for me in the past year. There have been so many challenges to hope over the course of the past 12 months. From anxiety over the virus-related unknowns, to racially motivated violence, loss of so many lives, an uncertain economy, political instability and threats to democracy. Any one of these would be difficult to manage. But all at once the cumulative effect is heavy.

As we move into the Triduum this year, things feel a little different. People have talked about the light coming into view at the end of a long tunnel. The vaccine is making its steady roll out, at least in the United States. COVID-19 numbers in some places seem to be moving in the right direction. Many folks are back at church, at least on occasion — with masks and distancing, but with community again.

All of this can bring a sense of hope. But the hope that is ushered in by the celebration of Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday is deeper than this. It has to be. The hope of Easter is not dependent on external realities — on vaccines and lower COVID-19 numbers. It is not dependent on a return to "normalcy." Hope cannot be dependent on the negative results of a biopsy.

No. Our hope is deeply rooted in God's action in our world to overcome darkness and death, injustice and cold hearts. Through it all, our God is at work in our world and in our hearts. Our hope is rooted in the soil of that truth. And realizing this is a great source of peace. Regardless of the external circumstances.

Update: *Wednesday night, I received word that my biopsy result was negative for malignancy.*

This story appears in the **Lent** feature series. View the full series.