



July 26, 2023
A Note from John Hoffman
Fast Forward, In Reverse

Dear Friends,

Pastor Jon asked me to share some information about myself. He said it would be good for you to know a little about me while I attempt to fill the gaps during Pastor April's Renewal Leave.

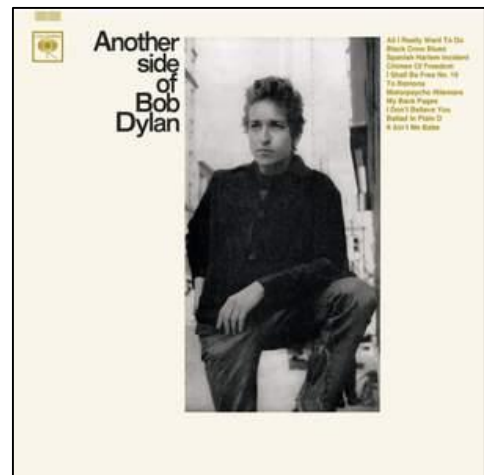
The first thing to know is that I am not comfortable sharing things about myself. I'm not an introvert, just private... avoiding attention, working behind the curtain rather than under the spotlight. What follows is a rather off-the-wall vignette of who I was, how I became who I am, and why I do what I am doing.

"Ah, but I was so much older then. I'm younger than that now." I know, I know, I know. The lyrics to the song make no more sense than the title of this letter.

How does one go forward in reverse? And, how can one be younger now, when they are indeed older?

Stay with me. I haven't gone off the deep end. It's not that cryptic.

There was a time in my life when what I believed was set in stone... black and white... right and wrong. Preconceived notions? Peer pressure? Learned behavior?



For example: Republicans were good. "I like Ike!" Democrats were bad. AFL/CIO! George Meaney. Methodists (prior to the 1968 church union) were poor. They gathered in the church basement for meatloaf dinners. Presbyterians were rich. They played basketball in their church gymnasium. And Catholics. Well, we won't even go there. My grandmother had an opinion about Catholics and that's all I have to say about that.

Perception informs opinion, and “I was so much older then.” For all intents and purposes, most of the Methodists I knew worked in blue collar jobs, while most of the Presbyterians held management positions. And the Catholics labored in steel mills and coal mines. Presbyterians were predestined. Methodists were people on the way. And Catholics? Well, Catholics celebrated in Latin, a language most didn’t understand, and went to confession.

But that was a long time ago and perception... Well, perception has an asterisk after it, and “I’m younger than that now.”

“I was so much older then.” I knew exactly the way the world was ordered. It was black and white, right and wrong. The world had parameters, limits, rules. I agreed with those who made the rules, set the parameters and limits.

Then, for some unexplained reason, those limits, parameters, and rules began to stretch, first one way, then another. What was once a clear vision of the way things were was beginning to look more like a vision of the way things might be.

What was it that began to open my mind to the possibilities of the way things might be, the possibility that I might have been wrong? God forbid!

Truthfully? I don’t have the faintest clue. I wish I could say I was struck blind as was St. Paul, but that would fall under the category of wishful thinking. I wish I could say it was prayerfully reading the Bible, but that too would be less than honest. I wish I could say it was the influence of people of faith. Sorry folks, fictitious as well.

What removed the obstacles of the way things were was Jesus the outsider, Jesus the nonconformist, Jesus the undefinable.

Here I defer to theologian Hans Küng. He writes: “He was attacked on all sides. He had not played any of the expected roles: for those who supported law and order he turned out to be a provocateur, dangerous to the system. He disappointed the activist revolutionaries by his nonviolent love of peace. He offended passive, world forsaking ascetics by his worldliness. And for those who adapted themselves to the world, he was too uncompromising. For the silent majority he was too noisy and for the noisy minority he was too quiet, too gentle for the strict and too strict for the gentle.” For these things he was rejected. For these things we created parameters, rules, and limits.

But “I’m younger than that now.” Jesus taught me that it’s okay to color outside the lines. It’s no longer a paint-by-the-numbers world. And Jesus taught me that it doesn’t mean that I can do whatever I want, whenever and wherever I want to do it. What it means is that I do what Jesus wants.

And what Jesus wants is for me to do the right thing! The right thing for me!

Peace,

John



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John is a retired United Methodist pastor who will be helping out primarily with preaching and pastoral care while [Pastor April](#) is on renewal leave through mid November.

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