

The Vintage Voice

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Blue Herons & Unchangeable Change

A Lenten Meditation by a Clergy Couple

Research reveals that, on average, we will move at least three times in retirement. Those surprising words echo throughout the Pension Fund's Enriching Your Retirement conferences, but I always find myself somewhat skeptical about them. It may seem strange, but a pair of Great Blue Herons made me a believer.

Scene 1: As winter cold drives us indoors even here in our new Florida home, two blue herons catch our attention as they swoop and sway around our spacious window overlooking a sleepy lagoon. What magic are they weaving? We soon realize they are building a nest together. The male gathers assorted twigs from overhanging trees, then the female collects them from him and begins to create a nest on a precarious limb arching over the water. We hold our breath, fearing all could be lost as the wind picks up and the frail pine bough quivers. Ah, but the herons carry on . . . the sturdy new home takes shape daily as they work together. According to *The Sibley Guide*, herons mate as they build their nest, and we actually observe them exchanging amorous greetings beak to beak. Because this Great Blue Heron sighting is apparently a first for this particular location, neighbors gather to share the unfolding scene with us.

Scene 2: The female perches on the nest where she remains for some twenty-eight days while the male keeps a constant vigil. He brings daily nourishment and feeds her. Meanwhile, Lent is upon us, and we wonder just when this new life in front of us will occur. Lo and behold, the day before Easter arrives, and we see tiny little necks springing from the nest with eager beaks. We count. Yes, there are three new herons heralding the next generation. Another task of feeding and protecting this new life begins. Both parents take active roles as they hover over their new chicks.

Scene 3: We watch the chicks taking their first trial flights out of the nest. Soon they will venture out on their own and leave this spot, but not without leaving us with a reminder that our own lives are always in flux. We came to this new place in Florida this winter to see if it might be a good place for us to "nest" for a part of each year. We do not intend to leave our home in Massachusetts permanently, but we think this may indeed be home for us for an increasing number of months each year. Will there be another move for us? We have already moved twice

in retirement, which is a surprise to us. Will the herons return next year? We hope so, because we have been renewed and instructed by this miracle of new life unfolding each day. Perhaps, like us, they will stay for a while before moving on.

Mary Wilson Taylor

When I was ten, the world could not change quickly enough to suit me. When I was twenty, I believed my springtime world would never change at all. When I was thirty, I was old enough to know how wrong I had been when I was twenty. When forty arrived, I began to realize, not always happily, that change was inevitable. Now, in my seventies, I have come to understand that change is one of the few things in life that is unchangeable.

None of this should surprise us. At the center of our faith as Christians, deep within the symbolism of the Cross and Resurrection, is the ebb and flow of death and rebirth — in a word, *change*.

Even so, most of us don't like change. Something about it calls up the specter of uncertainty and confusion, and we would much prefer our lives to be ordered and our surroundings controlled. If nothing else, experience should teach us that such hopes are rarely met. In fact, as someone once said, we would be wiser to expect the unexpected and find within it opportunities for growth and new reasons for celebration.

Isn't that, after all, one of the messages of our Christian faith? Renewal is always the child of change. New beginnings are always accompanied by endings. The natural world — including the world of blue herons — constantly confirms this. In the language of the gospels, Resurrection is born out of the pain of Crucifixion. Far from fearing that reality, Christians have always boldly celebrated it and found in its apparent paradox the key to living life unafraid, unbowed, and triumphantly hopeful.

Walter Taylor



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