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When my son, Jonathan, was born, someone gave him the gift of a blue bunny, a comforting soft toy that he could cuddle with and feel secure. When his little sister, Rebekah, was born 3-1/2 years later, he passed on Blue Bunny to her, which she carried around with her for many years. While telling her stories at night, I invited her to imagine adventures traveling with Blue Bunny in a magical ship made from a giant cardboard box, from lands across the globe to the moon and other faraway places.

When she went to preschool a block away from the publishing house where I worked in St. Louis, I met with the children on Friday mornings and told stories about Blue Bunny before we had lunch together.

When Rebekah was in elementary school, she told her teacher about our Blue Bunny stories, and she invited me to share the adventure with their class. Years later, in middle school, some of those listeners remembered the stories and asked Rebekah, “How’s Blue Bunny?”

The presence of Blue Bunny has gone with her everywhere, even to college, and remains with her even now. As I thought about the adventures of my daughter and Blue Bunny, I’ve come to realize that no matter what obstacles they faced, no matter how far they traveled in their imaginary cardboard box spaceship, in my stories they were always safe.

Isn’t that something we all desire—to feel safe? Although we may outgrow stuffed animals to hold onto at night, blankets often provide a sense of safety, such as a child will experience when receiving a homemade blanket from a police officer made by the women in our church.

Some have suggested that years ago slaves found their way to freedom by following patterns sewn into quilts that gave directions to safety. Even today, quilts continue to provide a sense of warmth and safety, as Carolyn Smith has experienced while working on a quilt during her chemo treatments, a pattern that is based on the stained glass windows in the sanctuary at Central Christian.

2

Are you feeling safe, or do you often feel as though you need to wrap up in a blanket? Lately I've sensed that many are feeling unsafe, with a recent article in the newspaper stating that locally, gun sales and security systems have increased. When the world seems to be falling apart, we reach out for a sense of security, though adding more weapons may escalate violence rather than creating safer places. Gone are stuffed animals and blankets of childhood as we search for other ways of feeling safe.

Psalm 16 invites us to experience God's safety, to sense how God is a constant presence in our lives, no matter how crazy life seems to get. The Psalmist wrote:

¹Protect me, God,

because I take refuge in you.

⁸I always put the LORD in front of me;

I will not stumble

because he is on my right side.

⁹That's why my heart celebrates

and my mood is joyous;

yes, my whole body will rest in safety. (CEB)

It's difficult to feel safe when one fears the uprising in the streets and illness spreading across the countryside, something we have in common with Julian of Norwich who lived 650 years ago during the black death pandemic and the peasant revolt. It was a time when 60% of the people in England died from the pandemic and were also facing climate disaster. Sound familiar? Although none of us living today have experience such a combination of crises in our lives before, we're not the first ones in history to experience the chaotic mixture of pandemic, uprising in the streets, and climate crisis.

When these disasters occurred centuries ago, the church tried to explain all the chaos by suggesting that God was angry and had sent the illness as punishment. Julian disagreed with this theology, seeing God instead as loving, not punishing. She recognized that suffering is a natural part of life, and she suggested it is not something that God sends into our lives.

Wendy Farley writes in her book *Beguiled by Beauty* about Julian's view of suffering:

what makes...suffering so soul-destroying is that we cannot see how beloved we are. We no longer remember that we are adored and cherished by God. If we could reconnect to God's love for us, we would still suffer, but it would not be so overwhelming.¹

We don't know Julian's actual name, for "her name is taken from St. Julian's Church in Norwich where she lived"² a solitary life spent in contemplation of God. Some suggest she's the first woman to write a book in English that has survived.

She's best known for her book *The Revelations of Divine Love*, which she wrote to describe the mystical visions she experienced at a point when she thought she was near death. She wrote:

But Jesus, who in this vision informed me of all that is needed by me, answered with these words and said: 'It was necessary that there should be sin; but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.'³

Isn't that amazing? During a time of chaos in the world and when she thought she was near

death, she could affirm that "All will be well." Maybe you've uttered a similar phrase when trying to comfort someone in a crisis by saying, "It will be ok. All will be well."

Contemplation on God won't make the pains of the world go away, but it can help us get through the anxiety. As I've been talking with many of you over the past few months, some have noticed a deeper connection to God, for many have expressed how they enjoy the slower pace of life. A little less rushing around. More time to sit and soak up the amazing beauty of God's creation. Time to recognize the beauty of the world. More time to read a few books or work in the yard. It's almost as though God has offered an extra beautiful blanket of safety during this stressful time.

We know that some, however, are not feeling safe, for many people of color are discovering that they are more affected by the coronavirus. The death of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer reminds us that our African-American brothers and sisters have felt unsafe for an

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exceedingly long time—not just during the pandemic, but each day of their lives. As I listened to the voices of those who walked the streets of Elkhart on Friday in a peaceful protest, they asked that they be seen for who they are—people, just like you and me, trying to make it through life.

A life of contemplation does not place blinders on our eyes to the pains of the world, but through reflection on God’s loving nature, we begin to see the beauty in everyone. Soon our hearts open to connecting to those in pain around us, and then our hands can open to offer help. Even in all the chaos, when we begin to view all of God’s world as beautiful, we ensure that everyone can find blankets of safety.

¹ Excerpts from Dr. Farley’s book © Wendy Farley 2020 as quoted on www.worshipdesignstudio.com/beauty.

² <http://juliancentre.org/about/about-julian-of-norwich.html>

³ <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/incontext/article/julian>