



March 22, 2022

## **The Anxiety of Getting Things Done**

**By The Rev. Susan D. Parsons**

Here we are in the midst of Lent, and how is your Lenten discipline going? Or did you give up Lent for Lent? I'd understand if you did, because it feels like we've been in Lent for over two years now, and that's about all the Lent anyone needs.

And yet, many of us have still made the decision to take on or give up something, as a way of growing closer to God, a discipline that will allow us to live our lives more closely aligned with Jesus.

I struggled this year -- so much to give up, and so much to take on -- where to begin? I need more exercise, more reading, and less Twitter<sup>®</sup> and butter. Notes, calls, and organizing need more of my attention, as well as finding time to do more meditating and praying. Discipline. I need more discipline, I decided.

And then I hit a stop sign.

A big metal stop sign. I must have been distracted, though I don't remember being distracted. The phone – omnipresent and deeply compelling – was tucked in my bag; the dogs were sitting quietly on the seat; and for once, there was no Starbucks coffee riding shotgun in the console. One second, I was making a left turn and the next, the stop sign in the median – that was easy to miss – jumped out, grabbed my bumper, and ripped it pretty much off the car.

Mortified and embarrassed at such a foolish accident, I pulled over, called the appropriate authorities, and sat down on the sidewalk with the dogs to wait. It was a soft spring day; the wide, quiet street had trees adorned with the palest of green buds; the car insurance was current; and no one was hurt. It was a good moment to meditate on the blessing, grace, and mercy of God, to say a prayer of thanksgiving.

Instead, I fussed. How can I tell people I hit a clearly visible, immovable object? Maybe I should say something less embarrassing like – I don't know – that a dog ran in front of the car and by swerving into the sign the sweet little dog's life was saved? And the insurance is bound to go up, and where is AAA, and where should the car be towed, and this certainly makes a nasty hole in a very busy day. Also, do I have to tell the city what happened to their sign?

Two women approached on the sidewalk. I had seen them walking by earlier, but I'd been busy attempting to get the twisted bumper out from under the car, and we hadn't spoken. This time though, we greeted one another, and they asked what happened. My response was fraught, filled with self-recrimination.

Most people would have left me to stew, but they chatted with me, allowed me to fuss, and responded with kindness, reassurance, and gentleness. After a few minutes they continued their unhurried walk leaving behind a peace that settled into my soul. They had the “non-anxious presence” we can all aspire to.

Maybe I do need more self-discipline and, maybe it's time to kick that anxiety about getting things done to the curb. This may sound contradictory but hear me out. Anxiety tells me I need it to get things done, that nothing

will happen without it. But I know that's not true, and the accident was a fitting example and reminder.

Fussing doesn't help me get things done as often as it ultimately works against me – it keeps me from focusing, it drains my energy. And perhaps I anxiously fuss about getting things done because I might not do them well enough.

May this spring and this Lent be about hope, about giving up fussing anxiously over getting things done and taking on a gentleness with ourselves as God works with us to turn our bare winter limbs into green, leafy branches.