Dear friends,  
Warm spring greetings to you all. We are living in anxious times. Uncertainty has come into our homes and found its way into each of our lives. What was once stable and familiar, has been shaken and we have entered a steep descent into the unknown. Here, the invisible world asserts its power, reminding us of the folly of control. In these times, it may not be the gods and goddesses affecting our fates, but something equally mysterious: something unseen moving through the air, rattling our deep psychic ground, affecting everything.

Fear and anxiety readily appear in times like these. Our work is to turn toward these jittery guests and make a place at the table to offer tea and soup, a warm place to rest. Grief may also come knocking as our plans and expectations of normalcy fade into shadows, and we are left with our faith in the world being shaken. This too is a loss worthy of our attention and kindness. Coronavirus reminds us of something inevitable but strangely denied: we are vulnerable, interdependent animals, clinging delicately to our little thread of life. The old Zen phrase, “Not knowing, is most intimate,” rings true. We don’t know what will happen today or tomorrow, and this brings us into the intimate truth of our own tender existence.

In reality, we are tumbling through a rough initiation,\* when radical alterations occur in our inner and outer landscapes. It is simultaneously deeply personal and wildly collective, binding us to one another. Everyone we meet in the grocery store, in line at the gas station, walking their dog, is tangled up in this liminal space betwixt and between the familiar world and the strange, emergent one. Hang on!

Much is asked of us during threshold times like these. In my work with the Cancer Help Program, I often hear how lost someone feels once they receive the diagnosis, undergo treatment and become a part of the medical machinery that often consumes much of their daily routine. The frequent lament is, “I don’t know who I am anymore.” This is the deep work of initiation. It is meant to dislodge our old identity, the sediment of self that we affix to our sense of who we are. We are meant to be radically changed by these encounters. We do not want to come out of these turbulent times the same as we went in. That is the invitation in this moment of history. Radical change.

There are shifts happening along the fault lines of this evolving crisis. The insane pace of modernity is being brought to a screeching halt. The dominant ideology of power/privilege is cracking, coaxing a more compassionate and heartfelt response to our mutually entangled lives. Suddenly, productivity is not the primary value, but connection, affection, love, encouragement. In the pause of sheltering in place, we remember neighbors and kindness, mutuality and empathy.

So now what? How do we navigate this tidal surge of uncertainty? Our first move could be to re-imagine social distancing as an experience of sanctuary and solitude, and not one of isolation. Social distance is a cold term, lacking any sense of the rich invitation that awaits us when we turn toward our internal worlds. Solitude is a state of hospitality, a welcoming of all that is in need of attention. Solitude offers a ground that is embracing and inclusive. Everything can be made welcome in the broad arms of solitude, even fear. For as long as humans have sought counsel with the sacred, much of it has happened in a space set apart from others. Here, in silence and a nourishing aloneness, we can become receptive to the influence of soul. As Rilke said, “I am too alone in the world, and not alone enough to make every minute holy.” As we shelter in place, may place become a shelter for each of us.

What else? Can we coax a few words of praise from our lips? Maybe sing a song or two, like they are sharing across balconies in the streets of Italy. Perhaps recite a poem to the birds, plant seeds, call a friend, pray, read the great myths that tell us, again and again, how we might find our way through the impossible. This is a season of remembering the ancient rhythms of soul. It is a time to become immense.

To become immense means to recall how embedded we are in an animate world--a world that dreams and enchants, a world that excites our imaginations and conjures our affections through its stunning beauty. Everything we need is here. We only need to remember the wider embrace of our belonging to woodlands and prairies, marshlands and neighborhoods, to the old stories and the tender gestures of a friend.

Fear can rattle us and activate strategic patterns of survival. These patterns enabled us to endure, but they cannot help us across this tremulous threshold. For that, we need to amplify the potency of the adult. As is true of any genuine initiation, it requires a ripening of our being and stepping more fully into our robust identity rooted in soul. We become immense, not in some grandiose, “I’ve got this,” kind of way, but in a way where we become flexible like a willow, taking into our open arms and offering shelter to all that is frightened and vulnerable.

So, my friends, we return to simple things: stillness, beauty, compassion, patience. This will not resolve quickly. The art of repetition has great value in shaky times. Beyond frequent hand washing and bowing to one another, we can come back to practices that enrich the field we inhabit. Rituals, prayer, meditation, dance, are all ways to foster an intimacy with the ground of soul and the soul of the world. Stay safe. Stay well.

Mighty blessings, Francis Weller