**Quotes from *So Much More: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality***

**by Debra Rienstra (Jossey-Bass)**

God permits human freedom and the workings of a fallen creation to cause pain and sorrow. However, God is also active in weaving that pain and sorrow into his larger purposes for individuals and all of history, purposes we can’t always clearly discern, especially at first. God permits suffering but does not abandon us. By the Holy Spirit, God is always working within societies to challenge the darkness in them, always moving to call people out of their darkness, always sending his faithful people out to relieve suffering, always available to those who seek him.

Suffering can become a place of intimate communion with Christ and through Christ with the triune God. In desperate times, the experience of Christ’s presence is especially available.

Could it be that the trust and faithfulness displayed by those in the midst of terrible pain are the very clues we need to understand the full nature of God? Where would such miraculous responses come from, if not from the power of God, who may allow suffering but whose mercy and compassion will not allow suffering to have the last word?

The promise of the cross for the present is that the quality of our suffering will change because we will find the companionship of Jesus in it. That companionship allows our suffering to take on a new shape: the downward slope of death turns to the rising hope of new life. Because Jesus suffered death on the cross, then conquered death through resurrection, our suffering too becomes pliable to hope. Our dark caves can begin to crack open and let in that resurrection light.

God often allows our own bad choices to reap their natural results; and suffering can be the big clue that something is wrong, like pain or a fever or bleeding when the body is ill. Self-examination is a regular dimension of the Christian life, and suffering can act as a bracing wake-up call to total honesty. Sometimes suffering can teach us to recognize sins we have so far managed to hide from ourselves.

God can use just about anything as an opportunity to work out our salvation in the here and now. The Christian life begins at some point of change and becomes a long process of change.

This generation is dying to die. This means not only that a shocking number of young people contemplate suicide but that young people are seeking something meaningful amid the meaninglessness. They desperately want something worth surrendering their livers to. Jesus on the cross makes sense to them in a way that defies rational explanation.

Sin has momentum, but so does salvation. One grace-filled step leads to another.

The faith through which we receive salvation is more like an overall leaning, with more and more of oneself in more and more areas of one’s life, in the direction of God. Faith encompasses a number of things, any one of which can be, at a given moment, the forward edge of that leaning.

People who believe in Jesus feel themselves unmade and made again.

There are places of grief and desperation when even the heartbeat of desire seems to go silent, when it is beyond our strength to form even a shadow of a prayer. At those times, we depend on the prayers of others and on the knowledge that prayer “does not depend on us.”

The first step of prayer is simply to lower the drawbridge, to open the fortress of our deepest selves to the presence of God.

The fundamental question for all of us is this: How big is our hope? Will we let our hope be small and feeble, invested only in the human spirit and the temporary endurance of our remarkable and terrible species? Or will we fling out our hope beyond the stars themselves toward the repair of all things?