



Mélange

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I was trying to edit a technical paper written by French speakers for an English-speaking audience. The word chosen by the authors was “mixture” to reflect an odd combination of processes for an aerospace design. “Mixture feels too much like a recipe,” I remarked. “Is there another word?” The two authors communicated in French about how best to translate into English the nuanced word they wanted: “mélange.” “No need,” I explained to their surprise. “Mélange is perfect. It’s the word we use in English, too.”

Like my French colleagues, Merriam-Webster takes the word “mélange” and translates it to “mixture” in English, but mélange is so much more. It’s a mixture of things that don’t go together. Take what are incongruous, shake them up, and you get a mélange. A “mixture” is dry pancake batter out of a cardboard box. A “mélange” is siracha sauce on vegetables and pudding, and it’s both sassy and delicious. Somehow everything works together.

I’m living in a mélange. Each day is filled with the incongruous. On the one hand, I practice normal. I type agendas, schedule meetings, and write memos. As a Presbytery, we plan for our quarterly Gatherings. ***The next is November 12, and you are invited! [Register here](#) and join the celebration of our Matthew 25 work on Medical Care and take the challenge on our new topic, Housing.***

Then normal goes away, and I find myself leading activities unfamiliar to us all: urgently praying with the Presbytery, morning and evening, for nonviolence and security in our elections; pondering an urban-rural chasm that is rooted in distrust and manifested in disdain; and encouraging you all to stay away from your church buildings to stop the spread of the coronavirus. These roles are foreign to me; I’ve never had to include them in with the regular work of the Presbytery. It’s a ministry mélange that can be dizzying.

I know I’m not alone in this weird existence of the normal and the chaotic. Even at a mundane level, we do laundry, but now it includes face masks. We cook meals, but the ingredients were either picked up curbside or in a mad dash through the store in protective gear. We worship together, but it’s socially distant. A head-spinning combination of the incongruous.

My greatest struggle is to recognize the mélange as a whole and not just the disparate parts that toss me like powerful waves. Is it possible to put these disparate pieces together to make something sassy and delicious? Can they work together somehow? I confess it’s beyond me right now. I move through the normal because it’s rote; I slog through the trials because I must, but I largely try to keep them separate, as if intentionally putting them side-by-side will taint my normal. I’m a child insistent that the foods on my plate can’t touch.

With confidence, I believe there is more wholeness than we can see. I am reminded of these words of Scripture: “For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor. 13:9-13 NRSV). Despite the unsettling mélange of our lives, faith, hope, and love will guide us through this day and into the next and the next. Hold fast. Though we cannot yet see what lies ahead, love awaits. It beckons.