

Life in the Midst of the Mess

Weekly Words of Wellness

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Change is messy. Perhaps this is why people, as well as families and organizations, often try to avoid it. Change, whether planned or unplanned, is always hard. When change first happens the old normal is gone, and the new normal is not yet established. That time in between the old and new normal is always messy. In such times we can find comfort in the quote from Amy Dickinson, author and newspaper columnist, at the top of this column, "The fullness of life is incubated in its messy places." I can give witness to the truth of this in my own life and in the countless people I have had the honor to help as a psychotherapist over the last three and half decades.

At this time of year in the Midwest, we know something about messy. As the long winter loses its grip and the mounds of snow have just melted, our roads, sidewalks, trails, and yards become quite messy and even ugly. In fact, I have heard it said here in the Midwest, as well as many other places in the country, that there are actually five seasons each year if you add the "mud season" that exists between winter and spring. Winter held on a little longer than usual this year and so just this past week we have begun experiencing our annual mud season.

Part of what creates the massive amount of mud and messiness this time of year is the fact that after a long, cold winter the depth of the ground freeze is quite significant. During the mud season, while the warming temperatures thaw the surface of the ground, the deeper ground remains frozen, and thus the melting water at the surface is unable to percolate down into the soil. Until the deeper ground thaws, the water stays on the surface creating increasingly deeper levels of mud and mess. Many dirt roads and walking trails become impassable during this time of year until the deeper thaw finally occurs, allowing

the water to seep down into the soil and then to flow on into the greater watershed, allowing the dirt to finally dry.

The mud season, itself a time of transition between winter and spring, strikes me as a powerful metaphor for describing what it feels like when we are going through times of change in our lives, be it as individuals, families, or organizations. Times of transition are always messy, and the path forward can sometimes become muddy and hard to navigate. If there is significant grief or loss of any kind involved in our transition, the initial thawing often feels particularly muddy and challenging.

Whatever type of mud season we may be experiencing, the way through is the same. Be patient. Put your boots on, keep your head up, and keep moving forward. Be careful to watch where you are walking, so that you avoid any potential danger. Walk with someone else so you can help each other when the mud is, and you are at risk of getting stuck. Be patient, knowing that in time the ground will eventually thaw and the mess and the mud will gradually pass. The path may not ever be the same, but a new way forward, a new normal, is sure to emerge in time. And may we find comfort in remembering that, "the fullness of life is incubated in its messy places."