



Auckland Unitarian Church  
Love beyond belief

## Don't blow a fuse

Clay Nelson © 29 August 2021

Our reading this morning is what has occupied my musings this week, I'm grateful to my former colleague Glynn Cardy's Facebook post pointing me in the direction of [Nadia Bolz-Weber's blog on circuit breakers](#). I suppose it resonated because of a conversation I had with someone feeling confounded about how to respond to someone who wanted to relitigate an altercation that was years ago. This is the kind of imposition that can blow a fuse when we can barely handle all that is happening now. So, this is another message from your Minister for Spiritual Health on how to use a lockdown to your spiritual advantage. Just because we are adhering to the lockdown rules for the common good, it does not mean we have to lock down our growth and transformation.

Nadia's blog got my attention right away with her image of a fuse box in her old apartment that wasn't designed to handle the plethora of electrical devices we rely on today. Modernity quickly overwhelmed the fuses. Some of us are old enough to remember it used to be more involved than flipping a switch when we lost power. We had to figure out by trial and error which fuse was blown, remove it and screw in the right size replacement, which might require a quick run to the hardware store for the ones we need. Using the wrong one could burn the house down.

I agree with her that

*our psyches were [not] developed to hold, feel and respond to everything coming at them right now; every tragedy, injustice, sorrow and natural disaster happening to every human across the entire planet, in real time every minute of every day. The human heart and spirit were developed to be able to hold, feel and respond to any tragedy, injustice, sorrow or natural disaster that was happening IN OUR VILLAGE.*

*And yet, when I check social media it feels like there are voices saying "if you aren't talking about, doing something about, performatively posting about \_\_\_ (fill in the blank)\_\_\_ then you are an irredeemably callous, privileged, bigot who IS PART OF THE PROBLEM" and when I am someone who does actually care about human suffering and injustice, it leaves me feeling like absolute shit. I am left with wondering: am I doing enough, sacrificing enough, giving enough, saying enough about all the horrible things right now to think of myself as a good person and subsequently silence the accusing voice in my head? No. The answer is always no. No I am not. Nor could I. Because no matter what I do the goal of "enough" is just as far as when I started.*

Nadia offers this spiritual advice so as to not blow a fuse, know:

*What's MINE to do, and what's NOT mine to do?*

*What's MINE to say and what's NOT mine to say?*

*And the third one is harder:*

*What's MINE to care about and what's NOT mine to care about?*

*So, I try to remember, 1. We are still living through a global pandemic and that means the baseline of anxiety and grief is higher than ever and shared by everyone. 2. The world is on fire literally and metaphorically. But 3. I only have so much water in my bucket to help with the fires. The more exposure I have to the fires I have NO WATER to fight, the more likely I am to get so burned, and inhale so much smoke that I cannot help anymore with the fires close enough to fight once my bucket is full again.*

*So, I try to tell myself that It's ok to focus on one fire.*

*It's ok to do what is YOURS to do. Say what's yours to say. Care about what's yours to care about.*

*That's enough.*

One of the things I want you to care about during our lockdown is finding the courage to live without fear. Author [Meg Barnhouse shares a reflection](#) she had after a series of dreams.

*I woke up knowing what I was supposed to do with my life. I was going to "speak to the locks."*

*At a party once, I was telling a friend about Ike's, a restaurant in a neighbourhood by the railroad tracks. Ike's serves the best chili cheeseburger in the state. From the outside it looks like a dive. But inside you might see the mayor, construction work crews, college professors, and bikers with jailhouse tattoos. You would also see black, white, and Hispanic people, a mix you don't see many places around here.*

*My friend jumped in: "I know just where that neighbourhood is! My mother used to make us lock the car doors when we drove through there, and she would step on the gas to get through fast." He grinned. "We were supposed to lock the doors by sneaking our finger up to the button and pressing it down gently so it didn't make noise. My sister would lunge across the seat and pound the lock down, and Mama would hiss at her, 'Not that way, you'll hurt their feelings!'"*

*I think about the new road in the middle of town. The new road barely touches the neighbourhood that had a bad reputation in the forties and fifties. I still wouldn't want to walk there alone and drunk at three in the morning, but going through at fifty miles an hour is surely as safe as fifty miles an hour anywhere. I know someone who reaches stealthily to lock the car doors when they turn onto that road. What do people think is going to happen? Some wild-eyed person might charge their rolling*

*car, wrench the door open, and do unspeakable things? Wild-eyed people grab you when your car is stopped, not when it's going full speed.*

*In my old suburban neighbourhood I was street captain one year, which meant I had to go door-to-door collecting [monthly levies for neighbourhood improvements]. I rang the bell, and in a minute I heard locks being unlocked from the inside, sometimes two or three of them. People cracked open the door enough to look out fearfully with one eye. They watched too much TV. I couldn't figure out why else they would imagine that there were roving gangs of folks out to invade our homes.*

*My friend Jake lives in a downtown neighbourhood that is bad by anyone's standards. He sees a couple of crack houses from his front yard. Yet, he told me that on several occasions, he has gone camping and left the front door open for twenty-four hours.*

*"Open, like unlocked?" I ask.*

*"No," he said, "standing wide open. Nothing inside was touched." Here you mostly have to look out for being shot or stabbed by someone in your own family. No one bothers strangers much.*

*Here is what I'm thinking. We're scared of the wrong things. We lock our car doors and take our kids home to where the guns are. We tell them all about being wary of paedophile strangers, and we forget to tell them about protecting themselves from uncles and cousins. We don't let our neighbours into our lives so there is no one to turn to when we're in trouble. We're scared of people, don't want to know them, and worry that they want to rob or rape us, but we don't want to hurt their feelings.*

*Isolation is greatly to be feared, but our fears keep us alone. Ignorance is greatly to be feared, but our fears keep us at home, associating only with folks of our same nationality, class, and colour. Looking like a fool is greatly to be feared, but our fears keep us silent when we should speak up and make us talk too much when we should be quiet, so we end up looking like fools after all. Our fears keep us from bending, growing, changing in a supple way. Our fears lock us down into a narrowness of experience that sucks the marrow from our bones and leaves us dried-up husks in safe homes with satisfactory retirement funds.*

*Yeah, we're scared of all the wrong things.*

That kind of lockdown doesn't last just a few weeks, it's for life. Use this lockdown to seek ways to unlock our psyches that separate us from one another. Look for ways to be connected even from the safety of our bubbles.

There is one way we are reminded that we are all in the same waka. It is the 1.00pm daily update briefing from the Beehive. It is apparently more popular than whatever the newest offering on Netflix is.

Tara Ward writes in *The Spinoff*:

*One of the biggest local series of 2020 returned unexpectedly last week, and early reviews suggest the 2021 season might be the most popular yet.*

*Lockdown is back, and where should we turn amid all the chaos and worry? Why, IMDB of course, the online database that lets viewers write reviews of their favourite television shows and movies, including the 1pm daily Beehive press conference.*

*Just as in 2020, viewers have taken to IMDB to review 1pm Daily Update like it's the latest blockbuster television series. The afternoon press conference is no longer just a delivery of information about the government response to the Covid-19 outbreak, but a must-see thriller that pulsates with unexpected cliff-hangers and emotional moments. It's the drama we all need in our lives, despite it already being very much in our lives.*

As of 24 August, 1pm Daily Update had 246 viewer reviews on IMDB.

One of the reviews would be the envy of any new streaming service limited series, *"Set in a dystopian world where autocratic and populist leaders are in charge of the USA, China, UK, Brazil and many other nations. 1pm Daily Update takes place in the imaginary island nation of New Zealand, a utopian society where science, facts, strong leadership and a genuine care for its people and environment take precedence over money and big business."*

I invite you to use this time to give yourself permission not to blow a fuse. You will not shed light on a challenging world if you do. I invite you not to use the lockdown to lock yourself away from others. I trust you can find the courage to conquer your fears.

**Meditation / Conversation Starter:**

How are you using lockdown to your spiritual advantage?