
The Practice of Losing Control

An article for the *Cathedral Times* by the Very Rev. Sam Candler

I practice sailing. I practice sailing a small, and heavy, wooden dinghy every summer. I am not an expert sailor, but I do love to sail. The boat I sail is not exceptionally fast, but she loves to sail, too. I like to think we look graceful together.

The boat is old, scratched and scarred. Each summer, with help from my son or brother (both of whom are excellent sailors!), I rig the boat with replaced lines and bent hardware. Each summer, she and I sail out with mismatched lines, a rusty centerboard, and occasional water in the boat. I am practicing.

But what I am really practicing is the art of losing control. These days, I think that many of us need more practice in the art of losing control. When we don't learn how to manage a lack of control, we can be dangerous and unhealthy to those around us. In these last three years, those of us who were the least practiced in this art had, maybe, the hardest time. For, in whatever other ways we might describe the last three years in our civil society, most of us lost control. We lost control in different ways, and to greater and lesser degrees. But we had our lives changed by powers over which we had no control: disease, health, public health policies, business policies, social interaction expectations. We didn't like it.

If I was able to manage my loss of control at all, it was because I had some small practice at it.

Sailing has been one of my practices. Thus, it helps that I am not an excellent sailor! But, every sailor has to tack; we can rarely sail directly towards our goal. I have to come about, have to change direction. And then the wind changes direction, and my great plan has to change again. It is the moving with the wind that I practice. It is the changing out of lines. It is the pumping out of water. It is learning to live with sore hands.

Not all of us sail sailboats. But each of us can find ways of practicing the art of losing control. For instance, community interaction of any sort can be that practice. Once we are in relationship with a group, even if just one other person, we begin the practice of not always getting our way. Sometimes, it turns out that our way would have been good. And sometimes, it was fortunate that we did not get our way! Either way, we learn to live through changes together.

As the severity of the pandemic subsides, I believe that most of us are in some kind of post-trauma situation. It may not be bad. But it is real. We are wary. Some of us don't know how to exercise control without being excessive! Many of us have become anxious police officers, intent on aggressively seizing the control which we lost for so long. Some of us are just numb, not willing to spend ourselves.

I recommend finding a community. Of course, as a priest, I recommend finding a community of faith – in particular, a church, if you will. But any community devoted to a higher power than us, an acknowledged higher good power than us, inherently takes us out of control. We devote ourselves to the tradition of this Greater Good, around which that community gathers. People in communities learn not to behave in violent ways. They have learned how to lose control, gracefully. Oh, I realize that there are tragic exceptions—people in community are certainly fallible—but, in general, good community regulates its members (even its visitors who are not willing to be called “members”).

Prayer can also be a practice of losing control. Playing with children can be a practice of losing control. Playing good, competitive sports, can teach us how to lose control. These practices teach us how to adjust, how to manage, how to be free and confident, even when we have lost something—even when some control might have been seized from us.

As our churches, and our world, continue the process of re-engaging, I hope we can enjoy the practices of

losing control. They can save our lives. Sometimes when we learn to lose things, we end up gaining our souls.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

© The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.