



# WABASH CENTER

For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



## Bat Report

Nancy Lynne Westfield, Ph.D., *The Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion*

Blog Series: Teaching On The Pulse

September 14, 2020

Tags: teaching | self care | teacher fatigue | student fatigue

Throughout the spring and summer, from my porch, and in the comfort of my rocking chair, I had noticed bats feeding on insects under the street light. Then, on Sunday night, a bat came into my house. Sitting up in bed, reading on my iPad, I was enjoying an uneventful evening. Silently, a bat flew into my bedroom. I felt it enter before I saw it. I looked up from the iPad screen in time to see long flapping wings fly through, into the adjoining room, and out of sight. Startled and immediately panicked, my shrieks, calling on "JESUS!" "Jesus.... JESUS!!!" was what broke the silence. My fever pitched, full-throated summons for "JESUS!" continued as I jumped from the bed, ran to door the bat had just flown through and slammed it shut. Still shrieking, I realized there were two other doors in my bedroom which, to keep the bat from circling through again, must be closed. I ran from door to door, slamming each door and commanding Jesus to save me. By day break, I had barely slept. My heart was still racing. I could not get myself out of panic. I got dressed and waited for 7:00 AM - when Campus Services opened. Promptly at 7:00AM I emailed Campus Services. It was a distress email - "Please come now! Bat in house! Hurry!" At 7:10AM my doorbell rang. I ran down the stairs - fully expecting to be devoured by the silence shattering bat. A campus facilities colleague, donning a face mask and holding a fishing net, entered my house. The bat wrangler looked at me and asked, "Are you okay?" Meeting his gaze, I answered in a tone of defeat, "No." I

showed John upstairs to the scene of the incident. As we walked, he talked to me about the habits of bats. As he talked, I decided his net was not big enough to capture the intruder. John said from my description, the bat in my house was a Brown Big - *Eptesicus fuscus* - a protected bat in the state of Indiana. They eat insects and only attack when threatened. John's information did not comfort me. After the inspection, John lingered in the kitchen chatting with me and waiting to see if the bat might move around again. Before leaving, he gave me his cell phone number so I could direct dial.

The rest of the day I was skittish. I heard noises that were not there and saw bats in previously familiar shadows. I crept around my own house and dreaded nightfall. I considered going to a hotel, but talked myself out of it. The next day, campus facilities personnel returned with a professional bat remediator. The inspection began in the bedroom and carefully scoured the first and second floors, then both men went into the attic. They found evidence of bat activity in my attic, but no roosting. They said that was good news. I was unconvinced. They scheduled a time to return to repair possible places where bats might be entering the house and to clean up the evidence of bat activity.

The purpose of my bat report is not necessarily about the bat. I am mostly reflecting upon my reaction to the bat. Before the bat flew into my bedroom, I would have told you that I would not have panicked. I would have said that I would have likely been startled, but I would not have thought that I would have shrieked and run around the room like a character in a cheap horror movie. I have lived in the city, on dairy farms, and in suburbs. I am accustomed to critters, inside and outside. What had happened? Why was I so .... raw.... so... not myself .... so emotionally fragile?

A few days before the bat invasion (okay one bat might not be an invasion) the news broke that Chadwick Boseman had died. When I heard the news, I sat on my couch and wept as if a beloved family member had passed over. What is happening? Why am I so .... emotionally spent?

As a clergy person, I know to be a non-anxious presence, especially in times of crisis, loss, and emergency. I have experience sitting with families in emergency rooms, courthouses, and funeral homes to console and reassure. Even with my years of experience, nothing has prepared me for months of quarantine, months of re-organizing our programming, months of loss, uncertainty, grief, and anticipated terror - with no end in sight. My bat report is that I know first-hand that the cumulative stressors of 2020 can take a toll on body, mind and spirit. My sheer panic is evidence of the personal toll.

We are exhausted. We have protest fatigue. We do not ask **IF** another Black person will be publicly killed by the police. We ask **WHEN** will another Black person be publicly executed by the police. Adding to the worry, the public protests organized by Black Lives Matter become more violent as unwelcomed agitators incite incidences of vandalism and cause significant harm. The presidential election season strains of acute disagreement, mud-slinging, and deep-seated ire. We dread election day, regardless of its outcome, for its promise of increased

violence and national confusion. The death toll of COVID 19 signals the number of families grieving – we are nearing 200,000 grieving families in the United States and a million more grieving families around the world. Schools are trying to figure out how to keep students, faculties and administrators safe by taking calculated health risks for which they have little medical guidance. The surreal decision-making processes feel like roulette wheels and crap games in Las Vegas. We all know persons who have been furloughed, are unemployed, and continue to be underinsured. Parents are home schooling, working from home, and trying to keep family together – all at the same time. Person's who live alone are in seclusion and loneliness. The exhaustion is palpable.

For those of us who pay attention as the malaise of dis-ease, flagrant white supremacy, and uncouth violence rages on in daily life, a price is exacted from our bodies, minds, and spirits. How will our extorted souls find relief?

When the bat flew into my bedroom, I freaked. Unbeknownst to me, I had reached my own psychic limit; I could not take one more thing and the bat was one more thing. When I no longer felt safe in my own house, I became terrified. The year 2020 has us all living on the verge of some kind of madness. I applaud colleagues who routinely work with mental health needs. I suspect the mental health experts know what I learned, again and some more, over the last couple of days. A foil for stress, anxiety, loss, fear, and terror is kindness.

When I freaked-out about the bat in my house, my colleagues, friends, and family were steadfast and caring. The facilities colleagues who immediately came to my house were kind to me. No one told me that my fears were unfounded or that I should not have reached out for help. The bat remediation man was considerate as I reenacted the bat flying into my bedroom genuinely trying to convey my terror, but undoubtedly looking ridiculous. No one laughed at me or my fear. When I told family and friends about my panic, and chided myself for “over-reacting” – no one followed that line of conversation. Their kindness to me was to tell me that I get to respond to a bat in my house anyway I need to respond. A beloved neighbor said that if it happens again, to please text him – no matter the time of night or day. His concern for me made me tear-up. In 2020, gestures of kindness are not to be taken for granted.

African American women are accustomed to being treated as invisible. Our distresses are typically ignored, belittled, or erased. Or, we are told we are strong and we can handle anything/everything – even our own terror. We are, by the metrics and actions of white supremacy and patriarchy, invisible or superhuman. Both are narratives meant for dehumanization and violence. Even so, here is my bat report. In a world where Black bodies do not matter, and the distresses of Black women are oftentimes ignored, when my colleagues and friends rallied to help me, I was healed, at least a little bit. Their attentive responses and care were life giving and life affirming. In my fear, kindness made all the difference.

As we wade into our classrooms and into the fall semester, let us take the power of kindness with us. Let us engage our students with care and genuine concern, as best as we can. Remember, they might have recently had their own version of a bat in their house.

Our classrooms are not separate from, or immune from, the loss, grief and panic which permeates our daily lives. Attempts at compartmentalization works against kindness, care, and a holistic understanding of why we come together to learn. During the multiple pandemics of 2020, we cannot pretend that classroom sessions (even on-line) are outside of this current, unrehearsed reality. If in our own panic, we cannot model calm for our students, let us not try to pretend. Know that the pretense and charade of normalcy will not form, but will de-form students. If/when you realize your strength and determination has wavered, do not be afraid to ask for care, help, and kindness.

For easy access, several bat nets have been are placed around my house. I think I have gathered myself enough so that next time I will not freak-out. But if I do, I will not harshly judge myself as inadequate or lacking. I will call Jesus!, neighbors, and colleagues for help.

<https://wabash.center/2020/09/bat-report/>