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The Good Ship, *Church*

by Tony Jones

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An ecumenical sampler of events
and resources for spiritual growth,
published by the spiritual growth
community of Westminster
Presbyterian Church



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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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My dad grew up in Gaylord, Minnesota, a small town in southern Minnesota. In fact, I think it's spitting distance from Lake Wobegon. And, speaking of woe-be-gone, that's how I feel about Gaylord at this time of year. My grandparents are dead, and we're fully ensconced in suburban life, as are my parents. There's really no reason to visit Gaylord anymore, except for the occasional trip to the cemetery. But I still have a strong sense of Gaylord—it resides in my soul.

I'm particularly nostalgic for Gaylord about now because we used to go out there every year for Thanksgiving. We'd arrive around noon on Thursday, and, before we even made it into the kitchen with its smells of turkey and trimmings, we passed through the breezeway, where pies (pecan, pumpkin, and sour-cream raisin) were cooling. We'd stay the weekend, eating leftovers, baking Christmas cookies, and driving into the big city of Mankato for dinner at the Holiday House Supper Club.

So, maybe I have reason to be wistful. I do long for a world of breezeways, supper clubs, and small towns, none of which my own young children will know. Instead, I fear, my own children know only frenzy—rushing to get to soccer or gymnastics, and don't forget to practice the piano and finish your art project before getting out your homework. It's busy, the life we've chosen in the suburbs, and finding a space for God is a deep challenge.

It's become more challenging since I left the traditional parish-pastor role that I held for seven years to pursue thinking into the future of the church in the emerging church movement. As rewarding as this work has been, it has left me at times nostalgic for the rhythms of life on a church staff. And that's never the case more than during Advent. The long-held traditions of pine boughs and hymn-sings make this dark and mysterious period alive with wonder, especially for the young. And the candle-lit midnight service on Christmas Eve. Several times I was assigned the benediction. My spine tingles as I remember. Looking out at the gathered congregation—familiar faces in the darkened sanctuary and the enveloping candle light, individuals yet somehow drawn together and made one by the shared worship—and then being able to proclaim as the service ended and midnight arrived, "It is now Christmas."

So I'm left wondering, can I capture the past and hand it on to my kids? Or do I forge ahead into something new?

The Good Ship, *Church*, continues on page 2

Look for *Thin Places* on the web: www.eWestminster.org/thinplaces.asp

As with so many aspects of the Christian life, the answer is both/and, not either/or. The danger with either/or is clear to me: I see churches that idolize the past, and their nostalgia paralyzes them, keeping them from cooperating with God's own kingdom-building work on Earth. But I also visit lots of churches that have made an idol of innovation—if it's new, it's good. They're missing the work of God, too—the work of God that lay behind them.

Somehow, we've got to steer the good ship, Church, between the Scylla of nostalgia and the Charybdis of innovation. And maybe this can start with our own, personal spirituality.

A deep appreciation of the past has grown in our churches and many of our own lives in the past few decades. Ten years or so ago, who'd heard of *lectio divina*? Only a select few. And twenty years ago, who'd walked a labyrinth? Now we're incorporating these disciplines into our lives with joy, and our own walks with God are immensely deeper as a result. But we must beware the danger of nostalgia. God calls us not to be 13th century Christians but 21st century Christians.

Writing about spirituality has always been daunting for me, because if you walked in my shoes a bit, you'd discover that I've figured out almost nothing. And, as I approach Advent, I once again feel unprepared. I'll likely take up the practice of the daily office, and I'll try to incorporate it with my family. I hope to tell my kids stories of God's goodness, of God's advent in a humble stable.

And, I'll tell my kids about Gaylord, a little town that time forgot. I'll also tell them that, as nice as Gaylord sounds in my memories, we can't live there. No, we have to make our way in world here, now.

So, I'll pray my way into Advent, thankful for times gone by, but also hopeful about times to come. Because, who knows, maybe my kids will one day be telling stories about a great new prayer practice that was invented in 2006!

The Rev. Tony Jones is the national coordinator of Emergent Village (www.emergentvillage.com) and a Ph.D. candidate at Princeton Theological Seminary. Tony was the minister for youth and young adults at Colonial Church of Edina, in Minnesota, for seven years. His most recent book, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*, was noticed in the last issue of *Thin Places*. Tony is also a volunteer police chaplain. As noted below on page 7, in January he will be taking part in a conference—*Conversations in Theology, Practice, and Hope*—with Brian McLaren, Diana Butler Bass and others. He may be reached at: jonestony@gmail.com.

ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES

A recent note from a reader near Columbus, Ohio, commented on “the remarkable richness of the contemplative opportunities” available here. Whether we have more than other areas of the country is not known. But the note does remind us that we do have much for which to be thankful (this being written as Thanksgiving approaches). Here is a small sampling of some of the broadly ecumenical, contemplative opportunities available to us:

Centering Prayer: “Be still and know tht I am God”

(*Psalm 45*)

Silence is the language of the spirit. Centering prayer is a way of coming to our own center and finding the deep stillness that is there, within us.

Every Monday through Friday morning, 7:30-7:50 a.m.

Meeting week-day mornings for the last twelve years, these are open and ongoing groups offering support to people committed to Centering Prayer or some form of meditation. Many who come work downtown and begin their (busy) day with this time to be still.

Every Saturday morning, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Also in its twelfth year, this is also an open group to which people come as they are able. We begin with two 20-minute prayer periods, with a meditative walk between them. Then there is instruction and discussion of some aspect of prayer or meditation and of the spiritual journey. All are welcome

St. Olaf Catholic Church, in Crowley Hall

215 South 8th Street, Minneapolis

For information: 612.332.7471 or

sr.joan.tuberty@juno.com

Healing Service

This Holy Eucharist and Healing Service is a quiet reflective time to commune with God, to pray for healing and renewal of mind, body and spirit, for your self or for others.

Every Monday, 5:30-6:00 p.m.

Saint Mark's Episcopal Cathedral, in the All Saints Chapel
519 Oak Grove Street, Minneapolis

For information: 612.870.7800 or

www.ourcathedral.org/worship/liturgies

Do you know of anyone who might like to receive
Thin Places? It's sent free to all who request it.

Or do you know of an up-coming “Opportunity”
that might be of interest to others?

If so, please contact Kathy Fisher:

kfisher@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421

Monday Night Contemplative Practice

Each Monday evening we will offer an open invitation to anyone interested in practicing silent prayer in a Christian setting. We will offer chanted prayers as well as instruction, with two 20-minute sits and a walking meditation between. Please join us if you can

Every Monday, 6:00-7:00 p.m.

House of Prayer in the City
425 Oak Grove Street, Minneapolis
For information: 320.363.3293 or wbauman@csbsj.edu

Advent Evening Prayer

Look for Signs and Wonders: God Is with Us. Seasonal readings—silence—music with local musicians. All are welcome (registration not required).

Mondays of Advent—December 4, 11, 18—7:00-8:00 p.m.

Sabbath House
3228 Portland Avenue South, Mpls
For information: 612.822.2623

Iona Healing Service

All are welcome to join in this ancient Celtic Christian tradition. This is a lay service of healing and intercessory prayer, for ourselves and for the community at large. A reader will gently lead us through hymns, scripture reading and prayer.

Tuesday, February 6, 7:00-7:45 p.m. (held quarterly)

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, in the creekside Chapel
4439 West 50th Street, Edina
For information: 952.920.0595

Taizé Prayer Evenings

Beautiful music, silence, and Scripture are the sustaining elements of this unique, peaceful, and inviting style of praying. If you've never experienced it before—or even if you have—you're in for a special experience using the songs and prayers from the Taizé ecumenical monastery at Taizé, France.

First Wednesday of each month, 7:00-8:00 p.m.

Christ the King Retreat Center
621 First Avenue South, Buffalo, MN
For information: 763.682.1394 or
christtheking@kingshouse.com

Advent Centering Prayer

Loyola provides a place of quiet and reflection during the busy days of Advent. We invite you to enter into the contemplative spirit of the season. We'll begin with *Lectio Divina* (Sacred Reading of Scripture) followed by a 30-minute "sit" of Centering Prayer. Come for one or all of

these prayer times during Advent. No advance notice necessary. Share your blessings by bringing a donation for the Peter Claver Foodshelf.

Thursday mornings of Advent—Dec. 7, 14, 21—7:15-8:00 a.m.

Loyola Spirituality Center
389 North Oxford Street, St. Paul
For information: 651.641.0008, ext. 20

Labyrinth Prayer Walk

Connect with The Holy through prayer and meditation while walking this ancient path.

If you've not walked a Labyrinth before, please know that it can be a deep experience. A Labyrinth is not a Maze. When you enter a maze you have to make decisions at each intersection, choices that may lead to dead-ends, experiences that may create uncertainty and tension. But a labyrinth is unicursal, there is only one path to follow. Once you have entered upon its path, you come slowly but certainly to the center. And after resting there, and perhaps praying there, you may come gently back out into the world.

Every Thursday, 3:00-5:00 p.m.

Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church,
in the Social Hall
511 Groveland Avenue, Minneapolis
For information: 612.871.5303

A place where great sanctity keeps blooming . . .

"Our faith in God who sent his Son to become God-with-us and who, with his Son, sent his Spirit to become God-within-us cannot be real without our faith in the Church.

The Church is that unlikely body of people through whom God chooses to reveal God's love for us. Just as it seems unlikely to us that God chose to become human in a young girl living in a small, not very respected town in the Middle East nearly two thousand years ago, it seems unlikely that God chose to continue his work of salvation in a community of people constantly torn apart by arguments, prejudices, authority conflicts, and power games. Still, believing in Jesus and believing in the Church are two sides of one faith. It is unlikely but divine! . . .

The Church is a very human organization but also the garden of God's grace, . . . a place where great sanctity keeps blooming."

Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*

Lectio Divina and Centering Prayer

We will be offering *Lectio Divina* and Centering Prayer focusing on the gifts of Christmas during Advent. Each week Scripture speaking of one of these gifts—Love, Joy, Peace, Hope—will be chosen. Come and use this time to deepen your faith throughout the Christmas season.

Every Thursday, 6:45-8:00 p.m.

Colonial Church of Edina,
in the Spiritual Formation Center
6200 Colonial Way
For information: 952.925-2711 or
carolynyoung@mn.rr.com.

A Celtic Christmas Evening Prayer

Celtic Christians felt that God is present in every event of daily life, from the lighting of the morning fire to the coming of the night's stillness. For them as for us, December marked the coming of the shortest and darkest days but also the coming of the Christ Child. This evening's service will include traditional Celtic music on authentic Celtic instruments, Christmas readings from Scripture, time for silence and meditation, and for prayer. It will end with all of us encircling the Chapel with candlelight, a powerful way to see and experience the circle of the community of believers.

This service each year is normally the high point of the annual cycle of Celtic Evening Prayers (which take place on **the Second Thursday of each month**). You might want to come a little early. Then, please join us afterwards for Scottish scones and tea and good fellowship—in this season when we especially long for peace on earth and good will towards all.

Thursday, December 14, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Westminster Presbyterian Church, in the Chapel
1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis
For information: 612.866.8752

The Unfinished Task of Christmas

**When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:**

**To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.**

Howard Thurman

Taizé Worship. A time apart. . . a time for prayer, community and silence

Our monthly Taizé service of worship and renewal through singing, Scripture and silence is modeled after the daily Prayer of the ecumenical community of Taizé, located in a small village in the Burgundy region of France, where over 100 brothers from Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed and Roman Catholic traditions live and work together. Our hope is that our Prayer, like that at Taizé, may serve as parable of community and a sign of hope to the world.

Second Friday of each month, 7:00-8:00 p.m.

Minnehaha United Methodist Church
3701 East 50th Street, Minneapolis
For information: 612.721.6231.

Leading Lives that Matter & Taizé Prayer

This monthly Taizé Prayer has been enriched by an additional Opportunity.

Come at 5:00 p.m. to explore one of the Benedictine values and its application to everyday life and to share over a simple supper. Then gather with the monastic community for a quiet hour of Taizé Prayer. Discussions will be led by a member of the monastic staff. Or just come at 7:00 p.m. for the Prayer in the Chapel. All are welcome.

Third Friday of each month, 5:00-8:00 p.m.

Benedictine Center of St. Paul's Monastery
2675 Larpenteur Avenue East, St. Paul
For information or to say that you're coming for supper:
651.777.7251 or
benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org.

Taizé Prayer and Byzantine Evening Prayer

You are invited to experience an evening service incorporating Taizé Prayer and Byzantine Vespers. Come enjoy this introduction to Eastern Catholic liturgy in an ecumenical setting. [As many will remember, during the last decade thousands and thousands of young people from Eastern Europe have been coming to Taizé, and this year's New Year's Gathering (which perhaps 70,000 will attend) will be held in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia.]

Third Saturday of each month, 7:00-8:00 p.m.

St. John's Byzantine Catholic Church
In the Education Building, two doors north of the church
at 22nd Avenue and 3rd Street NE, Minneapolis
For information: 612.874.9312 or
groomjmtc@usfamily.net.

Celtic Choral Evensong: Celebrating Creation

A unique worship experience, using contemplative language and glorious music drawn from the Celtic tradition, calling us away from our hectic life. It encourages and enables us to reflect and meditate, and become embraced by the Spirit of God.

First Sunday of each month, 4:00-5:00 p.m.

Saint Mark's Episcopal Cathedral, in the Sanctuary
519 Oak Grove Street, Minneapolis
For information: 612.870.7800 or
www.ourcathedral.org/worship/liturgies

**Earth's crammed with heaven...
Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God:
But only he who sees
takes off his shoes.
The rest sit round it,
and pluck blackberries.**

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

**Celtic Contemplative Communion Service,
a reflective service of Celtic music and prayers
Nordic Contemplative Service,
a celebration of the rich and haunting music
of the Scandinavian peoples**

Both of these monthly services offer an alternative, introspective approach to worship. People tell us that they have been especially meaningful for those who may have been away from worship for a while, yet are longing for spirituality. Come yourself, but also think about friends and neighbors who might welcome this contemplative experience and invite them to come along as we journey into the mysteries of God's love and grace, palpably present among us.

Both services begin at 6:51 p.m.

**on the Second Sunday of each month for the
Celtic Contemplative Communion Service
on the Fourth Sunday (December omitted) for the
Nordic Contemplative Service**

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
1935 St. Clair Avenue, St. Paul
For information: 651.699.6886

A Spiritual Oasis. . . a time and place for Prayer and Renewal

*"I learned of Saint John's in Kathleen Norris's book, *Cloister Walk*, but no amount of reading could have prepared me for the experience of being on the campus, the beauty and peacefulness of the environs, the time for prayer and silence and*

reading, the restorative services in the church."

a California guest

After years of planning, the monks of Saint John's Abbey are pleased to announce the opening of the Abbey Guesthouse on December 1, 2006. We invite men and women of all faiths to come and enjoy the quiet and solitude, as well as the Benedictine hospitality, of our new and expanded guest accommodations.

Each of the thirty guest rooms (including four suites) has a unique view of Lake Sagatagan. There is a meditation chapel, a library, a dining room, and parlors for visiting and spiritual direction. And the trails into our 2,600 acres of woodlands and lakes literally begin at the front door.

Yet—while set apart to allow for solitude, quiet and reflection—the Guesthouse is also linked to the Abbey Church, affording guests the opportunity to meet and pray with the monastic community, allowing them to join the monks for Liturgy of the Hours and Eucharist.

Consider coming for a private time away. Or come to participate in a Benedictine Day of Prayer or a special retreat through the Abbey's Spiritual Life Program [www.saintjohnsabbey.org/slp/index.html]. Come and see what the generosity of many people, and the labor of many years, has now made available to all.

Open year around, beginning 1 December 2006

Saint John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN
For information or registration,
Guestmaster: 320.363.2573 or guestmaster@osb.org
Spiritual Life Program: 320.363.3929 or spirallife@osb.org

The Hermitage Experience

The hermitage experience is for many a step beyond a retreat, even a silent retreat. It is not "better" than a retreat, certainly not, but the silence is more complete and unbroken. Some who have never spent a day and a night, or more, in a hermitage setting may be apprehensive about what it will be like. But the men and women who have tried it—since the desert mothers and fathers in the earliest days of the Church—have found that the heart of the hermitage experience is the freedom to become quiet and still within...enabling one to enter more freely into the presence of God. Simplicity, silence and solitude create the environment for that freedom. Here are two possibilities, both proven.

Open all year long**Pacem in Terris, near St. Francis, MN**

For information and registration: 763.444.6408 or
www.paceminterris.org

Clearwater Forest, near Deerwood, MN

For information and registration: 218.678.2325 or
www.clearwaterforest.org

**The Journey In *necessarily* leads to the Journey Out
"Three Twentieth Century Mystics: Dag
Hammarskjöld, Ety Hillesum and Miguel De
Unamuno"**

All are invited to join the Rev. John Sinclair for lunch and a presentation on these significant twentieth century figures.

John is a retired pastor who has studied the three mystics extensively, he says, "because each had a direct relationship with God that changed them, not just their devotional lives. They translated their experience with God into a practical vision for taking action in their society, in their day. The life of each exemplifies what John Mackay (former President of Princeton Theological Seminary) meant when he wrote, 'A heavenly vision should lead us to run faithfully the earthly race.'"

Join us for lunch at Noon (please do let us know that you are coming, but you may pay [\$7] when you get here). Or come for the program, beginning at about 12:30 p.m.

Sunday, December 3, 12:00-1:30 p.m.

Westminster Presbyterian Church, in the Meisel Room
1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

For information or reservations: 612.332.3421 or
kfisher@wpc-mpls.org

**The love which we bear for others
remains the mark of the authenticity
of our contemplation.**

Brother Roger

Men's Spirituality Series: "Images of Masculinity"

We'll gather for dinner and then explore ancient Biblical texts as well as modern church statements that both presuppose and foster definite ideas about what "men" are and how they ought to operate in the world.

Wednesday, December 6, 5:30-8:00 p.m.

Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality
1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul

For information: 651.696.2788 or
www.wisdomwayscenter.org

Because there have been inward springs...

**Since their beginning 350 years ago, the story of Friends
attacking a series of social evils has been a thrilling one, [and]
they have been equally known for their cultivation of the
inner life of devotion. . .**

**But if Friends were merely an ethical culture society, they
would have died out long ago. Because there have been
inward springs, the fountains have continued to flow. . .**

James Newby, *Reflections from the Light of Christ*

Second Annual Men's Retreat—

**"Search for the Grail: for men seeking to develop an
inner life"**

Details available in January but note the date now:
Feb. 10, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Advent Retreat: *Preparing Space for the Holy*

Using the practice of *lectio divina*, we will listen for the Spirit through such voices as the prophet Isaiah, contemporary poets, and Advent music. Participants may respond verbally, or with drawing, movement or song. The format includes a brief introduction to each text and time for individual prayer, reflection and journaling, as well as small group discussion.

One of the newest of the nearly 100 labyrinths in Minnesota may be that recently completed by the ARC community. One community member, thinking about the space at the center of the labyrinth, remembered words from T. S. Eliot, "*At the still point of the turning world.*" And another who helped to build it remembered Matsuo Basho's words, "*Every day is a journey, and the journey itself is home.*"

Friday, December 8, after supper to

Sunday, December 10, after lunch

Or come just for **Saturday, December 9,
9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.**

ARC Ecumenical Retreat Center

1680 373rd Avenue North, Stanchfield, MN

For information or registration: 763.689.3540 or
office@arcretreat.org.

December 10 is the Anniversary of Thomas Merton's

entry into the Monastery at Gethsemane (in 1941) and, as it happened, of his accidental death at a Buddhist/Christian conference in Bangkok (in 1968).

The coincidence of these dates may be curious, but the life Merton lived and the books he wrote during those twenty-seven busy years have touched many. Would you consider spending a "Week with Thomas Merton"?

If so, the next **Week with Thomas Merton**

Elderhostel will take place in March at Bellarmine University in Kentucky. Bellarmine is the official repository for Thomas Merton's manuscripts, poems, letters, journals, tapes, drawings, photography, and memorabilia. Thus, it is the perfect place to study this multi-talented Trappist monk. This program—which provides a multimedia survey of Thomas Merton: his life, published and unpublished works, and critical studies about him—emphasizes the unique place that Merton continues to hold in the 21st century.

Be stimulated by Merton's profound thinking in selected writings, poetry, photographs, and videos housed at the Merton Center. The highlight of the week is a trip to the Abbey of Gethsemani to visit those who lived and worked with Merton and to view his gravesite.

Sunday, March 25, at 4:00 p.m. to Friday, March 30, after lunch

Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY

For information or registration: lbailey@bellarmine.edu or 502.452.8161 or

www.elderhostel.org/programs/state.asp?whatState=KY

Christmas Quiet

This is our (thirteenth) annual time of quiet, reflection and music to give us an opportunity to draw aside during the Advent season to ponder on the coming and birth of Jesus Christ. Refreshments following.

Tuesday, December 12, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Christos Center for Spiritual Formation
1212 Holly Drive, Lino Lakes

For information: 651.653.8207 or www.christoscenter.org

Heart Rest: Be Still and Know that I Am God

For some it may seem that the season of winter will never end! So too, it happens in our lives: darkness appears and we wait for the light to come. Thomas Merton wrote, "Love winter when the plant says nothing." You are invited to treat yourself to a winter evening and a day when you can allow light to enter within, embrace winter with hope and give your heart a rest. The retreat will consist of reflections before the fireplace, prayer, sharing food and spirit, time to rest and a gift to yourself of heart space. Consider inviting a friend to join you.

Wednesday, January 24 at supper to Thursday, January 25, at 4:00 p.m.

The Spirituality Center, Saint Benedict's Monastery, St. Joseph MN

For information or registration: 320.363.7116 or dmanuel@csbsju.edu

Mainline Emergent/s: Conversations in Theology, Practice, and Hope

What unique contributions and needs do mainline churches bring to this moment of re-evaluation and transition in American Culture? How can they participate more deeply and broadly in the emergent conversation? Join us for stimulating conversations among emergent/s and mainline leaders as we explore the church's mission, practice and hope in God's world. Presented as part of Columbia Theological Seminary's Lifelong

Learning/January Seminars program.

Tuesday, January 30, at 1:00 p.m. to Thursday, February 1, at 2:00 p.m.

Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA

For information or registration:

www.ctsnet.edu/lifelong/calendar/index.asp.

Wisdom School Introduction

Led by Lynn Bauman, author of *Ancient Songs Sung Anew: The Psalms as Poetry*, this retreat explores one aspect of our Christian wisdom tradition.

Fifty years ago a very ancient document from the beginning of Christianity came to light—the Gospel of Mary Magdalene. It was found in Egypt, and only surfaced onto the contemporary scene after much difficulty and intrigue. Clearly, this woman student of Jesus played an important role not only in his life, but also in the early formation of Christianity. Ultimately she and her Gospel were rejected and disappeared from view—only to surface 2000 years later.

Legends, such as those now told in the popular *DaVinci Code*, are widely available today. Though a mixture of fact and fiction, they point to a deeper reality that this Gospel uncovers and makes available now, after lying hidden from view for thousands of years. Are we ready for what it reveals? Perhaps we are! In this seminar we will explore the legends, the Gospel, and the principles of the Divine Feminine all of which intrigue our modern imagination. Critical to each of us is the wisdom they bring to our own lives, and to the collective life of modern humanity. Come prepared for an adventure of Spirit.

Thursday, February 8, with supper to Sunday, February 11, after lunch

The Episcopal house of Prayer, Collegeville, MN

For information or registration: 320.63.293 or

www.ehouseofprayer.org.

In
silence
learn
to give
of yourself
forgive others
live with gratitude.
Then

you need not seek peace:
peace will find you!

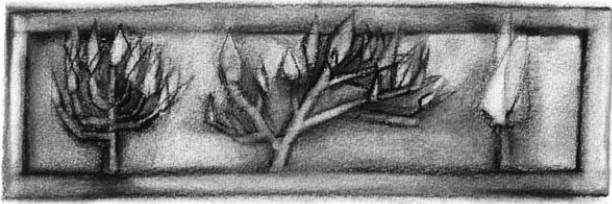
Nan Merrill
Lumen Christi



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"The Good Ship, Church"
"A place where great sanctity keeps blooming. . ."



AFTERWORDS: ...a place where sanctity keeps blooming

Henri Nouwen describes the church as a very human organization "but also the garden of God's grace,...a place where great sanctity keeps blooming." Perhaps the central reality in any garden is that—if it is to flourish—it must be tended to, it must be cultivated. If it is to keep blooming, the soil must be made into Fertile Ground, open to the Sun, and to Living Water.

And perhaps this is true not only in the life of the church but also in our personal lives. We need to tend, to be more intentional about our personal spiritual journeys, our own desire to come closer to God. If this be so, we might wish to consider adopting for this Advent Season one of the most ancient and proven "gardening" techniques, the practice of *lectio divina* or sacred reading.

Lectio divina is a way of reading Scripture that is more like the experience of listening to sacred music than it is to Bible Study, a way that is less like "reading" and more like "hearing," like listening "with the ear of your heart." One can choose a short passage and begin by reading it aloud slowly at least three times, pausing to be still each time, not seeking to "understand" it, but allowing it to flow over you.

Listen for a word or phrase in the passage that seems lifted up. When that happens, gently stay with it—allowing it to call forth any thought, memory, image or feeling that might arise. Read the passage again. Be still. Is there an invitation here? Is God calling me to do something or be something? Is there a word of affirmation or challenge? But don't chase answers. Rest in God's presence, and then take that presence out into your day.

As Advent begins, one might read parts of the Christmas story a few verses at a time, the next passage each day or the same passage over several days. Perhaps verses from *Luke 1:26-38* or *Luke 1:39-45* or *Luke 1:46-55* or many others.

Or one might turn to Howard Thurman's poem on Page 4 above and find passages on "the work of Christmas." Perhaps verses from *Deut. 24:12-22* or *Psalms 37:8-17* or *Luke 14:15-24* or *Acts 20: 28-36* or many others. Or one might turn to the Lectionary for a text. Or turn to Thelma Hall's excellent book, *Too Deep for Words*, for more on the practice and for 500 "Selected Scripture Texts for Prayer."

Perhaps one *can* go gardening even when snow covers the ground.