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## “Are You Home Yet? . . .”

by the Rev. Dr. Keith Meyer

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



**WESTMINSTER**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1200 Marquette Avenue  
Minneapolis, MN 55403-2419  
612.332.3421  
[www.eWestminster.org](http://www.eWestminster.org)

I have had two “spiritual directors” in my life of fifty-one years, nine years with a Roman Catholic Priest who taught me how to pray and the last two years with a Presbyterian Pastor who is helping me discern my next calling in ministry. Both have helped me best by asking questions. “Where do you see God moving in your life?” “In this change of life, what ways can you keep attentive to God?” Open-ended questions that often feel liberating rather than “directive.”

But my first and best and most influential spiritual director didn’t call himself a spiritual director at all, nor did he know what one was...my son, Kyle, six years old at the time.

One day I came home early from the piles of work on my desk in the church office to fulfill a promise to myself and my wife to spend some “quality time” with Kyle. Quality time for Kyle sometimes meant watching cartoons with him. And today that was just what I needed, the spiritual discipline of some vegetative TV watching. I plopped myself down next to him to be beside him in his cartoon reverie.

And then I noticed that I was really tired. But not just tired physically. I was tired of ministry and of the kind of life that it seemed to require of me. I was preaching, teaching and creating programs about living the Christian life and the way to get to heaven but living in what felt like a kind of hell on earth. Looking back, I can see that I was pursuing a twisted idea of success, not in the secular forms I regularly preached against but in the sanctified activism and workaholism sometimes called professional ministry.

A growing church—as in higher attendance at church services, more and more programs, and bigger budgets and buildings—was the mark of a successful ministry. And I was not alone in this pursuit, for at denominational conferences more often than not the conversation soon turned to comparisons of church attendance figures or building programs.

At home my wife and I were having arguments about how I was spending my time. Too many nights out each week, long hours and pre-occupation with ministry were not her idea of the kind of marriage and family life she signed up for when saying, “I do.” I had grown up a PK (pastor’s kid) in what I now know was a performance-based home, and I was modeling to my family the right way to serve the church and God. Although uneasy

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Look for *Thin Places* at: [www.thinplaces.us](http://www.thinplaces.us) or [www.eWestminster.org/thinplaces.asp](http://www.eWestminster.org/thinplaces.asp)

with the practice, I often found myself comparing my age and the size of my congregation with my father's. At age 30 my father had 1,000 at worship, I had 500. I lose, both at ministry and in family.

So on that day with Kyle at my side "vegging" with cartoons I was surprised by his breaking the drone of the TV to ask me a question. Without even looking at me he said, "Dad, are you home yet?"

His question hit me as strange and surprising. Home yet? Hadn't I been sitting there with him for at least twenty minutes watching his favorite cartoon? I didn't quite know how to answer his question. It became a question I would live into for a long time. It was Kyle's first-grade attempt at asking for my attention, for my engagement with him with all my attention.

My wife had been asking her version of that question in our fights about my busy schedule but in the noise of our adult power struggle I couldn't hear her. Kyle's question took me like a kind of divine surprise, it opened for me a kind of thin place or heavenly window into my soul where God could get through to me.

Keith Meyer is Executive Pastor at Church of the Open Door, where for the last 14 years he has led the church team in seeking to center the congregation around the task of spiritual formation. He is a Visiting Professor at Denver Seminary, where he teaches the core course for the Doctor of Ministry Formation track, "Leadership of Spiritual Formation Communities," and he is a Board member and regular presenter at The Spiritual Formation Forum Conference ([www.spiritualformationforum.org](http://www.spiritualformationforum.org)). Keith's most recent article will appear in the Spring issue of the *Spiritual Formation Journal*, *Conversations* ([www.conversationsjournal.com](http://www.conversationsjournal.com)). He can be reached at [kmeyer@thedor.org](mailto:kmeyer@thedor.org).

## ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES

### **The Wooddove Community**

This is an informal community—begun by David Keller, former warden of The House of Prayer—which had its specific origins with a reading of Gerald Manley Hopkins' poem, "Peace," which begins, "When will you ever, Peace, wild Wooddove..." But it may also have arisen from a memory of the words to the familiar song, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." In sharing his idea, David writes,

"What would happen if each of us, and those we know well enough to invite to join us, would agree to spend ten minutes a day in silence? no

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](mailto:kfisher@wpc-mpls.org) or 612.332.3421

That question led me to ask myself "What was really taking my attention?" "What was the goal in all my activity for God?" "Was it really for God or was it for me?" And finally, "What was true success in ministry and in life itself?"

God had got my attention and led me to a new attentiveness to Him and to others that more and more defined ministry success. It first led to some counseling for me, and then more together with my wife, and ultimately to the pursuit of a spiritual director in my developing hunger for being attentive to God, others and my life.

And it has opened me up to the spiritual direction that God has for me outside of professional directors. Now when my professional spiritual director asks me where I am paying attention to God in my life, I am reminded again and again that I can find God speaking through those who he has surrounded me with right now, those who are right at home with me in my life.

During this season of Lent I will be making a daily practice of again asking myself Kyle's question, "Am I home yet?" and looking for those who God has placed around me, his home-made spiritual directors, like Kyle, who took me to God by surprise.

rules, no bylaws, no hierarchy, no goals, no-thing. I invite you to spend ten minutes every day in silence with only one intent: to be present to what G.M. Hopkins called the 'wooddove.'

Perhaps if people all over the world, in all religious traditions, would be together in this way a change of consciousness would take place. I'm not talking about praying for a change in consciousness in 'other people,' especially those I do not agree with, or will not listen to, or (let's face it with me) have grown to despise. I'm talking about a change of consciousness in me. Each of us, sitting or walking in silence, being open to transformation. That can be our 'sacred work.'"

### **Ten minutes a day in silence**

For more information, contact David at: 607.273.1325 or [tycoedd@yahoo.com](mailto:tycoedd@yahoo.com).

And become a member of the Community by undertaking to spend ten minutes a day in silence.

**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 yourself 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](http://www.ourcathedral.org/worship/liturgies)

**Men's Contemplative Spirituality Group**

This ongoing group welcomes all men who seek support and encouragement in their spiritual journeys. Regular and first-time participants alike describe the evening as a comfortable place to dig deep with other men. No experience with contemplative prayer is necessary, just an openness to its possibilities.

**Fourth Monday of every month, 7:00-9:00 p.m.**

The Benedictine Center, St. Paul's Monastery  
2675 Larpenteur Avenue East, St. Paul

For information: 651.777.7251 or

[benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org](mailto:benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org)

**The Merton Seasonal: A Quarterly Review**

This excellent journal is a joint publication of the International Thomas Merton Society and the Merton Center at Bellarmine University (for information: 502.452.8187 or [www.merton.org](http://www.merton.org)).

An article in the current issue recalls that in 1962 a Congressman asked Merton to write a "**Prayer for Peace**" to be read at the opening of the U. S. Congress during Holy Week. Here is part of Merton's 1962 prayer:

"Save us from the compulsion  
to follow our adversaries in all that we most hate,  
confirming them in their hatred  
and suspicion of us....

Grant light, grant strength and patience  
to all who work for peace,  
to this Congress, our President,  
our military forces, and our adversaries.

Grant us prudence in proportion to our power,  
wisdom in proportion to our science,  
humanness in proportion to our wealth and might.

And bless our earnest will to help  
all races and peoples  
to travel in friendship with us  
along the road of justice, and liberty,  
and everlasting peace."

**Lenten Taizé Evening Prayer**

All are invited to gather around the peacefulness of a candle lit table juxtaposed with a hanging thorny cross, receiving the ashes as Lent begins on February 21st and continuing each Wednesday through March 28th. A nice supper (at modest cost) and fellowship are available in the Refectory beginning at 5:30 p.m.

Particularly for those who may work in downtown Minneapolis, there is also a **Wednesday noon** worship in the Sanctuary, a thirty-minute quiet reflection and music following the Lenten theme. It is followed by a modest lunch and fellowship in the Great Hall.

**Each Wednesday during Lent, 6:30-7:00 p.m.**

Westminster Presbyterian Church, in the Great Hall  
1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

For information: 612.332.3421 or

[www.ewestminster.org/holidays.asp](http://www.ewestminster.org/holidays.asp)

**A Prayer for Peace and Healing**

This service has evolved from the monthly Taizé Prayer held at Our Saviour's in recent years. Come for a time of quiet, of prayer, and of healing.

**First Wednesday of each month, 7:00-7:30 p.m.**

Our Savior's Lutheran Church  
2318 Chicago Avenue South, Minneapolis

For information: 612.871.2967

**It needs to be announced** that one of the area's longest continuing Taizé Prayers, the weekly service at the University Episcopal Center, has ended as those leading it have moved away. However, the monthly First Friday service at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Edina (952.920.0595) continues, as it has for many years.

**On Being Present**

**"Patience is a hard discipline...  
for it asks us to live the moment  
to the fullest, to be completely present to the moment,  
to taste the here and now, to be where we are.**

**When we are impatient,  
we try to get away from where we are.  
We behave as if the real thing will happen tomorrow  
or later or somewhere else.**

**Let's be patient and trust that the treasure we look for  
is hidden in the ground on which we stand."**

**Henri Nouwen**  
in *Bread for the journey*

### “A Faithful Adventure, Together”

Shalom. Salaam. Peace. The three Abrahamic faiths all anchor their hope in this vision that is more than the absence of conflict but is a deep and pervasive experience of well-being, harmony among people, and one-ness with the Divine. For a week in mid-January, twelve senior clergy from Jewish, Muslim and Christian houses of worship in downtown Minneapolis traveled together to Jerusalem, Tiberias, and Bethlehem...sharing a common pilgrimage in lands of great promise and peril.

Writing before they left, these twelve men and women noted, “A trip like this can only begin in humility before the complex political, national, ethnic, and religious conflicts of the region...but that humility is rooted in the faith that shalom/salaam/peace is our common destiny, ordained by our Creator, sought through all of our various traditions, and planted in the recesses of every human heart. We make this pilgrimage together in confidence that it is in our personal relationships—as it is in all human relationships—that the Infinite becomes Intimate and that the peace which God intends for the world has its beginning in moments when ‘kindred dwell in unity.’”

Leaving with great hope and expectations, the twelve undertook to share the journey with their congregants through their blog—not sending finished pieces of exposition but recordings of what they that day had seen, learned, wondered, and felt. This journal suggests that their daily experiences together were even more profound and powerful than they had expected.

Visit the blog at [www.journeyinfaith-mpls.org](http://www.journeyinfaith-mpls.org). (Some might wish to begin reading at the end, with the opening entries, and then follow the pilgrimage forward, day by day.) Here is Pastor Al Gallman (Missionary Fellowship Baptist Church) writing this morning (14 January):

“Today we awaken in Galilee. A place where Jesus performed most of his ministry. I cannot help but

think of my brother Freeman as I watch fishermen get into their boats at 5:30 am and head out to fish.... This place is filled with the presence of our Lord.

At 6:00, a four of us started walking along the shores of the Galilee. A Muslim, a Rabbi, a Presbyterian, and a Baptist. Just before the sun appeared from behind the Golan Heights, the four of us stopped, joined hands, steps from the Sea of Galilee, and prayed. I could not help but to think, the Kingdom of God here on Earth had come. What a moment in time. Thank God I am on this trip.”

### Twelfth Annual Celebration: Feast of St. Brigid

Join us for “The Spiritual Quest in Irish Literature,” a lecture by local Celtic literature expert, Patrick O’Donnell, who will discuss how “The Quest” has drawn many Irish writers—Frank O’Connor, Mary Lavin, Samuel Beckett, Yeats—to explore outside their traditional religious heritage, delving into themes aligned with ancient Celtic roots [\$20]. The program will be followed by a Celtic Contemplative Worship Service which will reflect on Brigid’s and our own spiritual quest for meaning.

[If you would like to learn and experience more of the practice of Celtic spirituality, contact Mary Kaye Medinger who will be leading a two-part workshop—live! discussion, poetry, music, prayer and ritual—on February 24 and March 13. She may be reached at 651.696.2790 or 651.696.2788.]

### Thursday, February 1, 6:30-9:00 p.m.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
1935 St. Claire Avenue, St. Paul  
For information or registration: 651.696.2788

### Second Annual Men’s Retreat:

#### “Search for the Grail: A Man’s Guide for Developing an Inner Life”

This retreat will present the story of Perceval and his search for the grail as a metaphor for the psycho-spiritual development of men. It will present an introduction to dream work as a tool for spiritual development. Men will have time for journaling, personal reflection and the opportunity to share their journeys with other men. For information about the retreat and its leader, Ken Schmitz, go to: [www.searchforthegrail.com](http://www.searchforthegrail.com). Registration requested by February 1.

#### Saturday, February 10, 8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. (breakfast and lunch)

also

The Spring 2007 Men’s Spirituality Series will continue with: “Moments in My Life Story”

### A Peace-filled Silence

“Holy Spirit, Comforting Spirit,  
remaining in your presence  
in a peace-filled silence  
is already prayer.  
You understand everything about us,  
and even a simple sigh  
can be a prayer.”

Brother Roger

**Wednesday, March 7, 7:15-9:00 a.m. (breakfast)**

Presenter Richard Leider, "Saving and Savoring the World"

**Wednesday, April 4, 7:15-9:00 a.m. (breakfast)**

Presenter Fr. Dick Rice, "Second Chances and Then Some"

**Wednesday, May 2, 5:30-8:00 p.m. (supper)**

Wisdom Ways, The Carondelet Center

1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul

For more information or registration for all of these: 651.696.2788 or [www.wisdomwayscenter.org](http://www.wisdomwayscenter.org).

**"Reflections from the Inner Light: The Gift of Quaker Spirituality"**

To the world at large, Quakers may be best known for the quietness of their worship and for their long commitment to peacemaking, but from whence do these commitments come? All are invited to join the Rev. James Newby for lunch and a presentation exploring "The Gift of Quaker Spirituality."

Jim is a Quaker (his father was the founder of the Quaker School in St. Paul) and the Minister of Faith and Learning at Wayzata Community Church. He wrote the meditation, "Becoming Comfortable with Mystery," for the November issue of *Thin Places* and is the author of several books on Quaker spirituality.

Join us for lunch at Noon (please do let us know that you're coming so that we can set a place for you—you may pay [\$7] when you get here). Or come for the program, beginning at about 12:30 p.m.

**Sunday, February 11, 12:00-1:30 p.m.**

Westminster Presbyterian Church, in the Meisel Room

1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

For information or a luncheon reservation: 612.866.8752 or [kfisher@wpc-mpls.org](mailto:kfisher@wpc-mpls.org)

**Ash Wednesday Retreat**

Spend a quiet day in retreat, preparing for the Lenten Journey with Christ. Use *lectio divina*, reflection time and ritual to consider the process of change: change of heart, of perspective and of focus.

**Wednesday, February 21, 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.**

also

**Triduum / Easter Retreat**

Celebrate the mystery of God's redemption through Jesus Christ during these sacred days of Triduum. Join the monastic community in observing the liturgies of Holy Thursday through Easter Sunday. Presentations, group sharing and time for personal reflection and prayer.

**Thursday, April 5 at 3:00 p.m.-Saturday, April 8 at 1:00 p.m.**

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

For information or registration: [dmanuel@csbsju.edu](mailto:dmanuel@csbsju.edu) or 320.363.7116

**"The Wind at Our Backs: The Celtic Spirit in All Creation"**

This retreat is for all Irish and Irish lovers on the sacred weekend of St. Patrick. If God is searching for you and you find yourself in a continual lost and found department...if you relish thin places, tall tales and songs brimming with sentiment, this retreat could be for you.

Presenters include a liturgist, a story teller and sage, a presenter and prayer. A surprise guest might result in a storytelling contest on Saturday afternoon.

**Friday, March 16- Sunday, March 18**

The Benedictine Center, St. Paul's Monastery

2675 Larpenteur Avenue East, St. Paul

For information: 651.777.7251 or [benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org](mailto:benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org)

**Lectio Divina Experience**

As mentioned in the "Afterwords" below, one of the most ancient and proven spiritual practices is that of *lectio divina* or sacred reading. This evening offers an opportunity to experience this way of moving deeply into God's Word, guided by Sr. Virginia Matter, who has been mentor to many, over many years.

**Tuesday, March 20, 7:00-9:00 p.m.**

The Benedictine Center

2675 Larpenteur Avenue East, St. Paul

For information: 651.777.7251 or [benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org](mailto:benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org)

**In Ourselves**

**"Ultimately, we have just one moral duty:  
to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves,**

**more and more peace,  
and to reflect it toward others.**

**And the more peace there is in us,  
the more peace there will be in  
our troubled world."**

**Etty Hillstrum**

a young Jewish woman living in Holland,  
(who was to die in a concentration camp)  
writing in her journal, *An Interrupted Life*

**“Retreat in Everyday Living”**

This eight-week scriptural retreat uses the Ignatian Exercises, which provide a process for integrating life and prayer, for coming to greater freedom of spirit, for deepening a personal relationship with God, and for finding God in all parts of life. Praying the Exercises requires a commitment of one hour of prayer each day, journaling about the prayer experience, and meeting weekly to share the week's experiences in prayer and in daily life. No previous scripture study or theology background is necessary, only a desire and willingness to know God.

**Tuesdays, April 3 to June 22, 10:00 a.m. to Noon**

(Sacred Ground Center for Spirituality)

Thursdays, April 12 to May 31, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

(Wayzata Community Church)

For information or registration: 651.696.2798 or [www.sacredgroundspirit.org](http://www.sacredgroundspirit.org).

also

**“Guiding Others Through the Ignatian Exercises in Daily Life—a Program for Spiritual Directors**, has just begun at the Loyola Center for Spirituality.

For more information, contact them at 651.696.2798 or [staff@loyolasrr.org](mailto:staff@loyolasrr.org).

**Taizé Brothers’ “Pilgrimage of Trust on Earth”**

Have you thought about visiting the ecumenical Taizé Community in France but been slowed by the cost?

Brother Alois (who succeeded Brother Roger) and other Brothers from the Taizé Community are bringing their “Pilgrimage of Trust on Earth” to Montreal the last weekend in April for people in Canada and the United States. These pilgrimages offer an opportunity to meet, to pray with, and to learn from the Brothers and are intended as encouragement to young adults to become bearers of peace, trust, and reconciliation in the places where they live. Registrations for the Pilgrimage will be accepted until March 31.

**Friday, April 27, 5:00 p.m.-Sunday April 29, 4:00 p.m.**

For information visit:

[http://www.taize.fr/en\\_article3607.html](http://www.taize.fr/en_article3607.html) or

<http://www.comnet.ca/~cdjeunes/TaizeMontreal2007/en>

**I Always Begin**

**“I always begin my prayer in silence, for it is in the silence of the heart that God speaks. God is the friend of silence, so we need to listen. For it is not what we say but what God says, to us and through us, that matters. Prayer feeds the soul-as blood is to the body, so prayer is to the soul-and it brings us closer to God.”**

Mother Teresa,  
in *A Simple Path*

**A Poetry Reading with Mary Oliver**

This Evening with Pulitzer Prize winning author, Mary Oliver, is sponsored by WomenSpirit, The Loft, and Plymouth Congregational Church. Her many volumes of poetry, prose poems, and prose reveal her as an intense and joyful observer of the natural world and are filled with imagery from her daily walks near her Massachusetts home: shore birds, water snakes, the phases of the moon, “White Pine,” “The Leaf and the Cloud,” “At Blackwater Pond,” and much more.

Unfortunately, this is an opportunity that may have disappeared almost as soon as it appeared. Tickets became available on Jan. 15 and, apparently, were gone by the end of the day. Fortunately, her writings are widely available.

**Monday, May 7, 8:00-9:30 p.m.**

Plymouth Congregation Church

1900 Nicolet Avenue, Minneapolis

**A Day with Esther de Waal: “The Celtic Way of Prayer”**

Esther deWaal, internationally known Celtic scholar, will guide participants into this ancient way of prayer, an encounter with the mystery of God that manifests beauty, serenity and a profound sense of wonder. Open both to the public and as a professional development day for those who guide others along the path to wholeness.

**Tuesday, May 8, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.**

The Carondelet Center

1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul

For more information or registration: 651.696.2788.

also

**Two additional opportunities to meet Esther deWaal:**

A workshop retreat, May 4-6, “Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict”

A public lecture, “A Benedictine Vision for Contemporary Life”

For more information, contact the Benedictine Center at 651.777.7251

**Scotland: The Adventure of Faith in Stories & Places.**

You are invited to make an eleven-day pilgrimage in late May 2007 to Scotland. You will explore Glasgow, Stirling, Inverness, the Scottish Highlands and the Isle of Skye.

And you will visit Iona, where St. Columba landed in 563 C.E. to establish a monastery, and where the ecumenical Iona Community still gathers. For over fifteen centuries, Iona has seemed to many to be a “thin place,” a place where the boundary between the sacred and the everyday can seem thin. For information or registration details, contact the Rev. Byron Thompson at 612.332.3421 or [bthompson@wpc-mpls.org](mailto:bthompson@wpc-mpls.org).

***The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation***  
by Thomas Merton.

Available in the Lowe Library or on-line (\$12).

Thomas Merton published *What Is Contemplation* in the same year (1948) as *The Seven Storey Mountain*. *Seven Storey Mountain* remains his best known and probably best loved book, being reprinted time after time up to the present, its “story” continuing to resonate with readers.

But in the years after 1948 he became increasingly dissatisfied with *What is Contemplation*, feeling that it was “too superficial and too cerebral.” He revised it four times, writing in his journal after the fourth draft (in 1959) that it had become “a completely different book.” Then, he put it aside again, until just before he left for Bangkok in 1968 when he went over it once more and gave it to a friend, finally beginning to think about republishing it. As will be remembered, Merton never returned from Bangkok, being accidentally electrocuted while he was there, and his final draft was only published in 2003, as *Inner Experience*.

This publishing history might be more than one wants to know, but it seems suggestive. For it seems to remind us that the spiritual journey is a journey and not a destination. A story told—rich as it may be—remains a story. But a journey is a journey, ongoing, open-ended, unfolding.

And reading *Inner Experience* reinforces this truth. For as you read you feel that you are listening to Merton in conversation with himself (or perhaps that he is in conversation with you). He is thinking out loud, pondering. There are no right answers. There is only the need to be present and to be attentive to the journey.

Merton’s pondering—his thinking about how time and experience had made a difference between 1948 and 1959 and 1968—could be suggestive in another way. For it might encourage us to stop and reflect on our own spiritual journey, or on our life’s journey, on what might have changed, on what might have been (or need to be) “revised.” We might ask, “Ten years ago what was my attitude towards and experience with prayer...or other spiritual practices...or towards the church...or towards certain social issues...or...?” Thinking about where we were might sometimes help us to see more fully where we now are.

Be that as it may, *Inner Experience*, like our own journey, remains a work in progress. Here are some of the things Merton was thinking when he put this manuscript down for the last time:

“**How mistaken I was** to make contemplation only part of a person’s life. For a contemplative, his or her whole life is contemplation.”

“**The only way to find out anything** about the joys of contemplation is by experience. We must taste and see that the Lord is sweet.”

“**The fact that ‘contemplation’** is not mentioned in the new Testament should not mislead us. We shall see presently that the teaching of Christ is essentially ‘contemplative’ in much higher, more practical, and less esoteric sense than Plato’s.”

“**The inner self** is as secret as God and, like God, it evades every concept that tries to seize hold of it with full possession. It is a life that cannot be held and studied as an object, because it is not ‘a thing.’ It is not reached and coaxed forth from hiding by any process under the sun, including meditation. All that we can do with any spiritual discipline is to produce within ourselves something of the silence, the humility, the detachment, the purity of heart, and the indifference which are required if the inner self is to make some shy, unpredictable manifestation of God’s presence.”

“**The word ‘contemplation’ is too pale**, too vague, too inactive to convey the full spiritual strength of a genuinely religious experience of God. If we are to continue using the word at all, we must strengthen it, forget its purely pagan and intellectual connotations, and think rather of the trembling with which Moses ‘loosed the shoes from off his feet’ on Mount Horeb when God spoke to him out of the burning bush and warned him that he stood upon holy ground. Contemplation, in the Christian context, necessarily implies a sacred ‘dread’-a holy awe.”

And there is more. You might want to enter into a conversation with yourself, or with Merton through this book, or with another trusted friend, and gently explore your own inner experience.

*Afterwords*, continued from page 8

On that day, the parable seemed to be saying to him that his job was not to seek to ensure that every seed fell only on fertile ground. Instead, it seemed, he was being called to show up each morning, to be present, to be attentive. But he was not required to be sure that every outcome was as it ought to be. It felt freeing.

*Lord, help me to listen,  
to the words of Scripture and to the words of those around me.  
Help me to be present, to you and to them.  
Help me to come down where I ought to be.  
Amen*



Westminster Presbyterian Church  
1200 Marquette Avenue  
Minneapolis, MN 55403-2419

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“Are You Home Yet? . . .”  
“Listening to God . . .”



## AFTERWORDS: Listening to God

In the last issue, *Afterwords* talked about one of the most ancient and proven spiritual practices, that of *lectio divina* or sacred reading. Since then—while reading in *A Testament to Freedom* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer—one passage seemed to rise up off the page. Bonhoeffer writes:

“So now I read the Bible in this way. I ask in every place: What is God saying to us here? I ask God to show us what God wants today . . . Since I have learned to read the Bible in this way—and that is not very long ago—it becomes more wonderful to me every day. I read it every morning and evening, often during the day, taking for myself a text that I will have for the entire week and attempt to immerse myself entirely in it, in order to be able to really listen to it. I know that without this I would no longer be able to live properly. Or, even before that, to believe in the right way.”

Since then, also, a reader reports having tried *lectio divina* for the very first time, using (happenstancially) Jesus’ familiar Parable of the Sower:

“A sower went out to sow his seeds; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock, . . . Some fell among thorns, . . . Some fell in good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.’ As he said this he called out, ‘Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’”

Every previous time he’d read it—perhaps studying it rather than listening to it—he had focused on what the sower was doing, and on the “outcomes,” perhaps responding especially to a desire or need to feel productive.

But this time—as he read the familiar words, slowly, again and again, listening—the phrase that seemed lifted up was not “produced a hundredfold” or “some fell among thorns” as half expected. Instead, the words he kept hearing were only the opening words, “A sower went out. . . .” And pondering them, a feeling of release spread over him.

*Afterwords*, continues on page 7