



Thin Places

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The Best Things in Life . . . Aren’t Things

by Mary Treacy O’Keefe

It seemed to be no coincidence that, on the day before Ash Wednesday this year, I discovered a ceramic plaque with the simple message, *The Best Things in Life . . . Aren’t Things*, at the Benedictine Center of St. Paul’s Monastery. I’d been there for several days writing and resting and savoring the splendid hospitality of the Sisters, whose prayerful presence encouraged me to “listen with the ears of my heart” to the “still small voice within” that I so often ignore.

Participating in the thrice-daily times of community prayer made me wonder why it was so hard to establish my own daily routine of prayer. Finding the plaque should have prompted me to focus upon the true “best things” in my own life: my relationships with family, friends and, most importantly, God. Instead, the plaque’s message only motivated me to change my normal Lenten practice which, whether due to lack of creativity or just plain laziness, had remained the same since I was a teenager.

This year, as in every other year, I had planned to give up sweets for Lent—an intention that always ended up being more about trying to lose weight than a significant spiritual practice. But finding the small sign resulted in a decision to not just abstain from sugar but to forgo spending money on any “things” that were not absolutely necessary. I bought nothing other than the bare essentials, like food and gas. Yet it wasn’t until after Easter had come and gone that I realized I had missed the true significance of the “best things” message.

Rather than reflecting upon and being grateful for the best things in my life, I had chosen to focus on what to give up: the materialistic stuff of everyday life. And as soon as Lent was over, I resumed spending money on things I easily could have done without. And I quickly forgot how I wanted to incorporate times of regular prayer—which had been so meaningful at the monastery—into my daily routine.

I rationalized that because my professional life provides the opportunity to help others, the work itself was a prayer. Sometimes I do pray while working, but it’s usually to ask for guidance about what to say to a visitor or a desperate plea for a generous donor to suddenly

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An ecumenical sampler of events and resources for spiritual growth, with a particular interest in the contemplative spiritual journey, published by the Spiritual Growth Community of Westminster Presbyterian Church



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**“May you experience each day
as a sacred gift
woven around the heart of wonder.”**
John O’Donohue, *Eternal Echoes*

Look for *Thin Places* at: www.thinplaces.us or www.ewestminster.org/thinplaces.asp

appear. Any contemplative practices I adopted at the monastery soon were forgotten: within weeks of returning to the real world, I resumed my life as a human doing, instead of a human being.

Thankfully, God never gives up on me. Two weeks ago a scene in nature became a thin place, reminding me of my earlier intention to live a more prayerful life. During a family vacation to Hawaii, we stayed in a condominium that faced east, making it a perfect spot for observing another “best thing,” one of God’s greatest gifts, spectacular sunrises. Around 7 a.m. every day, we joined several of our neighbors, who stood on their balconies or walked (coffee cups in hand) to the shoreline, to stand in awe of the appearance of the sun slowly rising. The early morning ritual connected us fellow travelers, both to each other and to the ancient Polynesians who also must have stood on that ground, mesmerized by a Divine work of art that no human could ever recreate.

One morning, the daily ritual became especially sig-

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Sunsets . . . and inner peace

“Looking forward to exploring the Boundary Waters, some of us have been re-reading Sigurd Olson—remembering his love for that North Country and his many accounts of wilderness epiphanies where he experienced a deep sense of connectedness, a spiritual feeling that brought him inner peace.

In *The Singing Wilderness* Olson recalled his sunset climb to a great ridge called Robinson Peak. He remembered sitting there, looking out over the lakes and rivers and rugged hills of the Quetico–Superior, watching the sunset, listening to the soft sound of the thrushes, and of his own breathing:

“The sun was trembling now on the edge of the ridge. It was alive, almost fluid and pulsating, and as I watched it sink I thought that I could feel the earth turning from it, actually feel its rotation. Overall was the silence of the wilderness, that sense of oneness which comes only when there are no distracting sights and sounds, when we listen with inward ears and see with inward eyes, when we feel and are aware with our entire beings, rather than our senses.

‘I thought as I sat there of the ancient admonition, “Be still and know that I am God,” and knew that without stillness there can be no knowing, without stepping back from outside influences, we cannot know what spirit means.’”

from “*Invitation to a Journey*,”
the meditation in the first issue of *Thin Places*, October 1999.

nificant. As we watched in wonder, clouds began to move into shapes that created an eerie form. Within seconds, the clouds began to look like someone or something kneeling in prayer before an altar, perhaps even an angel with heart-shaped wings. I took a picture of the cloud formation and was delighted when the photograph preserved the scene and the moment, in even more dramatic color than I had remembered.

A bunch of clouds looking like an angel? As I write these words, I realize that maybe the image is just my own imagining. But I believe God communicates to us through our imaginations. And maybe in sunrises, too. As with many thin places, the experience felt real and immediate, and it felt like a gift.

What I do know is that a photo of a memorable sunrise motivates me—finally—to engage in a practice of daily prayer. The image of a praying figure is now the wallpaper on my computer screen—reminding me, several times throughout the day, to pause and pray.

ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES

SHALEM

The Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation provides in-depth support for contemplative living and leadership—a way of being in the world that is prayerfully attentive and responsive to God’s presence and guidance.

For over 30 years, we have offered a wide variety of programs and resources for spiritual directors, clergy, lay leaders and individuals who want to open themselves more fully to God in their daily lives and work.

All of our programs—both those offered here at Shalem and those at locations across the land—share a common, central grounding in the Christian contemplative tradition, which encourages awareness of God’s immediate presence, humility in understanding God’s ways, and radical trust in God at work in our own lives and the lives of others. Throughout our history, our programs also have been enriched by the contemplative wisdom of other faith traditions.

Participants come from many different denominations, faith traditions, and walks of life—all seeking connection, nurture and support. Over the years, thousands of men and women, nationally and internationally, have

immersed themselves in our long-term extension programs and have been refreshed through our many shorter programs. Often participants, especially from our longer programs, find their lives and ministries renewed or transformed.

Shalem programs are uniquely experiential in approach and are grounded in our understanding of classic contemplative wisdom. All offer a rich variety of practices, teachings and leadership styles. Program leaders and program design seek to create a sense of sacred space that fosters authentic spiritual community and spiritual growth.

At Shalem, we honor each individual spiritual path and welcome anyone who would seek to learn from the contemplative way.

Shalem Institute ~ 5430 Grosvenor Lane, Suite 140 ~ Bethesda, MD 20814 ~ 301.897.7334
www.shalem.org ~ info@shalem.org.

Revitalize, Renew, Reclaim Your Spiritual Heart

At the heart of Shalem's programmatic life are our longer, in-depth, ongoing programs:

- **Spiritual Guidance: *Nurturing the Call***—for those in the ministry of one-to-one spiritual direction;
- **Leading Contemplative Prayer Groups & Retreats: *Transforming Community***—for those leading prayer groups and retreats in churches or other settings;
- **Clergy Spiritual Life and Leadership: *Going Deeper***—for clergy in congregational settings seeking to nurture their spiritual heart and leadership; and
- **Personal Spiritual Deepening: *Living in God***—for anyone seeking support for living each day prayerfully and authentically.

Much of the program work and activities is done in participants' own communities, with residencies twice a year in the Baltimore/Washington area. Application deadlines and residency dates vary.

For information about the long-term extension programs offered by Shalem (or about its shorter "One-Time" offerings): 301.897.7334 or www.shalem.org or info@shalem.org.

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 you can answer, "yes," to either of these, please contact Kathy Fisher, kfisher@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421.

"For many young people, not to move, to be silent ..."

From Taizé Community News by E-mail: "Brother Alois and five other brothers were invited to come to The Frat—a large gathering of high school students from the Paris region—where 10,000 young people met at the end of April for four days of prayer, reflection and discussion.

Frat organizers wished to give the young people an experience of a form of prayer more meditative than that to which they are accustomed in this kind of gathering.

So—after the "Praise" with its drum kit, percussion and dance at each worship service—repetitive songs began to resound in the great underground space. For many young people, not to move, to be silent, and to concentrate inwardly, was a fairly new experience. For those who already knew Taizé, the fact of having at the same time two faith experiences so complementary was particularly moving."

To subscribe to News from Taizé by E-mail, go to <http://www.taize.fr/taizenews.php>.

Readers Respond

The last issue noted that this is the 800th anniversary year of Rumi's birth and asked readers to send in their favorite Rumi poems. Most frequently received was:

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
Some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,

Who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture.

Still, treat each guest honorably,
He may be cleaning you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
Meet them at door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
Because each has been sent
As a guide from beyond.

It was announced in late April that public radio's *Speaking of Faith* had won a Peabody—the broadcast industry's most prestigious honor—for its program, "The Ecstatic Faith of Rumi."

For the podcast [which begins, "This hour we enter the exuberant world of Rumi, the 13th century Persian mystic and poet, whose poems are best-sellers in the West and who is being celebrated globally by the United Nations this year. . ."], or for a transcript of the program, or for other information about Rumi, visit: <http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/rumi>

Responsible Living Initiative

As part of the belief that all of creation is a gift—as part of a belief that peoples of faith must be committed to caring for all of creation—Saint Mark’s Episcopal Cathedral is offering a “Responsible Living Information Sheet” and a “Responsible Living Pledge” as ways for us to align our actions with our beliefs. To learn more, go to www.ourcathedral.org and scroll down to “Responsible Living Initiative.”

A special Worship Service celebrating Saint Mark’s 150th Anniversary will be held on Sunday, June 1. For information: 612.870.7800.

The Angel

“In my dream
the Angel shrugged
and said, ‘If we fail this time
it will be a
failure of imagination.’

And then she
placed the world
gently
in the palm of my hand.”

B. Andreas, *Imagining World*

Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care

The inaugural issue of this new journal, published by the Talbot School of Theology, is now available. Its purpose is to advance the discussion of the theory and practice of Christian formation and soul care for the sake of the educational ministries of the church through scholarly publications that are rooted in biblical exegesis, systematic theology, the history of Christian spirituality, philosophical analysis, psychological theory/research, spiritual theology, and Christian experience.

While the journal will be rooted in biblical and theological inquiry, the existential nature of Christian spirituality demands an interdisciplinary approach in which disciplines such as history, psychology, philosophy, literature, and sociology have a valuable contribution. The major intent is to place before the Christian community writing that will foster spiritual formation as it has been understood and developed within historic Christianity.

For information or to subscribe: www.biola.edu/sfj.

Spirituality of the Seasons: Summer

The liturgical year has long witnessed how the change of the seasons can be a time of reflection and renewal. This seasonal retreat is an ideal way to make the coming of the summer solstice a time of spiritual journey.

Saturday, June 14, 9:00 a.m.-Noon

The Benedictine Center
2675 Larpenteur Ave. East, St. Paul

Also: **Finding the Sacred in the Ordinary, July 18-19**

Teachers’ Retreat, August 16

Retreat for Men’s Groups, August 23

For information and registration: 651.777.7251
or www.stpaulsmonastery.org.

A Directed Summer Retreat

Spend retreat time in prayer and silence, celebrating the Eucharist with the community. Included is a daily opportunity to meet one-on-one with a spiritual Director. One hermit day of solitude is arranged.

The newly completed **Subiaco Hermitage** is a special part of this directed retreat, but it is also available year around—set apart on the monastery grounds overlooking fields and woods. Retreatants in the hermitage may choose a total time away or may eat their meals in silence in the monastery.

Both of these opportunities are times to step aside, to quiet down, and to open one’s heart and mind to God’s presence and love.

Sunday, June 15 at 7:00 p.m. to

Sunday, June 22 at 1:00 p.m.

Saint Benedict’s Monastery
in the Spirituality Center, St. Joseph

For information or registration for this retreat or for the Hermitage: 320.363.7112 or dmanuel@csbsju.edu
or www.sbm.osb.org.

Celebrating 30 Years of Ministry:

Christos Center for Spiritual Formation

Think about where you were 30 years ago and what you were doing. Then think about these last 30 years of faithful ministry at Christos Center, “Encouraging the Spiritual Quest through historic traditions of prayer, meditation and spiritual direction.”

Thirty years ago, Christos Center—and Shalem and Loyola—were among the pioneers nationally in exploring the possibilities of a ministry of spiritual formation outside of a monastic setting.

All are invited to an afternoon that will be mostly one of celebration, but which will also provide an opportunity

for reflection upon what has been and what might be.

Sunday, June 22, 2:00-4:30 p.m.

Incarnation Lutheran Church,
4880 Hodgson Road, Shoreview

(directions: 651.484.7213 or www.incarnationmn.org)

For information or to say you can come: 651.653.8207
or christoscenter@msn.com or www.christoscenter.org.

Resurrection: A Story of Re-Creation

This summer solstice evening of Finnish song, story and ritual focuses on the movement to care locally and globally for our earth.

This artistic offering—created and produced by Ruth Mackenzie, Dean Magraw and Natalie Nowytski—draws upon “The Kalevala,” the Finnish national epic. Tickets are \$20. A reception and silent auction follow.

Sunday, June 22, 6:51-9:00 p.m.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church, 1935 St. Clair, St. Paul

For information and registration: 651.699.6886 or
pilgrim@pilgrimstpaul.org or www.pilgrimstpaul.org.

Praying Your Life

We often overlook a rich source of prayer—our own lives. This “Day of Prayer” is a time set apart, in a special place, for looking back and looking forward, a time for prayer and for spiritual renewal.

The day begins at 6:45 a.m. when a monk will meet you at the back of the Abbey Church and welcome you to Morning Prayer with the monastic community (just park near the church and come inside). After breakfast and check-in, one of the monks leads a spiritual conference (instruction and discussion), followed by *lectio divina*, the practice of prayerfully meditating upon the word of God, phrase by phrase. Substantial time is devoted to private prayer and silent reflection, plus other optional prayer experiences.

Participants are welcome to come the day before or to stay into the weekend—using the new Abbey Guesthouse—to have time to visit campus sites (like the Art Center, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, The Liturgical Press, the SJU bookstore), to have time for quiet walks in the woods or along the lake, to join the community for Mass at 5:00 p.m. or Monastic Evening Prayer at 7:00.

We welcome men and women of all faiths who want to come and pray with us.

Friday, June 27, 6:45 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Saint John’s Abbey, Collegeville

For information or registration: 320.363.3929 or
spirlife@osb.org or www.saintjohnsabbey.org/retreats.

For Abbey Guesthouse reservations: 320.363.2573
or guestmaster@osb.org.

Wisdom Way’s 13th Annual Summer Spirituality Institute: “Creating a Compassionate Democracy”

Our civic space is sacred. Many feel that it has been fractured. Yet most believe that a flourishing democracy requires its citizens to seek global awareness, to treat human rights as most sacred, to revere the other. Dr. Ashok Gangadean, co-convenor of the “World Commission on Global Consciousness and Spirituality” will lead us as we explore the possibility of compassionate democracy through the practice of Deep Dialogue and courageous listening.

Friday evening is a public lecture (in the Jeanne d’Arc Auditorium, College of St. Catherine).

Saturday is a working session to deepen understanding and to integrate the principles of Deep Dialogue in practice with one another. And with simple ritual we’ll explore how deep listening feels. “What does waiting on the spirit feel like in a civic space?” “How would it be to view talk within a group as sacred speaking?”

Friday, June 27 at 7:00 p.m. to Saturday, June 28 at 4:00 p.m.

The Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul

For information or registration: 651.696.2788 or
jremington@csjstpaul.org or www.wisdomwayscenter.org.

A Morning Offering

All that is eternal in me
Welcomes the wonder of this day,
The field of brightness it creates
Offering time for each thing
To arise and illuminate
May my mind come alive today
To the invisible geography
That invites me to new frontiers,
To break the dead shell of yesterdays,
To risk being disturbed and changed
May I have the courage today
To live the life that I love,
To postpone by dream no longer
But do at last what I came here for
And waste my heart on fear no more.

This morning prayer from John O’Donohue’s *To Bless the Space Between Us* was placed as a gift on the Agape Table at the *Thin Places* ecumenical Worship Service

Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening

This will be a day of teaching by nationally acclaimed author Cynthia Bourgeault, who is an Episcopal Priest, a twenty-year practitioner of Centering Prayer, and whose book by this name is exceptionally helpful.

Registration preferred, but walk-ins welcomed. No fee, but a free will offering opportunity. Bring a bag lunch (beverages and snacks provided). Free parking at the Energy Ramp between 8th & 9th Streets, with entrances off 3rd & 4th Avenues.

This is a special opportunity for those interested in Centering Prayer and meditation, hosted by the region's oldest (gathering weekly for over 16 years) Centering Prayer group.

Saturday, July 19, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

St. Olaf Catholic Church, in Fleming Hall
215 South 8th Street, Minneapolis
For information or registration: 612.332.7471
or www.SaintOlaf.org/events.htm.

School of Contemplative Wisdom (Week 1)

From time immemorial there have been Wisdom schools to raise human consciousness, thereby transforming society. Concerned with life lived in the fullness of human being and consciousness, Wisdom has been transmitted across time as a treasury of theory and practice to teach us how to awaken.

Once again, Lynn Bauman, Cynthia Bourgeault and Ward Bauman will direct an academy where participants will gather to learn, transform their way of living, and be raised to higher levels of understanding and consciousness.

Sunday, July 20 at supper to Saturday, July 26, after lunch

The Episcopal House of Prayer, Collegeville
Also: Week 2 of the Wisdom School, August 10-16
(which includes an inter-faith emphasis).

Coming in September,

Benedictine Experience, September 23-28.

For information or registration: 320.363.3293
or houseprayer@csbsju.edu.

Pottery Immersion Retreat

Learn how attentive working with clay can be a way to become more meditative and alert to God's movement in life and creation. As you work you may wish to hold in your heart a Blessing, written by Second Century Bishop Irenaeus, who was born less than a hundred years after

Christ's birth,

*"Let my clay be moist,
Lest I grow hard
and lose the imprint of God's fingers."*

Saturday, July 14, 9:00 a.m.-Noon

The Benedictine Center
2675 Larpenteur Ave. East, St. Paul
For information and registration: 651.777.7251
or www.stpaulsmonastery.org.

Educators' Retreat—Time Apart for Reflection and Renewal

This will be a time to remember our purposes as educators and to renew our commitments to those we teach. It will be the third year ARC is sponsoring a retreat for educators, designed for people who teach in all contexts and at all levels. Facilitated by Donna McNear, a teacher and life-long learner in the art of reflective teaching.

There will also be time for quiet and for walks in the woods, and we'll share our meals with the resident members of the ARC community. Scholarships available with priority given to teachers of special needs children in urban schools.

Monday, August 18 at 10:30 a.m. to Wednesday August 20 at 10:30 a.m.

ARC Ecumenical Retreat Center, Stanchfield, MN
Also: **Life Transitions—Engaging the Adventure of Transformation, June 13-15.**

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

A Celtic Pilgrimage to Ireland, Sept. 22-Oct. 2

Explore Irish history, the beauty of the Irish countryside, and famous ecclesiastical sites—including St. Columba's Cathedral, St. Patrick's Cathedral, the Book of Kells, and more.

For information and registration:
wcopeland0195@gmail.com or 612.810.3293
or www.crossingborders.com.

Pilgrimage to Italy, November 10-19

Visit the "thin places" where Christians have stood over the centuries: experience contemplative time together—introductions to Italian art, culture and history—and time at Casa Cares Retreat Center.

For more information: cyd.haynes@comcast.net
or 763.494.4440 or www.casacares.it.

Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation

by J. Philip Newell

Available in the Lowe Library or online [\$18]

Those who have heard J. Philip Newell in person—in the Twin Cities or at Ghost Ranch or elsewhere—and those who have read his earlier books will recognize his gentle, clear and the sometimes “eyes twinkling” lilt to his voice and his down-to-earth yet subtle mind in his just released *Christ of the Celts*. Drawing upon his ongoing research, he shares his understanding of the deeply lived faith of the Celtic Christians, the unceasing wish among many of them to be open and responsive to God’s presence in every element of creation and of their daily lives.

And in this book, subtitled *The Healing of Creation*, Philip particularly explores the theological and daily living implications—for the Celtic Christians and for us—of the repeated refrain in the creation story, “And God saw that it was good. . . .”

Here are some sample sentences:

“It was on Iona that I became deeply aware of the lost treasure of Celtic Christianity. In the ancient prayers of the Hebrides, especially in the collection known as the *Carmina Gadelica*, I found prayers that had been chanted for centuries at the rising of the sun and the setting of the sun, invocations for blessings at the birth of a child or the death of a loved one, rhythms of praise for tides and the turning of seasons, songs of thanks for planting and harvesting earth’s fruits.

These were different from the prayers I had grown up with in my Western Christian inheritance. The context was creation rather than church. Love of Christ and love of the earth were woven inseparably together. And I saw in them hidden gems for the journey of the human soul today.”

“In the Hebrides it was common practice well into the nineteenth century for men to take off their caps to greet the morning sun and for women to bend their knee in reverence to the moon at night. These were the lights of God. They moved in an ancient harmony that spoke of the relationship of all things. And they witnessed also to the eternal rhythm between masculine energies and feminine energies that commingle deep in the body of the universe.”

“So Irenaeus [‘who had been taught by Polycarp, who had in turn been the student of John the Beloved in Ephesus’] speaks of creation coming out of the very ‘substance’ of God. . . . The glory of the sun rising in the east is the glory of God shining on us now and now and now. The whiteness of the moon, the wildness of the wind, the moisture of the fecund earth is the glow and wildness and moistness of God now. It is the very stuff of God’s being of which we and creation are composed.”

“The great Celtic teachers repeatedly point to the fundamental truths of *Genesis* 1. It is used to remind us of our deepest identity, the image of God at the core of our being. It is also used to recall us to the essential nature of creation and of everything that has being. There is a phrase repeated after each day in the creation story, ‘And God saw that it was good . . .’

Creation is viewed not simply as something that occurred at one point in the past. Creation is forever being born. It is forever coming out of the Womb of the Eternal, and God forever sees what is being born as sacred.”

Christ of the Celts is at the same time both an “easy read” and movingly powerful. Lessons to be learned from the Celtic Christians seem not just historically interesting but seem to offer understandings that may be crucial for Christians in this time and this place.

Also Noted

- The Rev. Dr. Newell will again be the resident Companion/Theologian at the Casa del Sol Spirituality Center at Ghost Ranch, July 7-August 10 for programs / retreats: 505.982.8539 or casadelsol@ghostranch.org or www.ghostranch.org/casadelsol.
- Philip will lead a retreat, “**Iona: A Celtic Journey—Listening to the Heartbeat of God**,” September 20-26: “At Iona—the historic birthplace of Christianity in Scotland—we will listen for the new beginnings that God is calling us to as individuals and as a nation, participate in the rhythms of the Iona Community, and focus on the themes and music of the Celtic tradition for today.” For information or registration: 505.982.8539 or suer@ghostranch.org.
- And, Philip has been invited to be in the Twin Cities May 19-21, 2009—details to follow.



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**“The Best Things in Life . . .”
The Healing of Creation . . .**



AFTERWORDS: “. . . an ongoing conversation with Christ . . .”

The “Afterwords” in the last issue seems somehow too simple to be helpful.

Seeing a world too lacking in peace of heart and peace among peoples, too full of suffering and injustice and violence to people and to the earth, it seems too limited—even though it is true that the only moment I can truly live is the present one—even though it is only in the present moment that I can truly love the Lord my God with all my heart . . . and strength—to say that the Way is “to seek to do the loving thing in this moment.”

It just seems too simple and too limited. And so it probably is. For we do need to join with others to work together for peace on earth—in all its wider implications—with intelligence and energy and loving hearts.

And yet there is something compelling here, perhaps especially for those drawn to the contemplative spiritual journey. When doing the loving thing is practiced (as much as one can, with many failures) it feels liberating rather than limited.

In a recent Weekly Reflection (www.henrinouwen.org) Madeline Burghart, who is a house leader with L’Arche Toronto, writes,

Working as part of a Christian Peacemaker Team, “we realized that living nonviolently involves two separate yet interconnected practices: an outer, visible witness to a life of peace; and the more hidden, attentive work of being present to the small details of our lives. The outer practice is more noticeable, and is often more gratifying—who doesn’t feel better after participating in a peace march?

And yet, as I learn over and over again, the greatest impact I can have in my tiny world is the way I choose to be present to others and to the world around me. If, daily, I can speak to my children with absolute patience and listen to them as deeply as I would wish that listening from someone else; if, daily, I refrain from the easier tack of speaking ill of someone in order to appear stronger myself; if, daily, I make choices that cause less damage to this beautiful planet—then I know my journey of nonviolence continues, despite the invisibility of its workings.

Interconnected practices. Perhaps the one foundational for the other:

“Precisely when we live in an ongoing conversation with Christ and allow his Spirit to guide our lives, will we recognize him in the poor, the oppressed, and the downtrodden and hear his cry and respond to it wherever he reveals himself.”

Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life, by Henri Nouwen.