

September/October
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Encouraging Angels: A Testimony by Maxine Sinclair

As I look back over my ninety-one years, I am more and more conscious of—and deeply thankful for—the “encouraging angels” who have appeared at special times to help me on my journey. I call them “angels” because I didn’t ask for their help. They seemed to just appear when I needed them, opening opportunities and helping me on my way.

My forbearers came from Holland, Wales, and Scotland in the 1600s and to Kansas two hundred years later—I’m a tenth generation American. I was born a half-mile from my Mother’s rural home, not far from the state capitol of Topeka. Mother had inherited the farm and a new home from her pioneer parents. All seemed to be well, but by my fifth birthday times had changed and our farm was lost. Then the Great Depressions was upon us.

Most of my early memories were of “hard times,” poverty and struggle. We moved sixty miles to a rented fruit farm. As a farm family we always had plenty to eat. Three of my grandparents had been school teachers, and our parents had high expectations of the six of us. They were gentle folk and didn’t use harsh language or physical punishment, but neither did they praise us; their actions and demeanor made us know that we were loved and that they were proud of us.

Added to the financial struggle, our Mother suffered from bipolar disorder. At that time there was no professional help for her care in our town, so eventually she spent periods in a state hospital. By that time, my older siblings were married and lived far from our home, but I was old enough to do the house work. In those days mental illness was viewed as a shame in the community. And that didn’t help.

When I was eleven, we moved to a town of 600 where I entered sixth grade. Betty Jane and Marjorie were my best friends; Betty Jane was my only Catholic friend. Her mother, Helen Studer, was my first angel, quietly encouraging me. When I was ready to graduate from eighth grade—that was “a big deal” then—she borrowed a lovely dress for me to wear. Marjorie welcomed me and saw me as a competitor in class, but we did become close friends. However, I didn’t like that she and her mother saw me as “a poor girl,” which I was. Her mother’s club bought me a wool hat and a scarf and sent Marjorie to present it to me. Our family was poor but proud and never took any help from President Roosevelt’s charity programs.

My father helped me to believe that I would be able to go to college after high school. And the very year I graduated, an old Presbyterian college near us became “a free public junior college.” All I needed was a home where I could earn my room and board. Dad got me a ride with a friend who was driving through that town so I could “knock on doors and find a place to live.” At the first door at which I knocked, I was told to go to “Miss Zula’s.”

“Oneness . . .” . . . continues on page 2

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

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Afterwords

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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www.eWestminster.org

She welcomed me and said that the Dean of the college had talked to her about me. What my father and I had not known was that my high school principal was in touch with the Dean about my need for a place to stay.

Miss Zula became my angel for the next two years. In addition to letting me work for my room and board, she offered me friendship and encouragement. Times were still tough. Away from home, I remember that if I needed 25 cents to go to a potluck I could mail a penny postcard to my Dad, and he would send a quarter back. Then, when it was time to apply for a teaching job, the Dean, who was also the professor for teacher training, called an old friend who was a school board member in a town four miles from my family home. The Dean recommended me as a teacher for the first and second grades. I was hired and spent three good years there, living at home and commuting to my teaching job.

But during this time, along came World War II. My three brothers marched off to war, my younger sister was in college away from home, and Mother’s health took her to the hospital. My father at that time was running a gas station, but the war rationing of gasoline cut that job, and he had to move to Kansas City to work in a munitions factory. I was left alone. And my first angel, Helen Studer, invited me to live with their family.

I am taking too much time telling my story. But I need to add that during all of these years, the church had always been important to me, bringing new and growing experiences and many friends. And in the years that followed, many more appeared and helped me on my way . . . when I went back to college to finish my four-year degree . . . when I met John, my husband, and my most encouraging angel (who shared some parts of our journey in *Thin Places* two times ago, through passages from the Journal he has kept for sixty years) . . . when we were in the mission field in South America, and our three sons were growing up . . . back in this country, in other church assignments . . . and in our years of still active retirement. Many years and many encouraging angels.

Remembering the ordinary people who have encouraged me, I am conscious of those many small and often silently given kindnesses of life that have lifted me up and helped me on my way. Looking back, I realize how very different my life could have been without them. And remembering this, words from a favorite poem, “**Friends**,” a prayer by J. Barrie Shepherd, stir my mind and heart:

“Friends were with me today, Lord, . . .
. . . I thank you for them
and for all they bring to my living.
For the way they give of themselves to me,
for the way they help me give of myself,
and even be myself, and more than myself.
. . . but most of all, Lord, I thank you
for the ways in which you reveal yourself
to me through friendship,
for all the moments in which,
through frail but wonderful human instruments,
you sing to me of grace and mercy . . . “

This September, as I begin my 92nd year, “Thank you friends. Thank you encouraging angels. Thank you, Lord, for the gifts that have helped me to be myself and perhaps more than myself. And thank you, Lord, for the opportunities open to each of us . . . to quietly help others on their way.”

Maxine Sinclair built on her early experiences—adding to her treasured circle of friends—during her later years as office secretary at Princeton, seminary student, wife and mother, missionary partner in South America, ESL and public school teacher, peacemaker and organizer of church women, and more. She is now a retired Elder and an active member of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis.

In some ways, her words—together with John Sinclair’s “Being Attentive to Life . . .” in Issue #61—seem like a matched pair. Shared memories and insights from their long life together. Pilgrims on the way. . . .

**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 ‘yes’ to either, please contact Kathy Fisher at:
kfisher@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421.

**“Relationships
form the receptacles
for receiving the fullness of Christ**

**and are the places
where the kingdom comes . . . “**

Dallas Willard
in the “Foreword” to Keith Meyer’s
Whole Life Transformation

The Sacred Ground Center for Spirituality

. . . is a community of spiritual directors committed to the idea that this world can be a more compassionate and peace-filled place if we as individuals have the opportunity to grow into more of whom God created us to be. The sacred is everywhere—not just on a hilltop or in a church, temple or mosque. Our deepest heart's desire is to help people know a loving God, intimately, in all aspects of daily life.

The founders of Sacred Ground were spiritual directors trained at the Cenacle in Wayzata, MN. When the Cenacle Sisters announced they were closing their Wayzata Retreat House in 1996, they encouraged their current and past students to contemplate the future. The group discerned that they wanted to continue as a community that would be inclusive, ecumenical, and a spiritual resource to awaken and deepen faith. Sacred Ground began operations the following year. Soon after, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet welcomed them as tenants at Carondelet Center, Saint Paul.

Sacred Ground—located at 1890 Randolph Avenue in Saint Paul—offers individual and group spiritual companionship and leads persons through the **Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius**. The Exercises are an eight-month commitment of daily prayer and reading, along with weekly meetings with a spiritual director. This one-to-one retreat experience gives individuals a way to grow deeply in their spiritual life and in their relationship with God and others. It also deepens one's freedom to make decisions out of love and generosity.

Many who have experienced the Exercises have reported them to be a life-changing experience. Meetings are arranged at Carondelet Center and elsewhere around the Twin Cities. Some even meet via the Internet.

Sacred Ground also sponsors a **Spiritual Director Certification Program**. The program exposes students to classical wisdom literature and helps them to cultivate a contemplative and reflective way of living and to develop deep listening skills. Although the program is designed to train spiritual directors, whether or not they practice as certified spiritual directors, participants will have grown and will thereafter approach life in a new way.

And to help directors continue to grow, Sacred Ground offers professional development events, workshops and retreats. But all are welcome at these presentations. They are open to—and often attended by—participants who are simply interested in the topics.

For information on any of **Sacred Ground's** offerings, we invite you to visit www.sacredgroundspirit.org

or to contact Michele Krakowski, Executive Director, at: michelek@sacredgroundspirit.org or 651.696.2798.

Centering Prayer

For seventeen years the Centering Prayer group at St. Olaf Catholic Church has gathered *every* Saturday morning (except for those few times when Christmas Day fell on a Saturday).

The group is open—people are invited to join and participate as they are able. Some have been there almost every week. Others come for a while and then move on.

All who come may begin to learn that Silence is the language of the spirit, that Centering Prayer is a way of coming to our own center and of finding the deep stillness that is there, within each of us:

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

also:

A satellite group also meets at St. Olaf each week-day morning. Many who work downtown come to begin their (busy) day with this time to be still:

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

St. Olaf Catholic Church, in Crowley Hall

215 South 8th Street, Minneapolis

For information: 612.332.7474 or

sr.joan.tuberty@juno.com.

Taizé Evening Prayer

Now beginning its 12th year, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church offers its First Friday Taizé Prayer in the beautiful Chapel, overlooking Minnehaha Creek.

The Prayer—like the Taizé Community itself—is very ecumenical and an outreach ministry. Nearly 98% of those who come each month are not St. Stephen's parishioners.

The people come together for sung prayer, Scripture,

“Strange is our situation here upon earth . . .

**Each of us comes for a short visit,
not knowing why,
yet sometimes seeming to divine a purpose.**

**From the standpoint of daily life, however,
there is one thing we do know:
we are here for the sake of others. . . .**

**Many times a day I realize
how much my own outer and inner life
is built upon the labors
of so many others . . .”**

Albert Einstein

and silence in a candle-lit setting. Everyone is welcome:

First Friday of each month: 7:30-8:30 p.m.

(please note that this is a new starting time)

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, in the Chapel
4439 West 50th Street, Edina

For information: 952.920.0535 or

lreynolds@sststephens.com.

Quiet Worship

Now in its 11th year, Westminster Presbyterian Church offers a Quiet Worship, a time set aside each month to gather in a calm and intimate setting, around the lighted Christ Candle, the open Bible, and the Cross. It is a time to be together, resting quietly in God's presence and love.

Many who are deeply committed to a life of service have found that their journey out into the busy-ness of the world is enriched and strengthened when they take time for the journey in, for prayer or quiet music or silence. Many have also found that contemplative worship must be experienced to be known.

Consider beginning a weekend . . . by intentionally taking time for yourself, time for quiet worship, sung prayer and Scripture, and deep silence in a special setting:

Fourth Saturday of each month, 9:00-9:45 a.m.

(the third Saturday in November and December)

also:

A Celtic Evening Prayer, a service of prayer, music, Scripture and quiet, drawing upon the rich tradition of the Iona Community in Scotland. The songs and prayers speak of the Creation, of God's desire for wholeness and justice, and of our hope in the Spirit that surrounds us in everything we do:

Second Thursday of most months, 7:00-8:00 p.m.

Westminster Presbyterian Church, in the Chapel
1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

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

Celtic Contemplative Worship

Now in its 8th season, Pilgrim Lutheran Church continues to offer its beautiful Celtic Contemplative Worship.

Although pushed out to the fringes of Britain after Augustine of Canterbury's Roman mission in 597, Celtic Christian spirituality has always managed to survive in one form or another, usually on the edges of formal religion. One of the leaders of the Celtic Christian movement was St. Aidan, Abbot of Lindisfarne, known for his concern for the poor and strangers, who died in 651 A.D. (The starting time for these worship services commemorates him.)

For our Celtic worship, we draw prayers and texts from the *Carmina Gadelica* ("the songs and poems of the Gaels") and from Scotland's Iona Community. These

prayers and readings address the mysteries and challenges of everyday life as well as emphasizing the life of God within creation.

The theme for this year is "Homing in the Presence: A Celtic Journey into the Mysteries":

Second Sundays at 6:51 p.m., Sept. through April

(new this year: A Celtic Morning Communion Service, on October 3 and November 21 at 8:30 and 11:00 a.m.)

also:

A Nordic Contemplative Evening Prayer, a liturgy that—along with Morning Prayer—attunes us to the holiness of time. We participate in these daily rhythms, praising God for the sun's rising and a new day, thanking God for all the day has brought at day's end, gathering to celebrate the sacred mysteries of our lives in the context of the mystery of God. Our Nordic roots run deep in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, and the whole upper Midwest region:

Fourth Sundays at 6:51 p.m., Sept.-Nov. & Jan.-March

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

For information: 651.699.6886 or

www.pilgrimstpaul.org or pilgrim@pilgrimstpaul.org.

Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina

Colonial Church of Edina presents a dinner and a warm evening of reflection and prayer on the writings of an important contemplative of our times, Bernadette Roberts. Her work will be introduced by Dr. David Rothstein, a former Benedictine monk and a member of the staff at the Loyola Spirituality Center.

The specialness of this evening will be remembered by the many from throughout the metro area who came last year. Like last year's dinner, this will be the first of this year's weekly gatherings at Colonial.:

Dinner: Thursday, October 14, 5:30-8:30 p.m.

Thereafter: Thursdays, 6:45-8:00 p.m.

Colonial Church of Edina, 6200 Colonial Way, Edina

For reservations or information: Carolyn Young at

952.893.0673 or centeringprayerdinner@gmail.com.

**Our world is so full of conditions . . .
demands, requirements, and obligations
that we often wonder
what is expected of us.
But when we meet a truly free person
[a truly giving person]
there are no expectations,
only an invitation
to reach into ourselves
and discover there
our own freedom."**

Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*

Come Celebrate . . .**The Episcopal House of Prayer is 20 years old!**

Open House . . . hors d'oeuvres and beverages . . . program at 2:00 p.m. . . . music by St. John's Abbey Schola . . . and the newly minted *Sacred Food for Soulful Living* cookbook will also be available:

Sunday, September 12, 1:00-4:00 p.m.

also:

Come and See:**Personal Prayer in a Post-Modern World**

What does prayer have to do with "real life"? What happens when you pray? What are the difficulties and paradoxes of prayer? What are its possibilities? Meister Eckhart said, "The outward work will never be puny if the inward work is great." How will prayer transform your life?

Led by David Keller, former Steward of the House of Prayer, and Emily Wilmer, former long-time member of the staff at Loyola Spirituality Center:

**Friday, October 1, with supper at 6:00 p.m.,
to Saturday, October 3, after lunch**

The Episcopal House of Prayer

Fruit Farm Road, Collegeville

For information or registration: houseprayer@csbsju.edu or 320.363.3292.

What happens at a "Benedictine Day of Prayer"?

. . . at 6:45 a.m., a monk will meet you in the back of the Abbey Church and welcome you to Morning Prayer with the monastic community. After breakfast, there is an opening conference, followed by lectio divina—a spiritual practice dear to the heart of Saint Benedict. There is also ample time to spend in private prayer and reflection.

Other opportunities while at St. John's include seeing original manuscripts of the St. John's Bible at the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, taking a walk to the lovingly renovated Stella Maria Chapel, or simply enjoying the opportunity to walk the beautiful campus and pray in several of the chapels at the Abbey Church or Guesthouse:

**Fridays, Sept. 10, Oct. 22, Jan. 7, Feb. 18, April 22
(Good Friday), May 27-6:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.**

[If you'd like to come the night before, rooms are available in the new Guesthouse at modest cost.]

St. John's Abbey, Collegeville

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

A Path to Self-Awareness: The Enneagram

The Enneagram is a system of thought which combines psychology and spirituality for the purpose of personal

transformation. Studying the Enneagram leads to the understanding and acceptance of others, and improved relationships with family, friends and co-workers. This "basic" workshop will acquaint the beginner with this nine-point personality system of self-understanding.

Led by Kay Vander Vort who has just celebrated her 25th year at Loyola and who was a national pioneer in lay women finding a place in spiritual direction:

Saturday, October 23, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Loyola Spirituality Center

389 North Oxford Street, St. Paul

For information or registration: 651.614.0008 or www.loyolaspiritualitycenter.org.

"Hildegard of Bingen and the Living Light"

WomenSpirit and the St. Olaf Music Series present mezzo soprano Linn Maxwell in this one-woman show embodying the extraordinary life of 12th century German healer, composer, mystic and visionary, Hildegard of Bingen. Ahead of her time in a male dominated world, she made an enormous contribution both theologically and artistically.

Using authentic medieval instruments, performing seven of Hildegard's original songs, drawing upon Hildegard's actual letters and writings, Maxwell brings to life Hildegard's timeless message of spiritual truth, holistic healing and caring for the earth:

Thursday, October 28, 7:00-8:30, plus reception

St. Olaf Catholic Church, 215 South 8th Street, Mpls.

For information or reservations (tickets may also be purchased at the door): www.brownpapertickets.org or sr.joan.tuberty@juno.com.

also:

"Are we not called to communicate

a mystery of hope

to those around us

by the lives we lead?"

Brother Roger of Taizé

It is now the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Community since it was on 20 August 1940 that Brother Roger arrived on the hill of Taizé, at first alone, to begin his ministry there, not knowing what the future would hold. "A sower went out . . ."

“Hildegard of Bingen”

This outstanding video series from the Washington National Cathedral—offered by the St. Olaf Centering Prayer group at the church—will be an excellent preparation for all who would like to learn more about and to be inspired by Hildegard:

The first four Saturdays in October: 10:15-11:15 a.m.
Information: 612.332.7471 or sr.joan.tuberty@juno.com

17th Annual Fall Soul Conference:**“Tapping the Wisdom of the Universe”**

How do we negotiate the space between our essential unity and the problematic aspects of our differences? What kind of commitment is called for if we are to address the spiritual challenges of this negotiation?

This presentation, by the visionary student of the Universe Toni Nash—with singer-songwriter Sara Thomsen—will focus on the way the Universe evolves new structures by engaging differences and creative tensions.

We will use imagination, reflection, and discussion to understand the principles the Universe offers us as tools for meeting the radical polarities of our times. We will celebrate the wisdom of the Universe as we commit ourselves to the spiritual work of becoming an adult species of a vibrant Earth community:

Friday, October 22, at 7:00 p.m.

to Saturday, October 23, at 3:00 p.m.

Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality
Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul
For information or registration for either or both days:

651.696.2788 or www.wisdomwayscenter.org or
wisdomways@csjstpaul.org.

Centering Prayer: Introductory Workshop

Centering Prayer—like every spiritual practice—must be experienced to be understood.

This day is for those who may have *felt a tug* towards this ancient practice and who wish to experience it, and for those who may wish to refresh and reaffirm their practice.

Four teaching sessions, with a break at 11:15 to allow participation in Eucharist and lunch with the monastic community. All are very welcome:

Saturday, October 23, 9:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

also:

Intensive Centering Prayer Retreat

This weekend is for those who have been practicing Centering Prayer regularly for three months or longer, will offer time for Prayer and silence plus optional opportunities to view and discuss more advanced (video) teachings by Thomas Keating. A weekend for enrichment:

Friday, Oct. 1, at 7:30 p.m.–Sun., Oct. 3, at 1:00 p.m.

Saint Benedict’s Monastery, St. Joseph, MN

For information or registration: 320.363.7116 or
www.smb.osb.org/programs or dmanuel@csbsju.edu.

Dr. Marcus Borg:**“An Emerging Form of Christianity Today”**

Through his many books and at his center, Marcus Borg advocates that entering into relationship with God is much more important than any belief about God.

[In a sermon preached at House of Hope in St. Paul in March of 1999—at a time when the idea for this newsletter was gestating—Dr. Borg declared categorically that “the creation of thin places . . . should be the purpose of much which we do in the Church.”]

This is a special opportunity to listen to and to learn from an important, contemporary theological teacher and thinker:

Friday, November 12, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Saturday, November 13, 8:30 a.m.–12:15 p.m.

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

2730 East 31st Street, Minneapolis

For information or registration: 612.729.8358 or
www.htlcmple.org.

Pilgrimage: Advent through Lent

Again this year, Christos Center for Spiritual Formation will offer a time to gather together to recount the most profound stories of God’s love for humanity.

Two of the most significant sets of accounts are told

Thank You

As many will remember, *Thin Places* takes its name from the Celtic Christian metaphor for those times or places where the boundary between the sacred and the everyday feels “thin,” when our hearts are opened, and God’s presence is more strongly felt.

And it gets its being from the talents and labors-of-love of many. As its 12th year begins, *Thin Places* gives special thanks to Kathy Fisher (who manages the many and varied practical details that allow it to happen), to Kristin Kieft (who takes texts and artwork and ideas and turns them into a final form), and to Sandy Wilson (who—along with “the team”—sends it out to you each time).

And thanks to the more than 2,000 Readers, a cloud of witnesses . . . surrounding, supporting, exploring the contemplative spiritual journey.

each year during Advent and Lent. Through the gifts of scripture, imagination, symbols, and music, we will open ourselves to God. Please join us for these profound prayer experiences:

**Mondays: Nov, 15 (Advent), March 28 (Lent),
May 2 (Life after the Resurrection), 7:00-9:00 p.m.**

Christos Center for Spiritual Formation
1212 Holly Drive, Lino Lakes

For information or registration: www.christoscenter.org or
651.653.8207 or janetchristoscenter@msn.com.

**A Special Up-Coming Opportunity:
“School of Lectio Divina”**

The Benedictine Center is offering the “School of Lectio Divina” to adapt the ancient monastic riches of sustained lectio divina to contemporary people. Through an encompassing, ecumenical retreat experience-set in the rhythm of life at the monastery—you will receive instruction about lectio divina from a master teacher, spend time meditating on a sacred text significant to you, have the opportunity for individual spiritual direction, and participate in reflective conversations with others.

After the retreat, the Center will provide a variety of on-going support activities and resources to help you make sustained lectio core to your individual prayer and spiritual development.

Because of the intense nature of this experience, enrollment is limited to 15—applications are due January 1:

Friday, February 25, at noon to

Tuesday, March 1 at 1:00 p.m.

The Benedictine Center, St. Paul’s Monastery
2675 Benet Road, St. Paul

For information or an application: 651.777.7251 or
www.stpaulsmonastery.org.

Lead Us Into New Beginnings

The Casa del Sol Prayer of Jesus expresses the vision and commitment of the Companions of Casa del Sol. One of the prayer’s phrases, “Lead us into new beginnings,” speaks of the desire for new beginnings in our lives, both individually and collectively.

This retreat in the days leading up to a new year in our lives and world—to be led by J. Philip Newell—will consist of prayer around a fire at the rising and setting of the sun, teaching and sharing in the mornings and evenings, and rest and silence in the afternoons:

Wednesday, December 29, to Saturday, January 1

Casa del Sol, Ghost Ranch Retreat Center, Abiquiu, NM
For information or registration: 877.804.4678 or
registrar@ghostranch.org or www.ghostranch.org.

Coming next time: . . . from a seed sown . . . unexpected consequences . . . a first book.

The lead meditation in the February/March ‘07 issue of *Thin Places* was “**Are you home yet?** . . .” by the Rev. Dr. Keith Meyer. Many readers responded to his candid account of the startling wake up call he’d received one afternoon from his eight-year-old son. And then something unexpected happened.

An editor saw it and asked Keith to write a chapter for a forthcoming book. And the meditation became Chapter 5 in *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*.

Then an editor at another publisher read that chapter. And now we have a new book: *Whole Life Transformation: Becoming the Change Your Church Needs*.

Although greatly expanded and enriched, Keith’s message—drawn with poignancy from the pains and joys of his own life—remains the same: “Our true place will be found by becoming *on the inside* people who invite God into *every* aspect of their life.”

More next time.

“The way the dog trots out the front door . . .

**every morning
without a hat or an umbrella,
without any money
or the keys to her dog house
never fails to fill the saucer of my heart
with milky admiration.**

**Who provides a finer example
of a life without encumbrance—
Thoreau in his curtainless hut
with a single plate, a single spoon?
Ghandi with his staff and his holy diapers?**

**Off she goes into the material world
with nothing but her brown coat
and her modest blue collar,
following only her wet nose,
the twin portals of her steady breathing,
followed only by the plume of her tail.**

**If only she did not shove the cat aside
every morning . . .”**

“Dharma,” by Billy Collins,
with thanks to Garrison Keillor

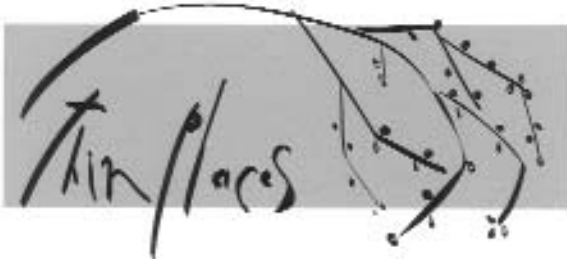


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“Encouraging Angels: a testimony . . .”
“A sower went out . . .”



AFTERWORDS: “A sower went out”

In August of 1940, a young man who had just turned 25 rode his bicycle from Geneva to Taizé, a small village on a hill top in central France with an ancient church but neither market nor stores, just the houses of those who farmed the verdant land all around. Brother Roger went without a grand plan and, certainly, with no even vague sense of what Taizé would become. But he probably went with two core beliefs that he was to share throughout his long life, “Inner Light, you are nothing but love” and “Don’t worry—give yourself.”

That same year, a few weeks later, a young woman who was soon to be 21 began teaching second grade in a small town in central Kansas. She went with a desire to serve but with not a master plan, just living each step as it came, going where she seemed to be led.

Many years later, another pilgrim—perhaps one who was too given to master plans and to being in control—had a first experience with *lectio divina*. The text offered was the familiar Parable of the Sower, and the instructions were to read it through very slowly at least three times listening for a word or phrase that seemed to be lifted up. The words that seemed lifted up were resisted, but they kept coming back. Until that time the parable had probably always been read as being about productivity. “Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

But this time the words heard were those with which the parable begins, “A sower went out . . .”

And these words that day and many times since have given comfort. They seem to remind us that we are not in charge. Our task is not to produce one hundred-fold (or even only sixty- or thirty-fold) but to go out . . . to open ourselves to God’s love . . . to give ourselves . . . to seek each time to do the loving thing and to welcome the loving things offered to us by others. . . .

Lord, thank you for the opportunities open to each of us . . . to give of ourselves and to receive from others.