



*Pray inwardly
even if you do not enjoy it.
It does good,
though you feel nothing.
Yes, even though you think
you are doing nothing.
...Prayer oneth us to God.*

—Julian of Norwich

FIFTH SUNDAY IN EASTER 10 May 2020

Note: *It might be helpful to read the “Going Deeper” section first about how to meditate. Then, following the reflection, you can flow more seamlessly into a time of meditation.*

Invitation to Prayer — Psalm 31

My times are in your hand, O God;
raise me up from my anxieties and hopelessness.
Let your face shine on me;
bring me to life through your steadfast love.

Gathering Prayer

Ground of Being:
you are the primordial Kiss that welcomes us into the world,
the Friend that companions us throughout our lives,
our Dwelling Place now and forevermore.
In you alone do we find rest and peace.

Come in these moments of worship.
Move within and around me
like air, like breath.
Make yourself known
in words and silence,
in the memories that surface,
the suffering we’ve endured together,
the gratitude that swells the heart.
Amen.

Glossary from original Greek that may illuminate your reading

dwelling place/dwell — less a physical reality than a state of being; *oneth* with God as Julian of Norwich says

I go/I come — not an action like “I go to the shop,” but an ontological transition, the journey from one state of being to another; tense used in Gospel reflects an ongoing action

the way — not a literal path or direction but a mode and means

know — literally “to see” but used metaphorically in the Gospel to refer to insight and spiritual understanding as when we say “I see what you mean”

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

"Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

- When have you had the sense recently that God is dwelling with you? As you reflect on the experience now, what were you doing? What do you think enabled you to receive and notice this encounter?
- What does it mean for you right now to live the way of Jesus? What are the challenges? What are the gifts?

Reflections in Solitude

You might choose to read the reflection followed by a time of silent meditation.

Going Deeper

Prayer in its many and varied forms is the most significant way we dwell with God. One form of prayer that focuses completely on union is meditation or centring prayer. Meditation is a kind of wordless prayer, an abiding with the divine beyond thought and sensation. In order to reap the greatest fruits, most recommend meditating twice a day for twenty to thirty minutes. You might want to observe a time of meditation as part of your worship.



“Meditation is a way of simplicity, silence and stillness. It can be practiced by anyone, wherever you are on your life’s journey. It is only necessary to be clear about the practice and then to begin — and to keep on beginning.”

—World Community
for Christian Meditation

“The all-important aim in meditation is to allow God’s mysterious and silent presence within us to become more and more not only a reality, but the reality in our lives; to let it become that reality which gives meaning, shape and purpose to everything we do, to everything we are.”

— John Main, OSB

How to meditate — from the World Community for Christian Meditation

Sit with your back straight and your feet on the floor. Close your eyes lightly.

Then interiorly, silently begin to recite a single word — a prayer word or mantra. We recommend the ancient Christian prayer-word “Maranatha.” Say it as four equal syllables: Ma – ra – na – tha. Breathe normally and give your full attention to the word as you say it, silently, gently, faithfully and — above all — simply.

Let go of all thoughts (even good thoughts), images, sensations and other words as they arise. Don’t fight your distractions: let them go by saying your word faithfully, gently and attentively, returning to it with intention when your attention wanders.

Prayers of Intercession

“Never pray in a room without windows.”

—The Jewish Talmud

Creator of All, we gaze intention on your world and the community in which we live. Through stillness and prayer, we have become aware once again of our great desire for harmony, love, justice, and peace. Please hear us as we pray: *May your loving spirit dwell in us.*

We hold before you our concerns for the pandemic that continues to bring illness and dis-ease around the world. Impart your wisdom and compassion on scientists, doctors and nurses, and leaders of nations. Release us from our fear that we may embody your love and peace.

May your loving spirit dwell in us.

Amidst the mean and demeaning voices that resound, we pray for greater mutuality and care. Give us your vision of health and balance in diversity, of communities where every person matters and belongs, of your Spirit alive and breathing through creation.

May your loving spirit dwell in us.

We hear Jesus say, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” May his way become our way—the slow, steady transformation into Christ-likeness through you at work in our prayer and self-giving love. *May your loving spirit dwell in us.*

Disciples’ Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

Blessing

May the beauty of the divine life fill us,
and the hearts of all who pray, with joyful hope.
May we go forth to dwell in your spirit of love.

The love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ and the communion of the Spirit be with us all.

Reflections in Solitude — Week 7

Rev. Christine Gilbert for St. Andrews by the Sea Uniting Church

A few months ago, I watched a series of recorded talks given by Sarah Bachelard from the 2019 John Main Seminar. Sarah is the founder and leader of the Benedictus Contemplative Church in Canberra. She is a priest in Anglican Orders, an honorary research fellow at the Australian Catholic University and a member of the World Community for Christian Meditation. This impressive blend of formation and experience made her a fitting choice for these talks and I valued her scholastic yet accessible approach.

However, I was taken by surprise to see Sarah choke back tears half-way through her third presentation. The subject matter was theological in nature as she attempted to address her cheekily phrased question: Do we need Jesus? Why can't we just meditate? But mid-way through, she seemed to run into something more personal, below the surface of her well-read, well-constructed lecture.

Sarah spoke about our—and her—inability to let go completely, to give herself wholly over. “I may yearn and yearn to give myself to God without remainder,” she said, “but I cannot get past myself.”



Then Sarah's voice grew quieter, her words came more slowly and it appeared we were traversing on holy ground. She continued:

And it's here, at the point of my very failure, to be truly poor in spirit—which is its own kind of poverty—that something else must happen. Some grace must be given if I am truly to break through. In the Christian vision, what happens at this point is Christ. Christ is the one who comes for me... who leads me out beyond myself... who liberates me for fullest life... Christ is the one who gave himself to be where we are so we might come to be where he is.

Our dependence on Christ does not always sit easily among those of us who are used to being competent and productive, self-sufficient and proactive. In fact, Sarah's words, her emotive response and my recollection of and focus on them may seem peculiar. Why would you want to go there, after all? What is its significance to real life?

Many of us can accept Jesus as a notable historic figure, a wise teacher, someone whose life we may wish to emulate. But to admit our limitations, to recognise *our need for a saviour*, someone to rescue us not just from the perils of the world but most especially from our very selves is hard to reconcile. Thus, the question honestly expressed during the John Main Seminar to a group who would largely identify as Christians, “Do we *need* Jesus?” may be a highly relevant one for us all.

As I listened to Sarah and watched her struggle to say the words written on the page before her, I felt warm tears form in my own eyes. Though I sat alone before the computer screen, I nodded in understanding and encouragement—a kind of gestural “amen”. Sarah's words and her display of deep movements of the heart put me in touch with my own utter dependence on God, on Something More than myself. I, too, have been overcome at times when I realise the profound grace that is with and for me, taking me beyond myself so that I might truly love and live.

One of the more recent experiences was during our final gathered worship before the COVID lockdown as we sang Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan's version of Psalm 121 with the repeated refrain: “You are holding our life...” So much was—and is—uncertain. Our anxieties and fear ran high amidst our helplessness against the threatening virus. But for a time, as we sang and prayed, I felt myself abiding in the love of Christ that still gives me confidence and hope.

Jesus said, "I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also."

In the narrative of the Gospel, we might hear Jesus' words in a linear and literal way. That is, Jesus was here on earth, has ascended to his father in heaven, and will return one day to take us there. But remembering that the Gospel was written in order that we might encounter the Living Christ as we read and re-read it, Jesus' words move into a realm that is beyond space and time.

In other words, *Christ is always coming to us*. At times, we might be startled by a luminous Presence as we move about in a world "charged with the grandeur of God" as Gerard Manley Hopkins put it. More often, we become more attuned to the Sacred that is within and around us when we quieten down and take time to notice.

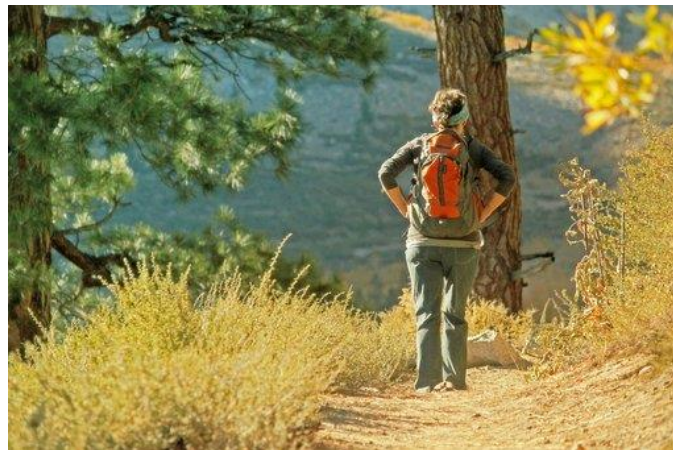
In the non-linear, beyond time and space reality of the Gospel, not only is Christ always coming to us but Christ is always taking us to dwell in God. We enter this dwelling place through the door of prayer and meditation. In the words of John Main:

The essence of Christian prayer is not dialogue but union, oneness. ...the experience of coming into full union with the energy that created the universe ...it is the wellspring that gives each one of us the creative power to be the person we are called to be—a person rooted and founded in love.

To say that the reality we discover in prayer belongs to the Gospel may suggest it is a separate and alternative reality than the one in which we ordinarily live. But this is not the case.

Daring to state things somewhat boldly here: the world shown to us by Christ in the Gospel, the world we encounter in prayer and meditation, is *the world* in which we truly live, move and come to have being.

Friends, in these weeks, many of us have glimpsed in new ways something of this very real world. It is the everlasting life full of compassion, justice, kindness, peace and love. Jesus not only revealed this world by living fully and consistently in it, but he longs to take us there.



Here is a well-known prayer of Michael Leunig's with which many of you will be familiar. I think it is fitting for this time.

Dear God,

We pray for another way of being: another way of knowing.

Across the difficult terrain of our existence we have attempted to build a highway and in so doing have lost our footpath. God lead us to our footpath: lead us there where in simplicity we may move at the speed of natural creatures and feel the earth's love beneath our feet. Lead us there where step-by-step we may feel the movement of creation in our hearts. And lead us there where side-by-side we may feel the embrace of the common soul. Nothing can be loved at speed.

God lead us to the slow path; to the joyous insights of the pilgrim; another way of knowing: another way of being.

Amen.

© *When I Talk to You: a cartoonist talks to God* by Michael Leunig