BAPTIZED FOR LIFE
AN EPISCOPAL DISCIPLESHIP INITIATIVE

Baptismal Resources
With God's Help

INTRODUCTION

Each unfolding moment is an opportunity to live into the promises made at our baptism. Finance meetings, grocery store checkout lines, nursing an infant, digging carrots, and worship– all of these things, when held in the heart against the heartbeat of God, are opportunities for deep engagement with the Spirit. They are opportunities to love our neighbor as ourselves, proclaim the good news of God, uphold the dignity of all creation, and above all, to return again and again to God.

In our baptism we promise to lean into these opportunities when they arise by saying boldly "I will." And, we don't leave it there. We follow each promise with the phrase "with God's help."

What follows are a series of invitations for how to center ourselves and to invite those we are in community with to center themselves on the eternal indwelling presence of God that lives at the heart of every moment. These practices are the life-blood of the Retreat House at Hillsboro, and we use them for framing meetings, retreats, conversations, and even worship. Whatever and whoever you may be walking with, we invite you to hold these practices for a while to see if they resonate with you in the hopes that we all may live more fully into our baptisms in the sharing of this Spirit-centered way of living.

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HOLDING SPACE:
What Does That Look Like?

This language of "holding space" floats about the world a lot these days. What are we talking about… holding space? For what? In order to what? What's the space for?

As persons who desire to live out of our Baptism, holding space is about helping ourselves and others, as stated in the introduction to *"love our neighbor as ourselves, proclaim the good news of God, uphold the dignity of all creation, and above all, to return again and again to God."* Holding space can be about inviting and setting prayerful space; it can be about being prayerfully present for others to connect, to communicate, to wrestle with difficulties, to express emotions. Additionally, holding space can be about being a "non-anxious presence" in the midst of turmoil or of brain-storming creativity or of peaceful restful gathering. Holding space can be about intentionally inviting, over and over, the spirit of God to flow through a room, a relationship, a conversation, a community. **Holding space is an exercise and practice of the heart.**

Different kinds of space are needed in different situations.

- One-to-one with someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one can invite a space of compassionate listening from our deepest heart space, listening, loving and not fixing.
- In a committee meeting if there is a difficult decision to be made, holding space can be about holding the group in your heart, inviting the Spirit's presence to move in the hearts of all in the room.
- In a Sunday worship, holding space can be about returning to your heart and with God, sending forth love over the entire group. In a contentious conversation, holding space can be about being present in a non-anxious way, listening and quietly loving all involved.

While different situations invite different kinds of spaces to be held, there are common threads in all of them.

Holding space is prayer. It is the prayer of your heart in the moment. Often, in our humanity, we drift up into our heads. Holding space becomes a practice of setting an intention for a time of exchange, asking God's help, and then trusting the Spirit that She will walk with you as you go forward. We do what we can to keep our open-for-God-hearts in the foreground, and if/when we drift away, we trust that Spirit holds our intention and carries the space for us. And we return again and again to God. This is prayer.

Holding space is intention. Father Thomas Keating wrote that God honors our intentions. With God, I set an intention for my hope for the people I will be with, perhaps for outcomes of a meeting, or for myself in this experience. From a place of great love for the other, with God I set my intention for the project at hand and how it will impact God's Kingdom for the Good. Then I live into the moment, trying to be as present as I can. I try to hold that intention as I listen for what is mine to do in the unfolding conversation or decision. It is my prayerful intention to be present for God to flow through me for the benefit and love of all those in the circle/meeting.

Holding space is trust. We are human, God knows only too well. And so, part of the practice of holding space is resting deeply in the trust that God's got this one. We go into our "inner room" with God, we rest in God, we set our intention and then we trust. We trust that God knows my longing for the exchange, my hope, and my love. We trust that God knows that I am wanting to walk this journey as a teammate with the Spirit. We trust God loves us in our intention and in our humanity. Then engage and do the best we can, trusting our teammate-God to be present and make up the difference of what I would like to do and be and what I am actually able to do and be. God's got this one. I do what I can to do my part and trust that God is making up the difference for the person(s) I am in relationship within this moment.

Holding space is surrender. When we engage in this way with others and ourselves, we are deeply invited by the Spirit to let go of control of outcomes, to let go of power and/or directing decision-making. We rest in a space with God, believing that with God's help, the people we are with–each of us bringing the unique gifts we have been given by God–are enough to create a vision, an experience, a community that will glorify God in its engagement with the world. Holding space this way invites us to surrender any power and control over a

situation or others and lean in to being present for God to live, speak, be present *through* us. We show up, bringing our best selves as we are able in the moment, and we pay attention.

As you can clearly see, **Holding space is a practice.** Some days are better than others, some moments are better than others. As we choose readings to help a group enter into a prayerful space, some readings are better than others. And as we practice this way of being present with others, we get better at it, whatever that may mean. Perhaps that means our own hearts draw closer to God. Perhaps that means the people we work with notice God in each other more easily. Perhaps that means we just keep practicing.

Holding space is in many ways the ultimate team-game with God. I do my small part of praying, offering love, opening my heart for Spirit to flow through me. I trust my teammate-God to do Her part, as She lives and speaks through Her created ones in the circle, guiding us through Her presence and sometimes in our words.

The Holy Spirit is a fabulous teammate, and God's got this.

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SOME PRACTICES

There is no question that, for the majority of us, living this Spirit-centered way is counter-cultural. This, we feel, is because centering on the Spirit invites us to live grounded in our awakened hearts in contrast with living from our minds. Our culture, prizing the intellect over the heart, focuses on data, surveys, numbers, lists, accomplishments– championing "doing." Living from our hearts focuses on interior stillness, listening, letting go, receiving from the Divine– seeking "being." Both of these ways of living– from the head and from the heart– are part of every moment of our lives. It is the question of noticing the intertwining of the two and allowing the fluidity of the ever-shifting balance to flow in the way that each moment needs– never abandoning the heart for the mind, never abandoning the mind for the heart.

Living each moment grounded in the Spirit is not an end point to be reached, it is a journey to be embraced. It's not a way of being that one day you can "check off the list" of things you have accomplished, it is a lifestyle. We ebb and flow from the depth of our groundedness. Even Jesus regularly "went away to a quiet place to be with his Father," so returning over and over to the heart center is clearly part of walking this embodied journey.

At this time in our culture, it seems that an extra focus on returning to the heart is invited to help us rest in the balance invited in each moment. To help such a shift into becoming a reality for us, (which is a gift from God,) different practices can help return us again and again to that groundedness in Spirit.

The Welcoming Prayer

One such practice is the Welcoming Prayer. This practice rests on the understanding of our human condition as offered by Father Thomas Keating. As humans, we have three "centers for happiness," as Keating names them: **for security and survival, for affection and esteem and for power and control.** As we are able to release our needs for these things– all of which are not bad but which do at times draw us away from the heart of God– we can help ourselves rest with the Spirit in our true selves, grounded in our awakened heart and living from a Spirit-centered space.

Embracing the Welcoming Prayer can be helpful in all sorts of situations: before entering a room; before walking into the post office, especially if there is a long line; as I approach a task in a hurry, just wanting to "check it off the list;" as I lie awake at night unable to sleep for worry about the world, work, family, health. It can be a particularly powerful and helpful practice to engage with in community before the start of any meeting.

The practice invites us to begin with:

– three deep breaths
Followed by:
– bringing our minds into our hearts
Followed by the prayer:
– "Welcome. Welcome.
I let go of my desire for security, affection, and control.
Welcome. Welcome.
I let go of my desire to change the situation."

[Note: The word "welcome" is extended to the situation at hand as well as to the Spirit of God.]

The prayer can be slowly repeated over and over out loud, or after a few repetitions, those gathered can be invited to repeat the prayer in the silence of their hearts. Give time and space for sinking deeply into the letting go.

– End the prayer with gratitude to God for all God has done and will do in Love for those gathered for the meeting..

There are many different versions of the Welcoming Prayer. This is one that works well for groups. Please note that if in a meeting things get off track or get contentious, it can be a helpful prayer to return to for a few moments, allowing time for all to return to that centered place in the heart with God.

Three Deep Breaths

James Finley, when speaking about the mystic Thomas Merton, describes the mystical understanding of God habitually creating us with every breath we breathe. The gift of life, the gift of Spirit, the gift of breath is given over and over and over again, continually creating–and re-creating us– in every moment of our lives. Focusing on the breath, therefore, can be a powerful and gentle way to focus our attention and our hearts on God. We return to God again and again.

This is a wonderful personal practice. **Focus on taking three deep breaths and returning to God before:**
– entering a room
– making a phone call
– starting to write an email or text
– sending an email or text
– beginning the commute to work
– as you end the commute to work
– engaging in a time of liturgical prayer
– taking that first sip of coffee in the morning

– entering a building
– anytime you notice you could return to God

This ia also a wonderful community practice. Inviting those gathered to focus on their breath and in so doing to return to God with three deep breaths helps bring us all into the room together with a heart more open to the Holy Spirit. **And so, you might invite this at the start of:**

– a finance committee meeting
– a vestry meeting
– Bible study
– all committee meetings
– Sunday worship
– Morning prayer, Evening prayer, Vespers, Compline
– Any time you gather with another or others

Taking three deep breaths, with the intention of returning to God, is a practice that is available to you always and can take as long or as short a time as you choose. It is an embodiment of an intention, of a prayer, of a longing to walk closely with God. It is available to all of us at any time.

Beginning meetings with Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina, the practice of listening and praying with scripture, is a beautiful practice for opening to God's leadings through the words of the Bible. It is the repetitive reading of a short passage of scripture, with spaces for silence and prayerful listening in between the readings. In the quiet, we open our hearts to receive God's nudges, guidance and love. In the context of community gatherings, it can be a powerful tool for helping the group stay connected to the guidance of the Spirit through the entire meeting time. In our life at the Retreat House, when we begin with a lectio, we often find that we return to words of the scripture passage throughout the journey of the meeting time. Words, phrases, ideas and invitations that may have come into our awareness in the time of quiet with the scripture reground us as we continue to be with the wonderings and work at hand.

So often we think that we "don't have enough time" for such prayer. We have found it is invaluable to start this way. The flow, the sense of Spirit's Presence, the creativity, the openness to the difficult letting go– all of these things are deepened and enhanced when we let go of our perspective of "scarcity of time" and trust that what we have is enough. There is abundance all around us.

Beginning Meetings with a Reading and Some Silence

Another way to help a community of people "return to God again and again" is to begin any group gathering with a short reading and some silence. Additionally, it can be enriching and helpful in enhancing community to follow the short reading and silence with a few minutes of sharing. Members of the group, if so moved, can share what stirred in them in response to the reading.

Selecting a reading for a meeting is sometimes a daunting thought. So often we wonder, "What is the *right* thing to read?" In our experience, we have found that there is *no one right reading.* Any reading becomes the right reading as the Spirit moves through the words in the hearts of the hearers. In so many ways, when inviting the Spirit in, you can't lose in. You have The. Best. Teammate. for this work.

How To Select a Reading to Facilitate Holding Prayerful Space: Stories of Experience

As scripture tells us, "going away to a quiet place" was deeply important to Jesus. Pausing in the midst of a busy day to return to that quiet interior place is a practice of great value. How do we do that? Three deep breaths. Pause to watch the birds for 30 seconds. Gaze out the window for a moment at a tree and thank God for all the many creatures God has created. Look up and notice the clouds racing or the blue blue sky. Close your eyes, go inside, open your heart to God and ask God to lead you in the next thing.

With so many possible moments of connection and relationship that fill the days of many of us– meetings, Zooms, classes, stepping out of our home spaces and into the world– listening to a short reading or poem from the Wise Ones who surround us and journey with us can be so very helpful. Whether it is to set your heart for the day ahead before you leave the house or to help bring everyone's hearts into the room with a moment of community meditation and/or prayer, a reading from the ones we know as mentors, guides, poets and mystics can be most helpful.

But how to choose such a reading? Books? Bible? Saints? Current authors? Poets? The options are endless. Is there a "right" one for this moment? What if I choose the "wrong" one?

The following are short writings of the experiences of three people at the Retreat House at Hillsboro MD whose lives are deeply grounded in Spirit-centered living and whose days are frequently filled with Zoom gatherings and in-person meetings, both groups and individuals. They select readings to start connections a lot! How do they do it? It's kind of hard to put words around this spiritual practice, but we asked them to give it a try.

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Selecting Resources for Framing a Space

Rachel Field

> For me, the process of lifting up a resource for framing the space is inextricable from my daily processes of prayer and conversation with spiritual teachers. One of my mentors, Carl Russel, would say "what we know does not inform what we don't know." So naturally the words or practices that rise in my heart as I prepare to hold space for a group are tied to what is happening in my spiritual life, my experiences in the world as a white cis-female with a graduate degree and with access to abundant societal privilege.
>
> The gift in this is that I find it easy to walk through a stack of books with my fingers shortly before a meeting and to pick one "at random." Then, usually, I can flip through pages and land on a short passage that feels rich, complex, and inviting. Generally, and surprisingly, that process often uncovers a theme or image that is in sync with themes or images that the group I am preparing for is familiar with. The drawback in my background and particularity is that I have a hard time bringing my body into the process. Because dominant culture prioritizes intellect over the body, I have found myself on a journey of re-membering how to lean into my body as a full co-creative participant in framing a space.
>
> Because of this, and as a way of expanding my own spiritual journey, I am more likely to start a gathering by opening a space with a practice that is centered around the body rather than around words. This could be a simple shared breathing exercise, gentle guided movement, or even a "natura divina" reflection.

A breathing exercise can be as simple as asking those gathered to take three deep breaths together, and then to sit in silence for a few minutes. Folding in gentle movement can involve breathing and letting the gaze float from left to right, looking forward and turning gently to look behind. This brings the awareness of God in all things into the senses.

The natura divina reflection process incorporates a physical object and engages our senses in relationship with how the Divine is revealed through materiality. This type of prayer comes to us from our ancestors with the name "kataphatic prayer." It involves opening our senses and overwhelming our being with the presence of the Divine in the world. This is a companion to "apophatic prayer" which involves a letting go of the senses and an emptying of self to meet the Divine in the way that they transcend the material world. Opening with natura divina requires a little more preparation. You can either invite participants to bring something from nature that speaks to them, or you can have a basket of offerings for them to choose from. Then invite them to gaze at the object with their eyes, feel the object with their hands, notice any smell, engaging as many senses as possible.

Whichever way you choose to begin, there is power in remembering this truth of the incarnation: that God took on human flesh, and in so doing sanctified all of creation.

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Choosing a Reading

Heather Strang

When I begin the process of choosing a contemplative reading, I start by taking time to ground myself prayerfully, to invite relaxation in my body, to clear my mind by putting distractions down, and to open my heart. Breathing slowly, I often bring to mind the people who will seek a quiet space as a clearing for centering themselves. I can focus my heart on loving this community of people, of which I am a part, as if we were connected in the same room where we might allow a few words to pour over us. It seems the entire process is a quiet prayer that takes me from head to heart and into a trusting flow that is not forced. As I hold that prayerful stance, I try to notice when pressure to choose the "right" reading arises and to release any fear. I return to my heart, reminding myself that the reading will nourish my heart, and that if it nourishes me, it will nourish others. With a curiosity for and confidence in that, I release myself once again, this time from the notion of choosing altogether. I await what I will receive with excitement. Inviting the Spirit into this process of choosing becomes an act of receiving.

This receptive stance, reminds me of the Prayer of Julian of Norwich, a body prayer that goes like this, with thanks for Richard Rohr's description:

AWAIT: Await God's presence, not as you expect, hope, or imagine, but just as it is in this moment.

ALLOW: Allow a sense of God's presence (or not) to come and be what it is, without meeting your expectations.

ACCEPT: Accept as a gift whatever comes or does not come. Accept that you are not in charge. Accept the infinity of God's presence, present whether or not you are aware.

ATTEND: Attend to what you are called to—actions that God invites you to from this stance of openness.

Then I simply look at the bookshelf or stack of readings and choose one that seems to draw me in. If my heart feels nourished by the reading, I go with it. And the prayer continues as it is read by others.

Choosing a Reading

Francie Thayer

When it is my turn to select a reading to begin a gathering, I smile and take a deep breath. Depending on how much I have been sleeping recently, I am either a) intimidated and worried if I'll "get it right" (tired) or b) delighted to get to spend time with God as God shows me what is invited for the group (rested.)

Either way, I start with deep breaths and centering myself in my spiritual heart. I ask God to show me what is invited. I also ask God to help me let go of my sense of "performance anxiety." I rest with God remembering it's both of us together, not just me.

I then turn my prayerful attention, with God, toward who will be in the group. I think about the people, wonder with God where they are in their hearts today, and say a little prayer for them. This process often directs me to particular books or authors. I go to my bookshelf or the author's webpage. I turn pages, read favorites, read new things, wait. And it usually comes clear. If it doesn't, I take a deep breath, ask God to make up the difference, and choose something.

If I don't know the people with whom I will be meeting, I ask God to hold them and to bring them what God knows they are needing in this particular day. I have no idea but God does, and I offer gratitude for that. I then turn to my bookshelf and see what catches my eye.

Note: what I am studying, reading, praying with, is sometimes in the mix of where my attention flows as I select a reading. This I think is part of it. It invites me to trust myself even as I am trusting God. I trust God to lead me elsewhere if that is what is needed for this particular meeting.

Each day there are meditations and poems and prayers that flow through my emails. I often stay alert as I visit these offerings for readings that may be helpful later in the week with groups with whom I will gather. There are certain social media posts that have brought wonderful readings as well, though for me that is less often as I don't spend tons of time there.

The bottom line in choosing a reading? Trust God to lead you. Trust yourself that the unique child of God that you are is part of how God moves through readings offered. Trust that you are doing your best and that God is walking with you. You are enough and God delights in loving Her precious children through you.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and SELECTED READINGS

Below you will find a compilation of works that we at the Retreat House have found helpful over the years in setting the table, as it were, for gatherings of all kinds. These readings are intended to ground, inspire, delight, and unleash your creativity and imagination – the place where God comes alive in you. All of the works are listed at the opening of this resource, and then following the index are excerpts from each work that we have found particularly helpful.

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Wendell Berry

"The Peace of Wild Things" – *The Peace of Wild Things: And Other Poems*

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night to the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water,
and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water,
and I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Steven Charleston

"A Few Good Surprises" – *Ladder to the Light: An Indigenous Elder's Meditations on Hope and Courage*

> Release the unexpected, Spirit, and catch us all off guard with what we pray to see. Do an intervention on us. Shake us free from our fear and dread. Help history take a sudden turn we never would have expected. A change for the better. A sign of hope. We are doing all we can, Spirit, but we could use a few good surprises. Step into time and space, even for only a heartbeat, and let us stand in awe of your great love. Amen

"The Ground of Love"

Ladder to the Light: An Indigenous Elder's Meditations on Hope and Courage

> My sorrows are like seeds, pressed deep into the dark earth of my soul. I do not deny them. I do not forget them. But nor do I let them remain unchanged. Over time, I let their pain turn into wisdom, their grief into mercy, their anger into forgiveness. Hidden within me, I let the hurt they once carried become the compassion I now carry, compassion for all who have known what I have known, felt what I have felt, wept as I have wept. The ground of love transforms the seeds of sorrow into new life, new hope, new beginnings, through the mystery of soul-deep healing. I do not leave my faith fallow, but I use my brokenness like a garden until it turns loss to gain and tears to songs of joy.

Lucille Clifton

"Blessing the Boats" – *Blessing the Boats*

may the tide
that is entering even now
the lip of our understanding
carry you out
beyond the face of fear

may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will
love your back may you
open your eyes to water
water waving forever
and may you in your innocence
sail through this to that

Verna Dozier

The Dream of God

I believe Christianity has journeyed far from what Jesus of Nazareth was about.

Of course, I'm not the first to think that, but my thesis is drawn from what I believe the biblical message to be: God calls a people to be the new thing in the world—the people of God. The new dispensation, the "people of the Way," as the first Christians were called, has missed its high calling even as did the first dispensation, the people of the Torah. The proof of that argument rests with what the church, the institution, has done to the ministry of the laity. The people of the Torah made the gracious gift of the law into a system. The people of the resurrection made the incomprehensible gift of grace into a structure.

The urgent task for us today is to reclaim our identity as the people of God and live into our high calling as the baptized community. We are a chosen people, chosen. For God's high purposes, that the dream of God for a new creation may be realized. God has paid us the high compliment of calling us to be coworkers with our Creator, a compliment so awesome that we have fled from it and taken refuge in the church. God does not need such an institution. "Destroy this temple," Jesus said, "and I will rebuild it in three days."

The institution is replaceable. The living body of God's people is not.
Like Esau, we have surrendered our birthright.

The institution is the servant of the people, but it has presumed to become the master.

Danna Faulds

"The Open Door" – *Limitless*

The door opens. Maybe I've
been standing here shuffling
my weight from foot to foot
for decades, or maybe I only
knocked once. In truth, it
doesn't matter. A door opens
and I walk through without a
backward glance. This is it,
then, the moment of truth in
a lifetime of truth: a choice

made, a path taken, the
gravitational pull of Spirit
too compelling to ignore any
longer. I am received by
something far too vast to see.
It has roots in antiquity but
speaks clearly in the present
tense. “Be” the vastness whispers.
“Be without adverbs, descriptors,
or qualities. Be so alive that
awareness bares itself
uncloaked and unadorned.
Then go forth to give what you
alone can give, awake to love
and suffering, unburdened by
the weight of expectations.
Go forth to see and be seen,
blossoming, always blossoming
into your magnificence.”

“Walk Slowly”

It only takes a reminder to breathe,
a moment to be still,
and just like that,
something in me settles,
softens,
makes space for imperfection.
The harsh voice of judgment drops to a whisper
and I remember again
that life isn't a relay race;
that we will all cross the finish line;
that waking up to life
is what we were born for.
As many times as I forget,
catch myself charging forward
without even knowing where I'm going,
that many times I can make the choice
to stop,
to breathe,
and be,
and walk slowly
into the mystery.

Kathleen Fischer

Loving Creation

"Near the New Jerusalem flows a river of life. Trees on the river's bank thrive, boasting leaves that promise reconciliation and healing for the nations. Here people are not lifted from the Earth in rapture, as they are in some apocalyptic thinking; rather, God comes down from heaven and makes a home on Earth, pitching a tent among us: "See the dwelling of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them as their God; they will be his people, and God's very self will be with them…" (Revelation 21:3) In this holy city, God's presence transforms space into a new creation."

Norman Fischer

"Psalm 8" – *Opening to You: Zen Inspired Translations of the Psalms*

Your Unsayable Name: it covers all the earth
And your presence extends ever outward
From the furthest conceivable point
Out of the mouths of babes
Who speak only wordless wandering words
You fashion your incomprehensible power
That gathers into the silence all opposition
All that pressure to get in and destroy
When I behold the night sky, the work of your fingers
The bright moon and the many-layered stars which you
have established
I think:
A woman is so frail and you remember her
A man is so small and you think of him
And yet
In you woman and man become as angels
Crowned with a luminous presence
And you have given them care for the works of your hands
Placed the solid growing earth under their feet
Flocks of birds and herds of deer
Oxen and sheep and goats and cows
Soaring birds and darting fishes
All that swims the paths of the sea
O you whom I am ever addressing
Your unsayable name covers heaven and earth

"Psalm 132" – *Opening to You: Zen Inspired Translations of the Psalms*

How good
How pleasant
When we abide intimate together
Like warm oil on the head
Trickling down the cheek

Aaron's cheek
And trickling down the neck into the collar
Like the dew of Mount Hermon
The dew that runs down the mountains of Zion
Where you called forth the blessing
For life, life always

Kahlil Gibran

"Of Marriage" – *The Prophet*

Then Almitra spoke again and said, And what of Marriage, master?
And he answered saying:
You were born together, and together you shall be forevermore.
You shall be together when the white wings of death scatter your days.
Ay, you shall be together even in the silent memory of God.
But let there be spaces in your togetherness,
And let the winds of the heavens dance between you.

Love one another, but make not a bond of love:
Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.
Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup.
Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf.
Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone,
Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.

Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping.
For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts.
And stand together yet not too near together:
For the pillars of the temple stand apart,
And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.

Ursula Goodenough

The Sacred Depths of Nature

"No question, our capacity to experience awareness is in some ways distinctive, ways that we will consider later in the chapter. But no question also, these capacities are deeply homologous to the awareness inherent in all of life, and absent from nonlife. Indeed, the Earth can be wonderfully thought of as a planet shimmering with awareness. Perhaps there are other planets that so shimmer, or perhaps this is the only one. In any case, awareness is integral to life, and integral as well to our religious lives."

"As a religious naturalist I say "What Is, Is" with the same bowing of the head, the same bending of the knee. Which then allows me to say "Blessed Be to What Is" with thanksgiving. To give assent is to understand, incorporate, and then let go. With the letting go comes that deep sigh we call relief, and relief allows the joy-of-being-alive-at-all to come tumbling forth again. Assent is a dignified word. Once it is freely given, one can move fluidly with it."

Amanda Gorman

"& So" – *Call Us What We Carry*

It is easy to harp.
Harder to hope.

This truth, like the white-blown sky,
Can only be felt in its entirety or not at all.
The glorious was not made to be piecemeal.
Despite being drenched with dread,
This dark girl still dreams.
We smile like a sun that is never shunted.

Grief, when it goes, does so softly,
Like the exit of that breath
We just realized we clutched.

Since the world is round,
There is no way to walk away
From each other, for even then,
We are coming back together.

Some distances, if allowed to grow,
Are merely the greatest proximities.

Hafiz

"Now is the Time" – *The Collected Poems of Hafiz*

Now is the time to know
that all that you do is sacred.

Now, why not consider
a lasting truce with yourself and God.

Now is the time to understand
that all our ideas of right and wrong
were just a child's training wheels
to be laid aside
when you can finally live
with veracity
and love.

My dear, please tell me,
why do you still
throw sticks at your heart
and God?

What is it in that sweet voice inside
that incites you to fear?

Now is the time for the world to know
that every thought and action is sacred.

This is the time
for you to deeply compute the impossibility
that there is anything
but Grace.

Now is the season to know
that everything you do
is sacred.

"The Seed Cracked Open" – *The Collected Poems of Hafiz*

It used to be
that when I would wake in the morning
I could with confidence say,
"What am 'I' going to do?"

That was before the seed
cracked open.

Now I am certain:

there are two of us housed
in this body,

doing the shopping together in the market and
tickling each other
while fixing the evening food.

Now when I awake
all the internal instruments play the same music.

"God, what love-mischief can 'We' do
for the world today?"

Joy Harjo

"Eagle Poem" – *In Mad Love and War*

To pray you open your whole self
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon
To one whole voice that is you.
And know there is more

That you can't see, can't hear;
Can't know except in moments
Steadily growing, and in languages
That aren't always sound but other
Circles of motion.
Like eagle that Sunday morning
Over Salt River. Circled in blue sky
In wind, swept our hearts clean
With sacred wings.
We see you, see ourselves and know
That we must take the utmost care
And kindness in all things.
Breathe in, knowing we are made of
All this, and breathe, knowing
We are truly blessed because we
Were born, and die soon within a
True circle of motion,
Like eagle rounding out the morning
Inside us.
We pray that it will be done
In beauty.
In beauty.

"Praise the Rain" – *In Mad Love and War*

Praise the rain; the seagull dive
The curl of plant, the raven talk—
Praise the hurt, the house slack
The stand of trees, the dignity—
Praise the dark, the moon cradle
The sky fall, the bear sleep—
Praise the mist, the warrior name
The earth eclipse, the fired leap—
Praise the backwards, upward sky
The baby cry, the spirit food—
Praise canoe, the fish rush
The hole for frog, the upside-down—
Praise the day, the cloud cup
The mind flat, forget it all—

Praise crazy. Praise sad.
Praise the path on which we're led.
Praise the roads on earth and water.
Praise the eater and the eaten.
Praise beginnings; praise the end.
Praise the song and praise the singer.

Praise the rain; it brings more rain.

Praise the rain; it brings more rain.

Chelan Harkin

"Prayer Flags" – *Susceptible to Light*

The work is finally moving
out of your parents' house
to God's house.

Pack up all the baggage,
the loads of dirty laundry
you collected there

and have dragged around
your entire life
gripping tightly to your past
like a doctrine
and finally take it all over
to unload at God's place.

The Beloved will unpack it all with you,
shake it out,
and you'll both have a good laugh.
"Where did you get this strange number?"

Then God will clean them off
and hang them to dry
on a like in the sun—
making them all prayer flags.

"The Worst Thing" – *Susceptible to Light*

The worst thing we ever did
was put God in the sky
out of reach,

pulling the divinity
from the leaf,
sifting out the holy from our bones,
insisting God isn't bursting dazzlement through everything
we've made
a hard commitment to see as ordinary,
stripping the sacred from everywhere
to put in a cloud-man elsewhere,
prying closeness from your heart.

The worst thing we ever did

was take the dance and the song
out of prayer,
made to sit up straight
And cross its legs,
removed it of rejoicing,
wiped clean its hip sway,
its questions,
its ecstatic yowl,
its tears.

The worst thing we ever did is pretend God isn't the easiest thing
in the universe,
available to every soul
in every breath.

"Crushed Into Wine" – *Let Us Dance*

To the God
who does not make
all of us famous,

to She who is not
an enabler
of the great dreams of the grapes
that instead they may be crushed
into wine.

To She who does not want to grant
the coal
deliverance from its suffering
just yet,
for somehow She sees within it
the makings
of unimaginable diamonds.

To She who does not respond
to the caterpillar's prayers
to be all that it can be
and instead makes it devour itself
to bring forth the latent wings
it never would have known.

To She who impoverishes
every illusion
we thought was so precious.

To She who is so happy to dash
any fantasy we've had of ourselves,

to prove our inner riches and nobility
more magnificent and abundant
than anything the external
could ever have crowned us with.

To She who steals
every smallness
I hang my name on—

thank You,
from who I will become.

Drew E. Jackson

"God Speaks Through Wombs" – *God Speaks Through Wombs*

Luke 1:5-25

In the days of empires
and puppet regimes,
God speaks.

Through wombs,
wrested and discarded
because they were unviable.
This is what they do:
the Romes,
the Babylons,
the USAs,
the men—
toss to the side, as detritus,
what they've deemed unfit
to be utilized.

But God speaks through wombs,
birthing prophetic utterances.
The object of public scorn
given the power to name
the happenings of the Lord.
Elizabeth is her name.
Say her name.
It is she who will be
the one through whom
the covenant is kept.

She, like a priestess, speaks her word
while the leading male voices
Are shut. Enough

of this unbelieving religion
that masquerades as faith.
Divine favor is placed
on what we have disgraced.

"The Anointing" – *God Speaks Through Wombs*

Luke 4:18

There are times when that something comes over you. You know those times. Pay attention. Let it fill you to overflowing. Allow it to move our pen to write. Open your mouth to say those words, at which you tremble. Pick up that brush to paint. Or sweep. But whatever that something moves you to do, let the Spirit take you.

To shake the foundations and make new worlds.
To break open new paradigms and design an unforeseen story.
To love. It will always move you to love.

When it comes it will drip slowly. Like oil. Running down the crown of your head, leaving little droplets of sweet-smelling perfume in the dust around you. Don't wipe your brow. Let it fall. The place on which you stand is holy ground.

Sometimes that genius will find you in the midnight hour. Other times it will overtake you at the high point of the day when all eyes are on you. No matter. The time will always be right. I have learned not to be surprised that I've been chosen. We have all been chosen for love. The anointing was given at creation's dawn. The oil always drips. Waiting for you, and for me, to stand under its flow.

Ann Johnson

"Magnificat of Waiting for the Fullness of Time" – *Miryam of Nazareth*

My soul reflects quietly on your fullness,
and my spirit grows stronger in the hope of your promise,
God my redeemer, because you have filled me with the knowing
that you are alive within me.

Yes, day by day through the course of time
my awareness of the call to blessed fulfillment increases
for you have done great things in me.

Holy is this time,
And patience is your gift
to all who nurture the seed of your love.

You have changed my life;
I was so confident in my unknowing.

You have deflected my fervent thrust toward iron-clad goals
and spread before me your vision of fragile simplicity.

My longing to be a healing and reconciling person to your people
is affirmed within the daily comings and goings of my life;
my illusions of my own wholeness are mercifully revealed.

You are here now in this seeming emptiness of waiting,
remembering your intent,
…according to the promise made in the beginning of time…
remembering our intent to reach through the work of my life
that your fullness may be known now, in our time.

"Epilogue: In Gratitude" – *Miryam of Nazareth*

Miryam, my kinswoman,
I have called your name
and you have answered me.
Across time and space we
have journeyed
groping through the mist of
legend and fantasy
squinting between the cracks in
the dogma-stone
sensing delicately the palpitations
your life
beneath blue plaster mantles
and benign stare-fixed smiles.

Woman of witness,
Woman of prayer.
Woman named the Hebrew name Rebellion.
Share yourself with me, with us,
this day, this time, forever.

Share yourself with those of us who seek companionship on
this salvific journey of self-knowledge and renewal,
remembering you are a woman by whose hand we were saved,
…according to the book of truth and promise,
the gospel words we read from day to day…
remembering you are a woman buy whose hand we
were saved,
walk with us, our enabling sister,
through the confounding mazes of our time.

We in this moment are the saving hands
joined across the ages of travel in the fertile wilderness,
a people with dusty feet and hearts that listen to hidden words,

dancing together around a tent pitched in our midst
in which resides the Shatterer of War and Death.
We are the desert people of winding and colorful design,
weaving and woven
in the mandala center which is God
which is our Source and our Shalom.

Trebbe Johnson
Radical Joy for Hard Times

"Becoming willing to gaze at the broken forest, we discovered that what we had feared would be too painful to bear was not. The first sight had packed a powerful punch, but as the reality of the place seeped into our consciousness, we were able to settle down into what it offered. The forest's past blended with the details of its present existence. And we say that is did exist. Existence had not ended with clear-cutting. What was before us in all its waste and clutter and decay was a forest – not a pretty one, but touching in many unexpected ways."

Daniel Landinsky
Love Songs From God: 12 Sacred Voices from the East & West

St. Teresa of Avila
"I Will Just Say This"

We
bloomed in Spring.

Our bodies
are the leaves of God.

The apparent seasons of life and death
our eyes can suffer;

but our souls, dear, I will just say this forthright:
they are God
Himself,

we will never perish
unless He
does.

St. John of the Cross – *"My Soul Is A Candle"*

My soul is a candle that burned away the veil;
Only the glorious duties of light I now have.

The sufferings I knew initiated me into God.
I am a holy confessor for men.

When I see their tears running across their cheeks
and falling into
His hands,

What can I say to their great sorrow
that I too have
known.

The soul is a candle that will burn away the darkness,
only the glorious duties of love we will have.

The sufferings I knew initiated me into God.
Only His glorious cares
I now have.

St. John of the Cross – *"Peace"*

Quiet yourself.
Reach out with your mind's skillful hand.
Let it go inside of me
and touch God.

Don't
be shy, dear.
Every aspect of Light we are meant
to know.

The calm hand holds more
than baskets of goods
from the market.

The calm soul knows more
than anything this world
can offer from her
beautiful
womb.

Denise Lavertov
"The Avowal"

As swimmers dare

to lie face to the sky
and water bears them,
as hawks rest upon air
and air sustains them,
so would I learn to attain
freefall, and float
into Creator Spirit's deep embrace
knowing no effort earns
that all-surrounding grace.

"Beginners"

But we have only begun
to love the earth.
We have only begun
to imagine the fullness of life.
How could we tire of hope?
—so much is in bud.
How can desire fail?
—we have only begun
to imagine justice and mercy,
only begun to envision
how it might be
to live as siblings with beast and flower,
not as oppressors.
Surely our river
cannot already be hastening
into the sea of nonbeing?
Surely it cannot
drag, in the silt,
all that is innocent?
Not yet, not yet—
there is too much broken
that must be mended,
too much hurt we have done to each other
that cannot yet be forgiven.
We have only begun to know
the power that is in us if we would join
our solitudes in the communion of struggle.
So much is unfolding that must
complete its gesture,
so much is in bud.

"The Garden Wall"

Bricks of the wall,
so much older than the house -
taken I think from a farm pulled down

when the street was built -
narrow bricks of another century.

Modestly, though laid with panels and parapets,
a wall behind the flowers -
roses and hollyhocks, the silver
pods of lupine, sweet-tasting
phlox, gray
lavender -
unnoticed -
but I discovered
the colors in the wall that woke
when spray from the hose
played on its pocks and warts -

a hazy red, a
grain gold, a mauve
of small shadows, sprung
from the quiet dry brown -
archetype
of the world always a step
beyond the world, that can't
be looked for, only
as the eye wanders,
Found.

Nan Merrill

Excerpts from: *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness*

Psalm 9

Give thanks to the Beloved
with your whole heart
tell the story of Love's way;
Be glad and dance with joy;
Sing praises to the Name above all names,
as illusions are dispelled,
as they fade away before Love's face.
For you, O Beloved, are ever-present,
ready to be known in open hearts.

Psalm 60

O Beloved, why do I believe that
I can separate myself
from You, feeling like
an alien in a foreign land?

O, that I might return to
The Light!

Psalm 90

Awaken us, O Holy One! Too long
Have we been asleep!
Have mercy on your people!
Help us to wait in Silence listening
For your gentle Voice;
Strengthen us with courage to
face the fears within.

Psalm 107

We give thanks to you,
who are the Source of Love;
whose Light shines forth
throughout the universe!
Come, awaken our hearts that
we might do your Work;
For, without You, we can do nothing;
'tis your Love that loves
through us.

Psalm 132

Enter into the Silence, into the
Heart of Truth;
For herein lies the Great Mystery
where life is ever unfolding;
Herein the Divine Plan is made known,
the Plan all are invited to serve.
Listen for the Music of the Spheres
in the resounding Silence of
the universe.
May balance and harmony be your aim
as you are drawn into the
Heart of Love.

Those who follow the way of Love
with calm and faith-filled
intent,
Know that all is working toward
healing and wholeness.
And may the healing power of Love
lift you from the limitations
of fear and ignorance
into the arms of freedom.
May the peace of the Spirit bless
you, and

lead you on life's journey.
Be not afraid of the Silence, for
Wisdom's Voice is heard there!

As you follow the Light, you become
gentle and kind,
you come to life in the Light
and see through Love's eyes.
Children enter the world radiating
the Spirit –
learn from them of innocence
and simplicity;
Learn to co-operate with the
unseen realms,
to see beyond the veil.

Thomas Merton

"Prayer of Thomas Merton" – *Thoughts in Solitude*

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain
where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that
I think I am following your will
does not mean
that I am actually doing so.
But I believe
that the desire to please you
does actually please you,
and I hope I have that desire
in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything
apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this,
you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore, I will trust you always.
Though I may seem to be lost
in the shadow of death,
I will not fear,
for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me
to face my perils
Alone. *Amen*

"Immense Joy" – *Thoughts in Solitude*

I have the immense joy
of being a [human being],
a member of a race
in which God became incarnate.
As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition
could overwhelm me,
now I realize what we all are.
And if only everybody could realize this!
But it cannot be explained.
There is no way of telling people
that they are all walking around
shining like the sun.

Mark Nepo

"The More I Wake into this Life" – *The Book of Awakening*

The more I wake into this life,
the more I realize that God is everywhere,
and the extraordinary is waiting quietly
beneath the skin of all that is ordinary.

Light is in both the broken bottle and the diamond,
and music is in both the flowing violin and the water dripping from the
drainage pipe.
Yes, God is under the porch as well as on top of the mountain,
and joy is in both the front row and the bleachers,

if we are willing to be where we are.

"When the Path is Blocked" – *The Book of Awakening*

We are each a mountain for the other to climb, and often our path to love is interrupted by a mishap or a problem or something unexpected that needs attending. We tend to call these unexpected things in life "obstacles."

Often the thing in the way comes from another person: a stubbornness falls like a tree blocking where we want to go, or a sadness comes like a flash flood to muddy the road between us, or just as we go to rest in the clearing we have prepared, we are bitten by something hiding in the undergrowth. Thus, in daily ways, we have this constant choice: to see each other as the stubborn, muddy biting thing that blocks our way, or to back up and take in the whole person as we would a mountain in its entirety, dizzy when looking up into its majesty.

When we are blocked in our closeness with another, we have this constant opportunity: to raise our eyes and behold each other completely, then to kneel and lift the fallen tree, or cross the flooded path, or pluck and toss the biting thing. We have the chance to keep climbing, so we might cup the water that runs from

each other, so we might quench our thirst as from a mountain stream, knowing that love like water comes softly through the hardest places.

Diane Neu, editor

Return Blessings

This is a collection of prayers, call and response rituals, retreats, and songs. One such example is from the "Welcome Spring Renewal" section and is a poem by Dolores La Chapelle

Let us pray:
We give-away our thanks to the earth
Which gives us our home.
We give away our thanks to the rivers and lakes
Which give away their water.
We give away our thanks to the trees
Which give-away fruit and nuts.
We give away our thanks to the wind
Which brings rain to water the plants.
We give-away our thanks tot he sun
Who gives-away warmth and light.
All beings on earth: the trees, the animals, the wind,
And the rivers
Give-away to one another so all is in balance.
We give-away our promise to begin to learn
How to stay in balance with all the earth.

John Philip Newell

"Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession" – *Celtic Benediction*

For your Spirit woven into the fabric of creation
for the eternal overlapping with time
and the life of earth interlaced with heaven's vitality
I give you thanks, O God.
For your untamed creativity
your boundless mystery
and your passionate yearnings
planted deep in the soul of every human being
I give you thanks.
Grant me the grace to reclaim these depths
to uncover this treasure
to liberate these longings
and in being set free in my own spirit
to act for the well-being of the world. Amen.

"Closing Prayer" – *Celtic Benediction*

O Brother Jesus
who wept at the death of a friend
and overturned tables in anger at wrong
let me not be frightened by the depths of passion.
Rather let me learn the love and anger
and wild expanses of soul within me
that are true expressions of your grace and wisdom.
And assure me again that in becoming more like you
I come closer to my true self
made in the image of outpouring Love
born of the free eternal Win. Amen

"Prayer of Awareness, Sunday Morning" – *Praying with the Earth: Prayers for Peace*

"Light within all light
Soul behind all souls
At the breaking of dawn
At the coming of day
We wait and watch.
Your light within the morning light
Your soul within the human soul
Your presence beckoning to us from the heart of life.
In the dawning of this day
Let us know fresh shinings in our soul.
In the growing colors of new beginnings all around us
Let us know the first lights of our heart.
Great Star of the morning
Inner Flame of the universe
Let us be a colour in this new dawning."

An excerpt from *Sounds of the Eternal*

"The strength of the rising sun,
The strength of the swelling sea,
The strength of the high mountains,
The strength of the fertile plains,
The strength of the everlasting river
Flowing in us and through us this day,
The strength of the river of God
Flowing in and through us this day."
~Closing Prayer, Tuesday Morning

An excerpt from *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*

The human soul is hungry for beauty; we seek it everywhere—in landscape, music, art, clothes, furniture, gardening, companionship, love, religion and in ourselves. No-one would desire not to be beautiful. When we experience the Beautiful, there is a sense of homecoming. Some of our most wonderful memories are of beautiful places where we felt immediately at home. We feel most alive in the presence of the Beautiful for it meets the needs of our soul. For a while the strains of struggle and endurance are relieved and our frailty is illuminated by a different light in which we come to glimpse behind the shudder of appearances the sure form of things. In the experience of beauty we awaken and surrender in the same act. Beauty brings a sense of completion and sureness. Without any of the usual calculation, we can slip into the beautiful with the same ease as we slip into the seamless embrace of water; something ancient within us already trusts that this embrace will hold us.

Naomi Shihab Nye

"Gate A - 4" – *Honey Bee*

Wandering around the Albuquerque Airport Terminal, after learning my flight had been delayed four hours, I heard an announcement: "If anyone in the vicinity of Gate A-4 understand any Arabic, please come to the gate immediately."

Well, one pauses these days. Gate A-4 was my own gate, I went there. An older woman in full traditional Palestinian embroidered dress, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing. "Help," said the flight agent. "Talk to her. What is her problem? We told her the flight was going to be late and she did this."

O stooped to out my arm around the woman and spoke haltingly. "Shu-dow-a, Shu-did-uck Habibti? Stani schway, Min fadlick, Shu-bit-se-wee?" The minute he heard any words she knew, however poorly used, she stopped crying. She thought the flight had been canceled entirely. She needed to be in El Paso for major medical treatment the next day. I said, "No, we're fine, you'll get there, just later, who is picking you up? Let's call him."

We called her son, I spoke with him in English. I told him I would stay with his mother till we got on the plane and ride next to her. She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it. Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and found out of course they had ten shared friends. Then I thought just for the heck of it why not call some Palestinian poets I know and let them chat with her? This all took up two hours. She was laughing a lot by then. Telling of her life, patting my knee, answering questions. She had pulled a sack of homemade *mamool* cookies– little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts– from her bag– and was offering them to all the women at the gate. To my amazement, not a single woman declined one. It was like a sacrament. The traveler from Argentina, the mom form California, the lovely woman from Laredo– we were all covered with the same powdered sugar. And smiling. There is not better cookie.

And then the airline broke out free apple juice from huge coolers and two little girls from our flight ran around serving it and they were covered with powdered sugar, too. And I noticed my new best friend–by now we were holding hands– had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing, with green furry leaves. Such an old country tradition. Always carry a plant. Always sty rooted to somewhere. And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and I thought, This is the world I want to live in. The shared

world. Not a single person in that gate– once the crying of confusion stopped– seemed apprehensive about any other person. They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women, too.

This can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost.

"Different Ways to Pray"– *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems*

There was the method of kneeling,
a fine method, if you lived in a country
where stones were smooth.
The women dreamed wistfully of bleached courtyards,
hidden corners where knee fit rock.
Their prayers were weathered rib bones,
small calcium words uttered in sequence,
as if this shedding of syllables could somehow
fuse them to the sky.

There were the men who had been shepherds so long
they walked like sheep.
Under the olive trees, they raised their arms—
Hear us! We have pain on earth!
We have so much pain there is no place to store it!
But the olives bobbed peacefully
in fragrant buckets of vinegar and thyme.
At night the men ate heartily, flat bread and white cheese,
and were happy in spite of the pain,
because there was also happiness.

Some prized the pilgrimage,
wrapping themselves in new white linen
to ride buses across miles of vacant sand.
When they arrived at Mecca
they would circle the holy places,
on foot, many times,
they would bend to kiss the earth
and return, their lean faces housing mystery.

While for certain cousins and grandmothers
the pilgrimage occurred daily,
lugging water from the spring
or balancing the baskets of grapes.
These were the ones present at births,
humming quietly to perspiring mothers.
The ones stitching intricate needlework into children's dresses,
forgetting how easily children soil clothes.

There were those who didn't care about praying.

The young ones. The ones who had been to America.
They told the old ones, you are wasting your time.
    Time?—The old ones prayed for the young ones.
They prayed for Allah to mend their brains,
for the twig, the round moon,
to speak suddenly in a commanding tone.

And occasionally there would be one
who did none of this,
the old man Fowzi, for example, Fowzi the fool,
who beat everyone at dominoes,
insisted he spoke with God as he spoke with goats,
and was famous for his laugh.

John O'Donohue

"For a New Beginning" – *To Bless the Space Between Us*

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,
Where your thoughts never think to wander,
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire,
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,
Wondered would you always live like this.

Then the delight, when your courage kindled,
And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,
A path of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

"For Presence" – *To Bless the Space Between Us*

Awaken to the mystery of being here
And enter the quiet immensity of your own presence.

Have joy and peace in the temple of your senses.

Receive encouragement when new frontiers beckon.

Respond to the call of your gift and the courage to follow its path.

Let the flame of anger free you of all falsity.

May warmth of heart keep your presence aflame.

May anxiety never linger about you.

May your outer dignity mirror an inner dignity of soul.

Take time to celebrate the quiet miracles that seek no attention.

Be consoled in the secret symmetry of our soul.

May you experience each day as a sacred gift woven around the heart of wonder.

Mary Oliver

"Praying" – *Devotions*

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

"The Summer Day" – *Devotions*

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean–
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down–
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

"When I am Among the Trees" – *Devotions*

When I am among the trees,
especially the willow and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."

"The Journey" –*Devotions*

One day you finally knew
what you had to do and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice—
thought the whole house
began to tremble

and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
“Mend my life!”
each voice cried.
But you didn’t stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voice behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do—
determined to save
the only life that you could save.

Pádraig Ó Tuama

“Morning Prayer” – *Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community*

We begin our day alone,
honoring this life, with all its potentials and possibilities.

We begin our day with trust,
knowing we are created for loving encounter.

We begin our day with hope,
knowing the day can hold
love, kindness,
forgiveness and justice.

We recall our day yesterday;
may we learn, may we love,
may we live on.

We make room for the unexpected;
may we find wisdom and life
in the unexpected.

Help us to embrace possibility,
respond graciously to disappointment
and hold tenderly those we encounter.
Help us to be fully present to the day.

We pray for all whose day will be difficult;
may we support, may we listen,
may we change.

We resolve to live life in its fullness:
we will welcome the people who will be part of this day,
we will greet God in ordinary and hidden moments,
we will live the life we are living.

A short silence.

May we find the wisdom we need,
God be with us.
may we hear the needs of those we meet,
God be with us.
may we love the life that we are given,
God be with us.

Amen.

"A Prayer for Courage" – *Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community*

Courage comes from the heart
and we are always welcomed by God,
the heart of all being.

We bear witness to our faith,
knowing that we are called
to live lives of courage,
love and reconciliation
in the ordinary and extraordinary
moments of each day.

We bear witness, too, to our failures
and our complicity in the fractures of our world.

May we be courageous today.

May we learn today.
May we love today.
Amen.
Amen.

Christine Vaulters Painter

"Vespers" – *Dreaming of Stones*

The sun slides down
the gap between houses
its amber reach crosses the grass
toward me, shadow of the elder tree
has grown long and I remember
under the mulberry spectacle of sky
how everything I love must end:
this cup of tea with steam ascending,
the dog curled right against me,
your warm hands over mine,
how this sweet leaving of day
makes me draw the world
as close as possible.

"Sabbath" – abbeyofthearts.com

Even as the subway car hurtles
into the tunnel and calendars heave
under growing weight of entries,
even under the familiar lament
for more hours to do

a bell rings somewhere
and a man lays down
his hammer, as if to say
the world can build without me,
a woman sets down
her pen as if to say,
the world will carry on
without my words.

The project left undone,
dust on the shelves,
dishes crusted with morning
egg, the vase of drooping
flowers, and so much work
still to complete,

I journey across the long field

where trees cling to the edges
free to not do anything but
stand their ground,
where buttercups
and bluebells sway
and in this taste of paradise
where rest becomes luminous
and play a prayer of gratitude,
even the stones sing
of a different time,
where burden is lifted
and eternity endures.

Jan Richardson

"Beloved is Where You Begin" – *Circle of Grace*

If you would enter
into the wilderness,
do not begin
without a blessing.

Do not leave
without hearing
who you are:
Beloved,
named by the One
who has traveled this path before you.

Do not go
without letting it echo
in your ears,
and if you find it is hard
to let it into your heart,
do not despair.
That is what this journey is for.

I cannot promise
this blessing will free you
from danger, from fear,
from hunger, from thirst
from the scorching
of sun
or the fall of the night.

But I can tell you
that on this path
there will be help.

I can tell you
that on this way
there will be rest.
I can tell you
that you will know
the strange graces
that come to our aid
only on a road such as this,
that fly to meet us
bearing comfort and strength,

that come alongside us
for no other cause
than to lean themselves
toward our ear
and with their
curious insistence
whisper our name:

Beloved.
Beloved.
Beloved.

"For Those Who Have Far To Travel An Epiphany Blessing"– *Circle of Grace*

If you could see
the journey whole
you might never
undertake it;
might never dare
the first step
that propels you
from the place
you have known
toward the place
you know not.

Call it
one of the mercies
of the road:
that we see it
only by stages
as it opens
before us,
as it comes into
our keeping
step by
single step.

There is nothing
for it
but to go
and by our going
take the vows
the pilgrim takes:

to be faithful to
the next step;
to rely on more
than the map;
to heed the signposts
of intuition and dream;
to follow the star
that only you
will recognize;
to keep an open eye
for the wonders that
attend the path;
to press on
beyond distractions
beyond fatigue
beyond what would
tempt you
from the way.

There are vows
that only you
will know;
the secret promises
for your particular path
and the new ones
you will need to make
when the road
is revealed
by turns
you could not
have foreseen.

Keep them, break them,
make them again:
each promise becomes
part of the path;
each choice creates
the road
that will take you
to the place

where at last
you will kneel

to offer the gift
most needed--
the gift that only you
can give--
before turning to go
home by
another way.

"A Blessing for Traveling in the Dark"

Go slow
if you can.
Slower.
More slowly still.
Friendly dark
or fearson,
this is no place
to break your neck
by rushing,
by running,
by crashing into
what you cannot see.
Then again,
it is true:
different darks
have different tasks,
and if you
have arrived here unawares,
if you have come
in peril
or in pain,
this might be no place
you should dawdle.
I do not know
what these shadows
ask of you,
what they might hold
that means you good
or ill.
It is not for me
to reckon
whether you should linger
or you should leave.
But this is what
I can ask for you:

that in the darkness
there be a blessing.
That in the shadows
there be a welcome.
That in the night
you be encompassed
by the Love that knows
your name.

"Another Name for Patience"

Beloved,
don't tell me
to be patient.
I am done
with this idle
not-doing,
this waiting that
wastes
and dulls.

Tell me, beloved,
to strengthen my heart.
Tell me to look to the ones
who spoke fire.
Tell me there is work to do
in the waiting,
a field to be cultivated,
a place to labor
during the watching

until,
beloved,
I lay myself down
among the
ready harvest,
spent and
drenched with the rains
early and
late.

Cole Arthur Riley
This Here Flesh

"I wonder if God feels as alienated from us as we do from him. Sometimes, it cracks me up to think of the stories that describe Christ just boldly inviting himself over to people's houses for dinner. Roaming around telling people to

stop everything and follow him. Multiplying food, but making everyone sit down in groups to eat it. He knew how to make his own belonging. Do we?"

Rumi

"The Guest House" – *The Rumi Collection: An Anthology of Translations of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi*

This being human is a guesthouse.
Every morning is 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 are 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 the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

"Two Kinds of Intelligence"– *The Rumi Collection: An Anthology of Translations of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi*

There are two kinds of intelligence:
One acquired, as a child in school
memorizes facts and concepts from books
and from what the teacher says,
collecting information from the traditional sciences
as well as from the new sciences.
With such intelligence you rise in the world.
You get ranked ahead or behind others
in regard to your competence in retaining information.
You stroll with this intelligence
in and out of fields of knowledge,
getting always more marks on your preserving tablets.

There is another kind of tablet,
one already completed and preserved inside you.

A spring overflowing its spring box.
A freshness in the center of the chest.
This other intelligence does not turn yellow or stagnate.
It's fluid,
and it doesn't move from outside to inside
through the conduits of plumbing-learning.
This second knowing
is a fountainhead from within you,
moving out.

Excerpts from "The Great Wagon"– *The Rumi Collection: An Anthology of Translations of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi*

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty
and frightened. Don't open the door to the study
and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.
Let the beauty we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

~~

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing
there is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other*
doesn't make any sense.

Howard Thurman

"The Singing of Angels"– *Meditations of the Heart*

There must be always, remaining in every life, someplace for the singing of angels. Someplace for that which in itself is breathless and beautiful.
Old burdens become lighter, deep and ancient wounds lose much of their old hurting. A crown is placed over us that for the rest of our lives we are trying to grow tall enough to wear.
Despite all the crassness of life, despite all the hardness of life, despite all the harsh discords of life, life is saved by the singing of angels.
"I will sing a new song"

Meditations of the Heart

The old song of my spirit has wearied itself out.
It has long ago been learned by my heart;
it repeats itself over and over,
bringing no added joy to my days or lift to my spirit.

I will sing a new song.

I must learn the new song for the new needs.
I must fashion new words born of all the new growth
of my life—of my mind—of my spirit.
I must prepare for new melodies that have never been mine before,
that all that is within me may lift my voice unto God.
Therefore, I shall rejoice with each new day
and delight my spirit in each fresh unfolding.
I will sing, this day, a new song unto the Lord

An excerpt: *Meditations of the Heart*

> "One: it is no longer possible to separate oneself from another person even when that other person behaves as if he were not a part of one's self. What the other person does to me is, in some very real sense, a part of me doing that thing to a part of us. Two: it becomes a reasonable thing for me to hope to understand another person because of the hope that I can and may ultimately understand myself. This is the meaning of the statement, Know thyself, which has been taken more mystically from the statement, 'Thou hast seen thy brother, thou has seen thy God.' "

Desmond & Mpho Tutu

"Wired to Be Compassionate" – *Made for Goodness*

> "I mean simply to say that ultimately our greatest joy is when we seek to do good for others… It's how we are made. I mean we are wired to be compassionate… We are wired to be caring for the other and generous to one another. We shrivel when we are not able to interact… We depend on the other in order for us to be fully who we are… The concept we have here at home, Ubuntu, says: A person is a person through other persons… Ubuntu says when I have a small piece of bread, it is for my benefit that I share it with you. Because, after all, none of us came into the world on our own."

Prayer from *Made for Goodness*

Don't struggle and strive so, my child.
There is no race to complete, no point to prove,
no obstacle course to conquer for you to win my love.
I have already given it to you.
I loved you before creation drew its first breath.
I dreamed you as I molded Adam from the mud.
I saw you wet from the womb.
And I loved you then.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.
Stop racing ahead at your own pace,
you will only be exhausted, flamed out, and
spent before the task is accomplished.
Pace yourself with me, walk alongside me.

Do you think I don't know the demands of your life?
I see you striving for perfection, craving my acceptance.
I see you bending yourself out of shape to conform to
the image that you have of me.
Do you imagine that I did not know who you were when
I made you, when I knit you together in your mother's womb?
Do you think I planted a fig tree and expected roses to bloom?
No, child, I sowed what I wanted to reap.

You are a child after my own heart.
Seek out your deepest joy and you will find me there.
Find that which makes you most perfectly yourself and
know that I am at the heart of it.
Do what delights you
And you will be working with me,
Walking with me,
Finding your life
Hidden in me.

Ask me any question
My answer is love.
When you want to hear my voice,
Listen for love.
How can you delight me?
I will tell you:
Love.
The tough, unbreakable, unshakable love.
Are you looking for me?
You will find me in love.
Would you know my secrets?
There is only one:
Love.
Do you want to know me?
Do you yearn to follow me?
Do you want to reach me?
Seek and serve love.

Alice Walker

"When You See Water" – *The World Will Follow Joy Turning Madness into Flowers*

When you see water in a stream
you say: oh, this is stream
water;
When you see water in the river
you say: oh, this is water
of the river;

When you see ocean
water
you say: This is the ocean's
water!
But actually water is always
only itself
and does not belong
to any of these containers
through it creates them.
And so it is with you.

Macrina Weiderkehr

"Prayers from "The Twilight Hour" – *Seven Sacred Pauses: Living Mindfully Through the Hours of the Day*

— In this evening hour reflect on the thin places of your day. Recall those moments when you stood very near the glory of God. There may be more than you realize. That's why it's important to take time for solitude. Practice deep listening and deep breathing. After a few moments of silence, the prayer below might help you bring closure to your day. Oh Spirit of the Holy One, earth is turning from the sun. Day is almost done. Radiant face of the Divine, clothe me now for the evening hour. As I stand before the thin places, lift the veil that hides your presence. Show me your face O God. Robe me in twilight. I am a companion of day and night. One hand cradles the daylight; the other embraces night. I have come to the Vespers hour. Day is almost done.

— O You Whose Face is a Thousand Colors… Look upon us in this twilight hour and color our faces with the radiance of your love. As the light of the sun fades away, light the lamps of our hearts that we may see one another more clearly. Let the incense of our gratitude rise as our hearts become more full of music and song. May the work that we bring with us into this hour fall away from our minds as we enter into the mystical grace of the evening hours. Amen.

— O God of so much Grace...Thank you for all the blessings of this day, those we have recognized and those we have yet to recognize. Look upon us in this twilight hour and color our faces with the radiance of your love.
As the light of the sun fades away, light the lamps of our hearts that we may see one another more clearly. Let the incense of our gratitude rise as our hearts become full of music and song. Make the work that we bring with us into this hour fall away from our minds as we enter the mystical grace of the evening hour. Amen.

David Whyte

"Start Close In" – *River Flow: New and Selected Poems*

Start close in,
don't take the second step
or the third,
start with the first
thing
close in,
the step

you don’t want to take.

Start with
the ground
you know,
the pale ground
beneath your feet,
your own
way to begin
the conversation.

Start with your own
question,
give up on other
people’s questions,
don’t let them
smother something
simple.

To hear
another’s voice,
follow
your own voice,
wait until
that voice
becomes an
intimate
private ear
that can
then
really listen
to another.

Start right now
take a small step
you can call your own
don’t follow
someone else’s
heroics, be humble
and focused,
start close in,
don’t mistake
that other
for your own.

Start close in,
don’t take
the second step

or the third,
start with the first
thing
close in,
the step
you don't want to take.

Individual writings that are NOT connected to a book in the Bibliography

Judy Brown	**Fire**
John Fox	**When Someone Deeply Listens to You**
Saint Irenaeus	**Keep your Clay Moist**
John Lewis	**You Are a Light**
Martha Postlethwaite	**The Clearing**
Rashani Read	**The Unbroken**
Rainer Maria Rilke	**The Book of Hours: Love Poems to God**
Ronald Rohlheiser	**Spirituality**
Sarah Are Speed	**With All That You Are**
Pierre Teillhard de Chardin	**Trust the Slow Work of God**
RS Thomas	**Bright Field**
Maryanne Williamson	**Our Deepest Fear**

Judy Brown

Fire

What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water would.

So building fires
requires attention
to the spaces in between,
as much as to the wood.

When we are able to build
open spaces
in the same way

we have learned
to pile on the logs,
then we can come to see how
it is fuel, and the absence of the fuel
together, that make fire possible.

We only need to lay a log
lightly from time to time.

A fire
grows
simply because the space is there,
with openings
in which the flame
that knows just how it wants to burn
can find its way.

John Fox

When Someone Deeply Listens to You

When someone deeply listens to you
it is like holding out a dented cup
you've had since childhood
and watching it fill up with
cold, fresh water.
When it balances on top of the brim,
you are understood.
When it overflows and touches your skin,
you are loved.
When someone deeply listens to you,
the room where you stay
starts a new life
and the place where you wrote
your first poem
begins to glow in your mind's eye.
It is as if gold has been discovered!
When someone deeply listens to you,
your barefeet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now home within you.

Saint Irenaeus

Let Your Clay Be Moist

It is not you that shapes God.

It is God that shapes you.
If you are the work of God,
await the hand of the artist
who does all things in due season.
Offer God your heart,
Soft and tractable,
and keep the form
in which the artist has fashioned you.

Let your clay be moist,
lest you grow hard
and lose the imprint of God's fingers.

John Lewis
You are a light

You are a light.
You are the light.
Never let anyone–
any person or any force–
dampen, dim or diminish your light.
Study the path of others
to make your way easier and more abundant.
Lean toward the whispers of your own heart,
Discover the universal truth,
And follow its dictates.

Martha Postlethwaite
The Clearing

Do not try to serve
the whole world
or do anything grandiose.
Instead, create
a clearing
in the dense forest
of your life
and wait there
patiently,
until the song
that is yours alone to sing
falls into your open cupped hands
and you recognize and greet it.
Only then will you know
how to give yourself

to the world
so worthy of rescue.

Rashani Read
The Unbroken

There is a brokenness
out of which comes the unbroken,
a shatteredness
out of which blooms the unshatterable.
There is a sorrow
beyond all grief which leads to joy
and a fragility
out of whose depths emerges strength.
There is a hollow space too vast for words
through which we pass with each loss,
out of whose darkness we are sanctioned into being.
There is a cry deeper than all sound
whose serrated edges cut the heart
as we break open
to the place inside which is unbreakable
and whole
while learning to sing.

Rainer Maria Rilke
Book of Hours: Love Poems to God

You see, I want a lot.
Maybe I want it all:
the darkness of each endless fall,
the shimmering light of each ascent.
So many are alive who don't seem to care.
Casual, easy, they move in the world
as though untouched.
But you take pleasure in the faces
of those who know they thirst.
You cherish those who grip you for survival.
You are not dead yet, it's not too late
to open your depths by plunging into them
and drink in the life
that reveals itself quietly there.

Ronald Rolheiser
Spirituality

Spirituality is more about whether or not we can sleep at night than about whether or not we go to church. It is about being integrated or falling apart, about being in community or being lonely, about being in harmony with Mother Earth or being alienated from her.

Sarah Are Speed
With All That You Are

You said "Return to me."
So here I am,
skin and bones held together
with memories and a little bit of duct tape.
I am bringing the worst of me,
consider yourself warned—
the furrowed brow,
the achy back,
the slew of judgments,
a pocketful of assumptions,
the track of negativity that runs laps in my head.
I am bringing it all
because You said
"Return to me,"
edits not required,
So return I will.
And not all of it will be bad.
Some of it will be lovely.
I will bring a wagon full of nostalgia,
a melody that won't let me go,
a million stories that start with the words
"Oh it was beautiful!"
I will bring a mended heart,
a glass half full,
two lungs, out of breath from dancing too long,
And dreams that taste like honey.
I will bring my whole
messy
human self
because I know,
I just *know*,
deep in my bones,
that you are already running to meet me.
There are no cuts on this team.
You said You'd take it all,
so here I come.
Me and all my humanity.

We are on the way.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Trust in the Slow Work of God

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through
some stages of instability-
and that it may take a very long time.
And so I think it is with you.
Your ideas mature gradually-- let them grow,
let them shape themselves without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances
acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.
Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give our Lord the benefit of believing
that His hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

Amen.

RS Thomas

Bright Field

I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the
pearl of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realize now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying
on to a receding future, not hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness

that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

Marianne Williamson
Our Deepest Fear

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”