



Dear Friend:

As we post our seventh and final retreat in this series, I would like to ask an honest question: What generates your deepest sense of identity today? Is it your job title or position? Is it your connection to a political party? Is it your connection to Young Life? When others walk away from an encounter with you, of what are they most aware? Is it your connection to a social movement, an ethnic group, your gender or a compelling cause? Or is what others notice most about you the gentleness of Jesus; the kindness of the Spirit; the goodness of the Father's DNA?

In this retreat, we turn one last time to the message from Moses on the threshold of the Promised Land. In it we hear Moses ask the Israelites, Who are you going to be in this new world? And then he emphatically reminds them, "The LORD is your life!" This is the most important understanding they will carry with them into the future. If they have not learned to internalize and embody their true identity as God's beloved children, then even a spacious land flowing with milk and honey will feel like prison. They will continue to live like tired and weary slaves. Or maybe they will live like task masters, ruling over others. The work of the wilderness is identity formation. Now is the time for the Israelites to fully step into their identity as deeply loved sons and daughters of the Most High God.

Though we are posting our final retreat, it seems we are still wandering in the wilderness created by the pandemic, at least in the United States. Here is our prayer: May this wilderness have its full and good effect in our lives. May we detach from everything that has laid claim to our identity and emerge as people who identify wholly, solely, deeply and completely with our Lord Jesus Christ. May we more fully embody our Father's DNA.

This retreat is written by and offered in the voice of Tracey Meeks, and what an inviting voice it is. Tracey invites us to stand outside the empty tomb with Mary on Easter morning and encounter Jesus. From that moment forward, it is easy to imagine what generated Mary's deepest sense of identity. She had seen the Lord! He had tenderly called her name! Everything else was garbage compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Him.

This is the final retreat, but we will be offering a bonus gift for you in the week after this retreat is posted. So check beneath the "Your Retreats" button one more time. Until then, enjoy this beautiful gift from Tracey.

Until Christ is formed in us,

Donna Hatasaki
Director of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care

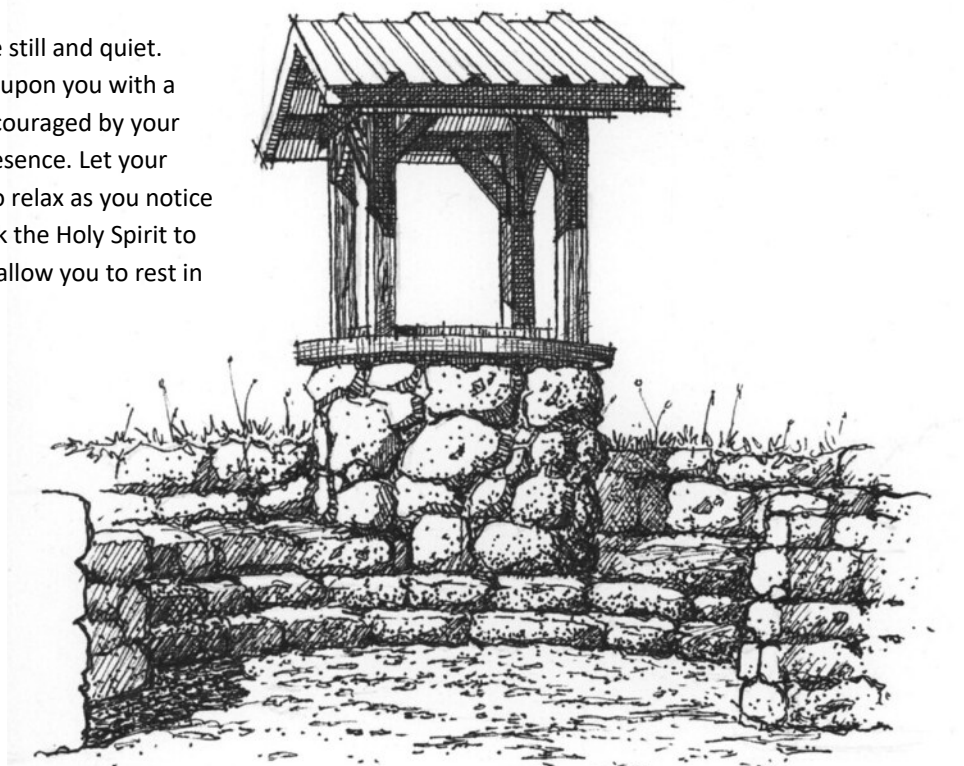
Retreat Seven

THE LORD IS YOUR LIFE

First Reflection

As you enter into this time of retreat, consider what your soul needs or desire during this time. A nap? A walk? A silenced phone? A quiet setting?

Take a moment to be still and quiet. Imagine God looking upon you with a long, loving gaze, encouraged by your desire to sit in his presence. Let your breathing help you to relax as you notice its gentle rhythm. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time and allow you to rest in his presence.



"Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evening, how you spend your weekend, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything."

Throughout these retreats, we have been visiting the framework of a threshold: those liminal spaces when the past season has come to a close, but there is a profound unknowing of what will come next.

In the passage from the last retreat we read in Deuteronomy, Moses is giving the Israelites a final charge before they enter the Promised Land. They too are in a threshold moment...a borderland... between their wanderings in the wilderness and the soon to be inhabited land flowing with milk and honey.

And what is Moses' encouragement? Choose life. He lets them know that set before them are life and death. As I have been pondering what helps me to choose life each day, and particularly during this pandemic, I kept being brought to Mary Magdalene's moment at the tomb where she also finds herself in an in-between moment.

Let's look together at Mary as she chooses life in the midst of uncertainty and her disorienting grief.

Take some time to read John 20:1-16 slowly and reflectively.

The passage begins by letting us know that Mary left for the tomb, while it was still dark. A courageous act of love as she perseveres through the darkness. Not just the darkness of the early morning, but the

darkness of her grief, the darkness of lost hope.

Imagine the weight of grief she's under having just witnessed Jesus' excruciating death. Think about the raw emotion in the first few days after someone you love dies; the possible sleepless nights, the sense of living a nightmare.

Mary sees the stone rolled away, runs to tell Peter and John, they come and go, and

then we are told that **"Mary stood outside facing the tomb, crying."**

When everyone else goes home or goes away, Mary stays. She moves toward the pain.

It's been said that one of the primary characteristics of Mary Magdalene's life was a desire to be as close to Jesus as she possibly could, no matter the obstacles. She was there at the crucifixion. She was there at the hurried burial as the Sabbath

was drawing near. And she was there at the tomb.

When it says

she was crying, this was not just a solitary tear trickling down her cheek. The words here in the original language let us know that this was not a quiet, restrained shedding of tears, but the noisy lamentation typical of Easterners of that day which would have been more like wailing.

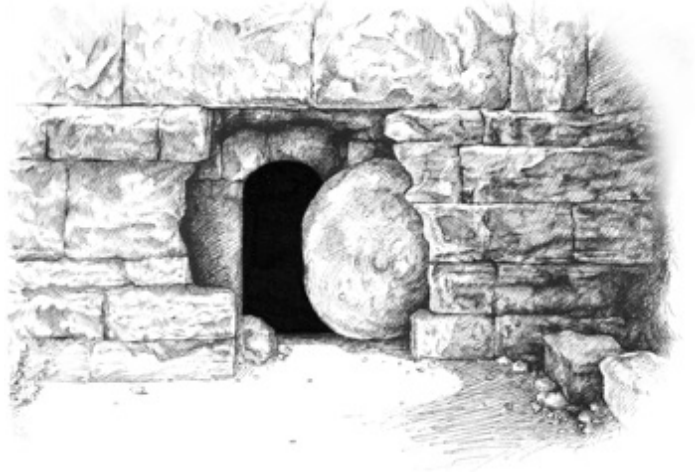


When everyone else goes home or goes away, Mary stays. She moves toward the pain.

The passage continues...**"She saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet, where Jesus' body had been lying."**

Think about that for a minute. The woman who had been delivered from 7 demons is **now seeing angels.**

"They said to her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "Because they've taken away my Lord," she told them, "and I don't know where they've put Him. Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not know it was Jesus."



She turned around. Have you ever wondered what made her turn around initially? Did she hear a noise behind her? Could it have been that the angels had some kind of reaction to the presence of their Lord?

"Woman," Jesus said to her, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Dale Bruner reminds us that, **"The question is pastoral and compassionate. The best thing to do with a grieving person is to enter his or her space with heart."**

Both the angels and Jesus ask this question. They both attend to her pain. Just as Jesus does with us, he invites Mary to confide in Him, to pour her heart out, and offers space for her tears and grief.

¹⁶ **Jesus said, "Mary."**

Was it something in the way the name was spoken that caught her attention? Was it the tone, the warmth, the affection, a familiarity in how it was said?

James Martin in his book, *A Pilgrimage*, writes, **"She knew that distinctive voice with the Nazarean accent - the voice that called her into wholeness when it expelled whatever demons troubled her, the voice that welcomed her into his circle of friends, the voice that told her she was valued in the eyes of God, the voice that answered her questions, the voice that laughed over a meal, the voice that counseled her near the end of his earthly life, the voice that cried out in pain from the cross. Mary knew that voice because it was a voice that had spoken to her in love."**

“Turning around, she said to Him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’^[a]—which means ‘Teacher.’”

Somewhere in this exchange she must have turned back again toward the grave because again it says she turns around, toward Jesus. The Greek verb for turning around carries the meaning of changing one’s manner or concern, changing course of action.

Mary, in this moment, turns herself AWAY from the grave and the quest for a dead body and turns herself TOWARD Jesus, who was fully alive.

She turns away from despair and toward hope; away from the darkness of the tomb and toward the Light of the world; away from death and toward life.

Within all the disorientation of the moment, with the very turn of her body, she turns toward life, she was **choosing life**.

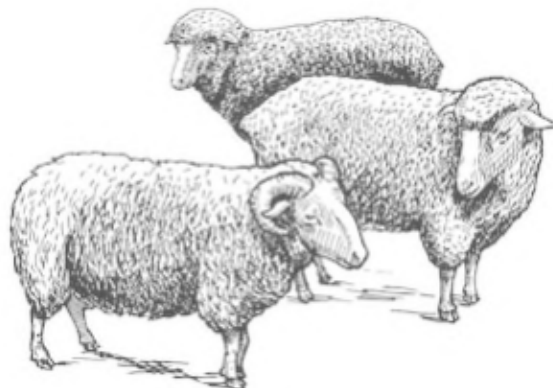
James Martin writes:

“It was the power of his voice, His Word, his presence that would sustain her...through whatever circumstances she might face...That morning, Mary went from absolute sorrow to astonishing joy. She’d been paralyzed by grief and despair and was now transformed by the miracle standing before her, reminding her that their relationship was hardly over, it has only begun. The Presence of Love was with her as it is with us.”

The Presence of Love was with her, and she heard the “voice that had spoken to her in love”. This is one of the deepest desires of the Good Way team, that you would recognize the voice of Jesus as the voice that speaks to you in love. The voice of the Good Shepherd. The voice of the one who knows you from the inside out and loves you completely and deeply. It is his loving voice that faithfully calls us to turn from death and choose life.

Even in this time of disorientation, loss and facing the unknown—ESPECIALLY in this time of disorientation, loss and facing the unknown—may you hear him calling your name, and with deep love and compassion, inviting you to turn towards him and choose life.

May God give each of us the grace to hear him call our name, as we wait together in this thin place.



The Magdalene's Blessing

by Jan Richardson

You hardly imagined
standing here,
everything you ever loved
suddenly returned to you,
looking you in the eye
and calling your name.

And now
you do not know
how to abide this ache
in the center
of your chest,
where a door
slams shut
and swings open
at the same time,
turning on the hinge
of your aching
and hopeful heart.

I tell you,
this is not a banishment
from the garden.
This is an invitation,
a choice,
a threshold,
a gate.

This is your life
calling to you
from a place
you could never
have dreamed,
but now that you
have glimpsed its edge,
you cannot imagine
choosing another way.

So let the tears come
as anointing,
as consecration,
and then
let them go.

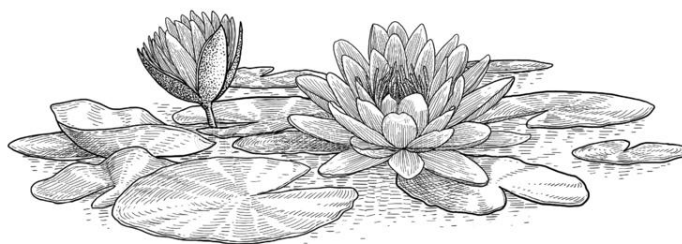
Let this blessing
gather itself around you.

Let it give you
what you will need
for this journey.

You will not remember
the words –
they do not matter.

All you need to remember
is how it sounded
when you stood
in the place of death

and heard the living
call your name.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

What stirs in you as you ponder Mary's encounter with Jesus at the tomb?

What comes to mind as you think of Mary's response to the angels "They have taken....and I don't know". How do these statements resonate with you in the place you find yourself?

Is there a conversation with God you could have around this?

Receive the invitation to pour out your heart before the Lord. "Pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord" Lamentations 2:19

Take some time to remember and reflect on God's voice that has spoken to you in Love.

Further up and Further in



Relax, be still and remember that you are in the presence of God who rejoices that you have come here now. Take a few minutes of silence to rest in the presence of the Lord.

For this retreat, we will be engaging in a practice called Gospel Contemplation or Gospel Meditation. Gospel Contemplation is a way of getting to know and meeting Christ in the Gospels. The ultimate goal is personal encounter with Him. It is a practice that involves placing yourself in the scene of a Gospel account and engaging in the sights, sounds, smells and even emotions of the story. It is a way of “living into” a passage of Scripture with all your senses and imagination.

We will be visiting our passage in John 20, focusing on verses 11 through 16.

Before we do, take some time to ask God to reveal himself to you through these words of Scripture. Let yourself settle into an expectant stillness.

“The Bible is God’s living and active voice, and every time we open its covers we expose ourselves to the possibility of a lifechanging encounter with Jesus Christ. The Bible creates a meeting place for human spirit and Divine spirit.” Richard Foster

Begin by familiarizing yourself with the passage as you read it several times slowly, meditatively.

¹¹ But Mary [who had returned] was standing outside the tomb sobbing; and so, as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. ¹³ And they said to her, “Woman, why are you crying?” She told them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.” ¹⁴ After saying this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you crying? For whom are you looking?” Supposing that He was the gardener, she replied, “Sir, if you are the one who has carried Him away from here, tell me where you have put Him, and I will take Him away.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him in ^[a]Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher).

Close your eyes as you continue to allow the events of the narrative to unfold in your mind, and the details of the scene to take shape. Sometimes replaying it as if it were a movie helps as you picture what you would see and hear, smell and even taste if you were there.

As you sit with Mary outside the tomb, what do you notice about the surroundings, the atmosphere, the feel of it all? Paint the scene as vividly as you can, spending unhurried time as you do.

How do you picture Mary as she is crying? What might her posture be? Again, engage your senses as to what it might sound like and sound like? What could she be thinking and feeling? What are you thinking and feeling as an empathic witness to her pain? What could it have been like to encounter the angels in this moment? What strikes you about what the angels say and Mary's response?

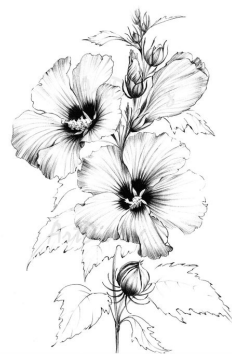
¹¹ But Mary [who had returned] was standing outside the tomb sobbing; and so, as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. ¹³ And they said to her, "Woman, why are you crying?" She told them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." ¹⁴ After saying this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? For whom are you looking?" Supposing that He was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you are the one who has carried Him away from here, tell me where you have

put Him, and I will take Him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in ^[g]Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher).

Now spend some time paying attention to Jesus. What do you notice about Jesus' response to Mary's tears? What is the quality and tone of voice that you sense? Picture the moment Jesus says Mary's name. Linger in that moment. What would it feel like to hear Jesus say *your* name in a moment like this? How do you find yourself reacting or responding to the things Jesus says and does?

Allow your reactions to become the starting point of a conversation with Christ. Speak your heart to Jesus about what you experienced through the gospel account. Notice where you are drawn deeper into God's presence and love. No need to hurry past. Stay and share with Him as much as you need.

Let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. (Song 2:14)



You might be interested in reading this article by Jan Johnson "Welcoming God Each Time".

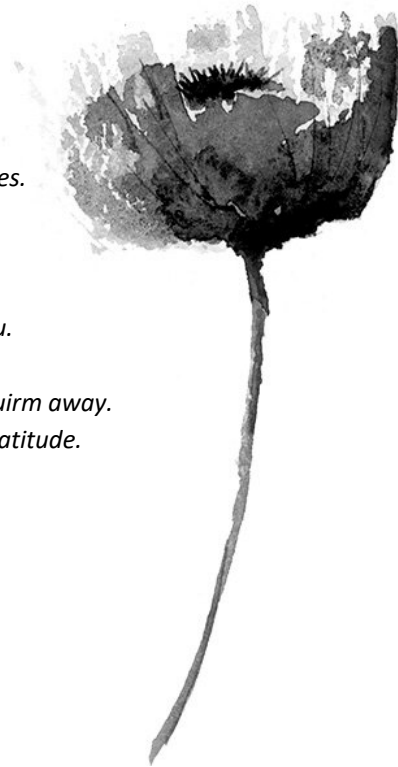
You might also like the book [Fire in the Word](#), by Chris Webb.

Further Still

Stop for a few minutes and remember God's presence around you, and within you. Use the following prayer to help you to become present to the "with-ness" of God.

A Prayer to Remember God's With-ness
by Emily P. Freeman

*Unbound by time or place or gravity,
You move with me and I with You.
You go ahead of me into an unknown future.
You walk toward me with love in Your eyes.
You stand beside me when I find myself in unsure places.
You sit next to me in silence and joy.
You watch behind me to protect my mind from regret.
You live within me and lead from a quiet place.
When You speak with gentleness, may I not ignore You.
When You direct with nudges may I move with ease.
When You declare Your love for me may I refuse to squirm away.
When you offer good gifts, may I receive them with gratitude.
When You delay the answers, may I wait with hope.
I resist the urge to sprint ahead in a hurry
or lag behind in fear.
Let me keep company with you at a walking pace,
moving forward together one step at a time.
You are for me.
You are with me.
You are within me.*



Before you move on, write down any thoughts, feelings, or observations as you connect to God's presence.

Looking back on our Scripture passage for this retreat. Take some time to read again John 20:1-16.

We are told that as Mary was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. That word "stooped" is the Greek word "parakupto" and holds the idea of looking carefully, peering into or inspecting curiously to become more acquainted with something.

What might it look like if we, like Mary, allow **our questions, our pain, our curiosity, our determination, our love to lead us** to peer into, inspecting curiously our lives under the loving gaze of God?

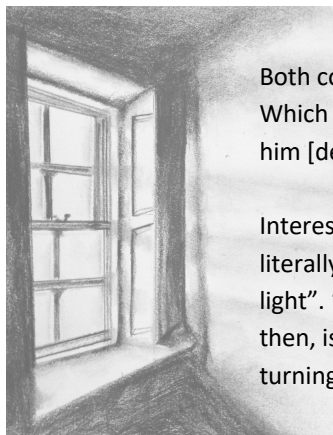
The process of spiritual formation involves both increasing our God awareness as well as our self-awareness. This requires us to stoop in a sense, or peer into and inspect our own lives, even in moments of pain and loss. Maybe especially in moments of pain and loss. One of the practices that helps us to look more intently in order to see the traces of God's actions in our daily lives is the prayer of examen.

The prayer of examen is a process of reviewing your day, week or any period of time in the presence of God. It offers a way to help us take notice of God's presence in our lives in places we may have otherwise missed. This prayer has sometimes been called the prayer of awareness as we peer into and inspect how God speaks to us through our deepest feelings and yearnings by way of what St Ignatius called consolation and desolation.

When in consolation, we may notice an increase of faith, hope and love and we will be drawn toward God.

While in desolation, we may notice a decrease of faith, hope and love and more of an experience where God seems distant

Sometimes when in desolation, we may find ourselves attempting to quickly relieve the tension rather than holding the uncertainty and confusion. Yet both of these interior movements are ways that God is speaking and leading.



Both consolation and desolation have to do with our overall orientation. Which direction is it taking us? Toward God [consolation] or away from him [desolation]?

Interestingly, the Spanish and French root of the word "consolacion" is literally "con" meaning "with our towards" and sola meaning "sun or light". "Desolacion" would then be "against or away from." Consolation then, is facing our turning toward the light, and desolation is facing or turning away from the light.

In this account of Mary at the tomb, God quite literally put before Mary death and life. We witness her peering into the darkness and death of the tomb, and then, moments later, we witness her turning toward the light and life of the resurrected Lord.

As our retreats in "A Spacious Place" come to a close, let's take some time to look back over the last seven retreats with a prayer of examen.

Take a moment to quiet your heart as you prepare to listen. Ask God to guide you as you take notice of His presence with you over the past several months.

As you begin to reflect over the past several retreats, ask the Spirit of God to begin to lift out moments that impacted you. If you journal, take some time to highlight these moments or write them down.



Are there specific things that stood out to you? Patterns or themes that emerge?
Are there places where you notice connections or deeper meaning as you ponder God's presence there?

Are there spiritual practices that you were particularly drawn to? What decisions, commitments, habits or practices would you like to incorporate into or continue within the rhythm of your life?

What God may be doing in your life right now through this? What might God be inviting you into?

As you reflect on what you wrote for the questions above, what longings has the Lord revealed to you? How might you articulate your deepest desires in his presence? what might be a prayer of longing or desire in your relationship with God around those things?

"Let this loving gaze reveal to you God's desire to be with you, that your feelings matter, and that God not only wants to know about your day but wants to experience it with you. This is compassionate love. Knowing that we are deeply loved by God—even sought out in compassion—is one of the greatest soul-healing realizations we can have." Andy Otto

You might be interested in this article by Sage Paik "Examen", or this one on "Rewing Your Day".

