

God in our Midst – JULY 2006

SUMMERTIME

The ground is warm, the days are long and we have the gift of being outdoors for long periods, held in God's grace. Our bodies respond and we relax into discovering ways of making more spaces in our lives; being in the quietness, and freeing ourselves from tiring preoccupations and preconceptions. It is then that we can meet God at greater depths and these encounters can be the source of a wonderful clarity. Solitude is a therapeutic support and an anchor to reality. It is the source of imagination, vision and extraordinary creative energy. It is the dwelling place of God.

Solitude leaves equal room to ponder and absorb the darkness and disturbances in the world.

EARTH SPACE

'Each of us has a unique place on this earth. At the same time, we are part of the whole planet. Our battles of daily life and noise, the discomfort and hostility of so much modern living diminish our natural feelings of this connection to nature.

Yet our planet is our heritage and our mother. It nourishes our senses and inspires our spirit. Many of us have longings to be in the countryside. We yearn for hill, sea, tree and flower. An awareness of your earth space, your place in nature, can help you to maintain a sense of harmony in the midst of the human-made discords you must face.'

MAKING SPACE

Our relationships and responsibilities are an enriching part of our lives, but we also need space just to be ourselves. We all need a place to which we can withdraw when the going gets too rough and the demands are overwhelming. That space and place are within you. This is your inner space, the realm of your spirit. It is open twenty-four hours a day and you have exclusive rights to be there.

Inner space may be an invisible world but it can offer real peace and a true sense of the sacred. Healing is also there, because those with a spiritual dimension to their lives are more likely to be in a state of good emotional health. The goal of being yourself is not easy, for the world eats away at our lives and the majority of us simply want to run away from time to time.

This desire to get away from it all is a common feature of modern living. It is not surprising when you consider the impact of the way most of us live today on our bodies and our minds. Equally stressful is the extent to which we have altered the idea of personal relationships that blur personal boundaries and require an ever increasing ability to cope. This makes our need for peace and spiritual nourishment very great.

People have always hungered for peace and inner well-being. But today these have become essential requirements if you want to maintain a healthy life and balanced relationships. The way to meet such needs has always been through development of your interior life, the place where your spirit dwells. It is right that we should want to spend time in this inner world which can renew and refresh our lives.

Take the journey inside yourself now, start with your place in nature, which is your 'earth space'. Then go into your inner world. Let the many aspects of your interior life unfold, from the scary space where memories unexpected images vie for your attention, to that mysterious one of dreaming. Learn how to retreat from too many demands and to trust the stillness you find within yourself. Play with your own consciousness. Become effective at making space in this life for who and what you are. In this way you may fill your life with hope, love and peace because you are true to yourself.'

WHAT IS MY FAITH IN THE FUTURE?

from 'Turning to One Another'; simple conversations to restore hope to the future - by Margaret J Wheatley, author of 'Leadership and the New Science'

Where does the future come from? It often feels these days as if the future arrives from nowhere. Suddenly things feel unfamiliar, we're behaving differently, the world doesn't work the way it used to. We're surprised to find ourselves in this new place – it's uncomfortable, and we don't like it.

The future doesn't take form irrationally, even though it feels that way. The future comes from where we are now. It materialises from the actions, values, and beliefs we are practicing now. We're creating the future everyday, by what we choose to do. If we want a different future, we have to take responsibility for what we are doing in the present.

I have faith in the future because I know it's not a predetermined path we're obliged to walk down. We can change direction from here. It requires critical thinking. We need to look thoughtfully at what's going on, and decide what we want to do about it. Luckily,

critical thinking is a skill easy to develop in all people. In Paulo Freire's work with economically poor people in Latin America, they became skilled thinkers when they saw how reading and analysis would give them the means to fight back against poverty. People learn quickly when learning offers them the possibility of a better life.

Exercise: Can you apply these perceptions to the way you are reading the newspapers and processing current events on a global scale?

DEVELOPING A VISUAL IMAGINATION ENRICHES AND INFORMS OUR DISCIPLESHIP

The compassionate face of Christ we have created for ourselves along our faith journey bears the marks of human suffering, summoning us to transform our own. It is because we have re-traced and accepted the incidence and implications of our personal suffering, assimilated it and tried to put it in a relatively safe place in our consciousness, that we can participate in the world's suffering. Try to imagine Christ looking at you right now, with some news to share, then allow his eyes to express his response to your request to sit and talk over a particular matter with him. Can you give some sort of shape and form to his whole face? Sit prayerfully for some moments to let images and feelings arise.

Exercise: Try to sketch or paint several images of Christ's face as you experience him in your life now. Keep an open mind and let your pencil or your brush move as it will, thinking only of Christ's love for you. You will find this a liberating and moving experience. Add a few words beside each drawing.

HOW HARD IT IS TO STAY IN OUR OWN PLACE WITH GOD. WE CUT OURSELVES SHORT OF HIS KNOWLEDGE OF AND CARE FOR US. WE MUST HOLD BACK FROM PEERING INTO SOMEONE ELSE'S SPIRITUAL BUCKET TO SEE HOW FULL IT IS.

"One of the great temptations of religious living is the urge to intrude between God and other people. We love to think that we know more of God than others; we find it comforting to try and control the access of others to God. This is a deep-rooted longing and we are constantly drawn almost irresistibly back towards this urge to manage. If we don't really know how to attend to the reality that is our own inner turmoil, we shall fail in responding to the needs of someone else."
Archbishop Rowan Williams – 'Silence and Honeycakes'

Exercise: Without judging yourself, jot down ways in which you might be failing to “work in your own garden.” Find a friend to compare notes.

HOSPITALITY AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Are we able to expand our hospitality? This can mean accommodating customs, art forms, music of other cultures, or it can mean inviting someone to share a simple meal.

‘Enlarge the place of your tent,
And let the curtains of your habitation be stretched out;
Hold not back, lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes.
For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left,
And your descendents will possess the nations
And will people desolate cities’ *Isaiah 54: 2-3*

Exercise: Repeat this verse from Isaiah with emphasis. Be a bit dramatic as you give voice to those wonderfully liberating ideas. Perhaps we are all too enclosed within our houses and need to use the summer days to help us find God in new spontaneous ways of meeting and relating to people. What we give to others need not be lavish or difficult to prepare. A candle, a coloured cloth, some flowers in a vase can make a table very inviting.

A THOUGHT TO END WITH:

Be patient towards all that is
unsolved in your heart
and try to love the questions
themselves.
Do not seek the answers
that cannot be given to you
because you would not be able to live them.
And the point is to live everything.
Live the questions now,
and perhaps you will gradually
without noticing it
live some distant day
into the answers.
(Maria Rilke)

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