

Holy Ground

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A quarterly reflection on
the contemplative life



GONE TO SEED

The seasons are teaching us again. Splashes of scarlet, gold and orange leaves call us into their glory beckoning, “Look at me. No, look at me! Oh, over here, look at me.” They hold us enthralled, mesmerized by beauty.



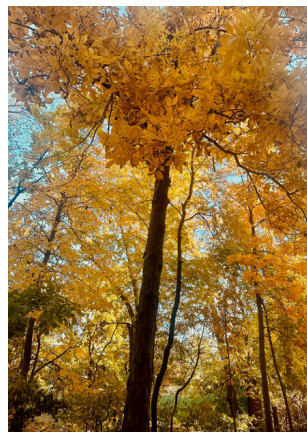
Yellow hickory leaves dance in the wind, slowly loosening their stems from twigs. Soon they boldly disrobe, toss away an old identity and release themselves into the arms of mother earth. No longer encumbered by a branch, they leave behind the kids on the swing, the birdsong, squirrels, sun and purple evenings.

The maple leaf falls with a sigh to rest on the floor of the forest understory. Here it will protect and enrich the soil, cycle nutrients and provide food and shelter for insects and animals. I envy the leaves’ ease of letting go and trust in their existence. They gracefully go to seed and continue their journey of supporting life.

Out walking, I snap photos of those seedy plants holding the future in tiny kernels, generously released and blown about the neighborhood. The plants and trees may appear to be dying. Yet death never has the last word. There is always more.

Gone to seed is a negative appraisal of a neighborhood, house, bar, motel or perhaps a nation.

Well into my seedy season, I have crashed



into my own and our culture's agism. I have found that aging is a transition similar to puberty. You may remember the strange things happening in your body, over which you had little control. Your emotions were up and down. Maybe you were self-conscious and awkward or had pimples and braces. Adults and parents may have referred to you as "teenagers," rolling their eyes when talking to their friends.

The first time I went to an exercise class for seniors, I rolled my eyes and was shocked to see all the old people. The booming 60's music catapulted me back to my teens. I felt like a teenager at a middle school dance. I headed for the back row. Am I wearing the right clothes? Are the cool kids making fun of me? Am I doing the steps correctly? Will I ever fit in here?

Today, once again, for the seniors among us, our bodies are changing in dramatic ways and seem to be beyond our control. Grey hair, arthritis, forgetfulness, less energy, looking for our passwords, keys, and yet another trip to the doctor - may sound familiar to some of us.

Aging as well as chronic illness may bring anxiety and grief. Who am I without my job title? Where

do I belong? We become a lucrative marketing demographic. The snake oil sellers, potion peddlers and scammers gather round.

We need a period of adjustment to catch up to these changes and learn how to accept, adapt to and enjoy this season of letting go.

Whenever we begin to demean, criticize ourselves, or look in the mirror and turn away with a frown, an alarm should sound. Because if there is ever a time to learn to love yourself, just as you are, it is now.

We have the freedom to loosen our grip on finding our worth in what we accomplish, possess, or other people's affection and esteem.

We each pass through cognitive and psychological developmental stages in varied ways. There is no right or wrong way. We have good days and bad days, and as the Sufi poet Rumi writes, "Appreciate and accept them all." It may take a while to move past our own ageism, as well as the agism of our culture. Going to seed is a time for gardeners to collect the kernels of fading plants to be planted in the spring.



Growing old is to rest in the rich silty black soil of our lives and to tend and share the harvest of our years. What is a life for, if not to give away in lavish acts of kindness?



Some of us seedy ones may overlook the goodness, wisdom, grace and spiritual power within us. All my life people older than me have given me words and actions of encouragement, wisdom and support.

As people age they often become more contemplative without even knowing anything about this kind of wordless prayer and lifestyle. Contemplative prayer is a natural part of our spiritual development, yet it may be largely unrecognized. As we slow down outwardly, a subtle, quiet interior transformation is underway.

Naturally slowed down by their bodies, and often unable to work and volunteer for church and community projects, a subtle, quiet transformation is under way.

A wordless prayer of the gaze, or simply beholding the wonder and goodness of God is born within us. Hundreds of books have been written about this ancient prayer. There are courses and organizations teaching it. And people like me talk about it a lot. This prayer transcends doctrines and directions on how to do it. It is sheer gift from the One who loves us more than we can imagine.

Contemplation comes upon us when we have slowed down and learned how to sit quietly without having to figure everything out. If you would ask such a person, “What are thinking about? They might respond, “Oh nothing in particular.” You might ask again, “Well how do feel?”

“Oh, Ok, peaceful I guess.” This communion with Christ brings the peace that doesn’t make sense and passes our understanding.

Sometimes people feel guilty about this kind of praying. Shouldn’t I be doing more? I am just wasting time here. I better get back to work.

My Quaker mother would say, “I am doing what Uncle Lem used to say: I work for Dolittle and Setmore these days.”



Not everyone is given this gift of prayer. If we feel drawn into it, we have a responsibility to engage with Christ in this quiet exchange of love. When we realize we are powerless to control and change reality and finally surrender our busy egos, we fall into the soil from which we were formed and become channels of love as God prays through us.

I think these prayers are binding us all together like a vine always reaching beyond itself to connect and join. Plant your seeds in good soil and tend them carefully. Send your roots deep and wide. Offer the gift of yourself and your compassion. Your blooming may come without bling and fanfare. It may be quite unassuming, as it passes quietly in the whispers of leaves, kind eyes and a gentle smile. Here we find ourselves in union with the ebb and flow of the ocean of Love in which we live. Trust your seeds and watch them grow.

We are entering an era of great changes in our country. Some are relieved and rejoice at these changes. Others cringe in fear, mourn and feel angry and betrayed. None of us know what is ahead, in spite of all the analyses, predictions and theories of very thoughtful people.

We are at an impasse. We are poised on a precipice of not knowing, not understanding and not



being right. Here we are invited to tolerate the tension of ambiguity, and uncertainty and trust in God, as we trust in God's presence in others.

The words of the prophet Isaiah remind us of the way of our Mysterious God:

*A secureness is found
as one slows down
a quiet confidence
In hearing and seeing
building strength
To open oneself
In the strength of trust
but not this people
only their mouths are open
Saying not us
we've got fast horses
we can escape any danger
and they will escape
and they will ride
into the jaws of danger . . .
But even now as then
the Lord is waiting
to embrace you*



*You will open up to God
as pure mountain air
Totally surrounding you in an embrace
There is a just voice speaking
in the quiet strength of those
Listening
to God's presence unfolding
around them
like a scroll of overwhelming poetry
you are the survivors of the future . .*

Isaiah 30:15 as paraphrased in A Poet's Bible-
Rediscovering the Voices of the Original Text
pp 270-272, by David Rosenberg

All our fast horses, all our technology, our intelligence and artillery will not save us, neither will our wealth and privilege.

We are not the first people to experience a time of heart wrenching wandering in the wilderness, nor will we be the last. In the presence of chaos and suffering is a sacred gift, a pearl of great price. There are lessons we each must learn. And yes, some of these we must learn the hard way so that they are etched upon our hearts.

For these lessons cannot be put in a book or come with a post-doctoral degree. These are lessons in our psychological, cognitive and spiritual

growth, which form the curriculum for our souls.

I believe our species at this point in history has come up against our own limitations, a period of uncomfortable puberty, if you will. To survive we must learn to adapt. This requires an evolutionary leap of consciousness and deeper understanding of our relationships with each other and our planet. We know our brains can be changed. Our hearts must also be changed.

This will require genuine humility and acceptance of our own powerlessness and complicity in the way things are with love and compassionate forgiveness. And much of this is beyond our seeing or comprehension as we wait for a new thing we cannot even name.

This is not to say that we do nothing, but rather that we allow our actions to flow, not from our anxiety and fear, but from the expansive stillness of God.

We will still try to figure this out. We will consult others. We will blame others for our suffering and feel that we have failed somehow and have brought this on ourselves. We will cry out to God. We will support each other.



What ultimately changes us is contact with Christ, the Mystery of Being itself. What allows us to expand and open to the reality of Love is an encounter with Love in any of its many forms as it manifests in our lives. John of the Cross called this difficult period of growth The Dark Night of the Spirit. Many people believe that the church is in such a dark night. Others speak of a global dark night. This period of growth signals the education of our desire, according to author and Carmelite Sister, Constance Fitzgerald. Our desire, our will learns to conform to the the will of Our Creator.

Accumulating wealth and power and hurting and killing people will not save us. There is a better way. Jesus is eager to take our hands and show us how.

DEAR READERS,

I have been writing this little newsletter for almost 37 years, some of you have been on this journey with me from the beginning. We have shared



many triumphs. We struggled and grieved, laughed and delighted in each other. We will get through this time. Spread the love.

Loretta F Ross

A little of this pure love is more precious to God and more beneficial to the church, even though one seems to be doing nothing, than all these other works put together. ...Let those who are singularly active, who think they can win the world with their preaching and exterior works, observe here that they would profit the church and please God much more, not to mention the good example they would give, were they to spend at least half of this time with God in prayer... They would then certainly accomplish more, and with less labor, by one work than they otherwise would by thousand... Without this idle prayer, they would do a great deal of hammering but accomplish little, and sometimes nothing, and even at times cause harm.

- St. John of the Cross





He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

- Matthew 13: 31-32

THE Praying Life

A BLOG ABOUT CONTEMPLATIVE LIVING

www.fromholyground.org

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Loretta F Ross on Facebook, Instagram.**

And if social media is not your thing, just email
info@fromholyground.org or call 785-230-0365.

Thank You!

Holy Ground readers are amazing. Thank you for your generous support of this Wayside Fruit Stand. The Sanctuary and its programs are open to serve a wide range of people. And we have a great assortment of the fruits of the Spirit ready for you.

Stories From Those We Serve

I'm always so glad when Holy Ground arrives because I know it will prompt me to slow down, sit, and reflect. A real blessing -- I've benefited greatly from your spiritual wisdom! Receiving each new issue of the newsletter feels like a spiritual breath of fresh air!

- LS

Once again, thank you for the newsletter. It's a privilege to be given that window on your journey, for the Light is reflected into my own life through yours.

- AN

Do you have a story or experience over the past 35-40 years related to the Sanctuary ministry? If so we would love to hear from you and share it with others.



We may suppose these depths of prayer are our achievement, the precipitate of our own habits at the surface level settled into subconscious regions. But this humanistic account misses the autonomy of the life of prayer. It misses the fact that this inner level has a life of its own, invigorated not by us but by a divine Source.....We pray, and yet it is not we who pray, but a Greater who prays in us.....All we can say is, Prayer is taking place, and I am given to be in the orbit.....and we are joyfully prayed through, by a Seeking Life that flows through us into the world.

- A Testament of Devotion by Thomas R Kelly - First published 1941.
This edition 1979, Reprint 1989. Quaker Home Service. p 41



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...the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Revelation 22:2-3

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