Holy Ground

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A quarterly reflection on the contemplative life

Knowledge Frenzy

I am a glutton for books and knowing things. I have three bookshelves stuffed with books, and more scattered in piles in my office, kitchen counter and floor. I am addicted to knowing things. I recognize the desire and urgency to rummage around for a book and look for an answer to a question I have. I say, "Hey Siri what is the root meaning of gullible?" Alexis, when did the civil war begin?" I feel the hit of dopamine and that happy pleasure to know the answer. My brief success fills me with content.

I hunt for the root meanings of words, especially Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. These collections of consonants and vowels expressed in letters form a language which allows us to connect and communicate with each other. I spent much of my life seeking to capture an experience or object in words. It seems to me to be a cruel and brutal thing to do to our reality. It is like taking something wild, beautiful, majestic, true, and then stuffing it into a little word-cage and never letting it out to breathe and be whatever our feeble scribbles declare it is. And so, we toss these cages around and throw them at each other, sit back and feel that we have things under control.



Here I go: the Greek word for knowing is gnosis and this knowing is based on personal perception, or experience. Such knowledge rises out of direct connection with God. *Gnosis* is mystical knowing, rather than rational knowing and therefore, in some faith traditions is suspect or heretical. The Hebrew word for knowing is *yada* which has multiple meanings, including having personal and intimate relationship with someone.

Once a wise man with multiple PhDs told me that it is the nature of the mind to make meaning of its suffering. Have you experienced that desperate search

for answers: Why did this happen? What did I do wrong? How do I stop this? Who can I blame? I need to understand! Knowing may relieve our suffering because the act of naming gives us a sense of power in the midst of chaos.

However, knowing may not deliver the relief we are seeking. Being a know-it-all becomes a burden in an age of information overload. Events and conditions arise that refuse to rest quietly in our rickety cages of meaning. We may be summoned to deeper more intimate knowledge beyond our grasping, rapacious consumption.

The chorus from a song in a musical came to me in the evening, while I fixed supper for my dog and I. We meet in the kitchen, after going our own way for the day. There I sing and dance while Dobby jumps and wags his tail. I thought this song was from *Westside Story*. Nope. It is *Jesus Christ Superstar*.
What's the buzz, tell me what's a-happening
What's the buzz, tell me what's a-happening
What's the buzz, tell me what's a-happening

The song is a conversation between the disciples and Jesus. The plea to know becomes increasingly urgent and demanding and Jesus replies:
Why should you want to know?
Don't you mind about the future
Don't you try to think ahead
Save tomorrow for tomorrow
Think about today instead.

His followers are insistent:
What's the buzz, tell me what's a-happening
What's the buzz, tell me what's a-happening

Annoyed by their demand, Jesus replies,
I could give you facts and figures.
Even give you plans and forecasts.
Even tell you where I'm going.

But the anxious disciples persist.
What's the buzz, tell me what's a-happening
Pleading for answers, they ask Jesus:
When do we ride into Jerusalem?

Exasperated, Jesus cries out:
Why should you want to know?
Why are you obsessed with fighting?
Times and fates you can't defy?
If you knew the path we're riding,
You'd understand it less than I.

- Jesus Christ Superstar, music by Andrew Lloyd Webber, lyrics by Tim Rice

We each respond differently to uncertainty and change. Chaos and crises call out different gifts from us to meet the challenges. Have you considered what gifts you might offer? You may know the gifts you want to bring to this piece of history. If you do not know, keep looking. We are agents of peace, card carrying bearers of good news, love, compassion, and creativity. We have access to far more power than we believe we have.

I watch the sun rise with my coffee. In this quiet time, I like to ask the Holy One, "What is your word to me for today?" I sit and listen, notice my thoughts and feelings, and pick up the Bible, a book, or just wait, absorbed in prayer.

A word, or a bit of wisdom is given, if not at that moment, later in the day. Over the past couple of months, the words have all been similar: *Stay with me. Remain here with me. Watch and pray.* You may recognize these words from a Taizé song often sung at Maundy Thursday services. I said to the Holy One, "Well, what good is that going to do?" Yet, God compels me to sit still in quiet communion with the love that unceasingly flows through us all.

Do you remember how furious God was, when the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff necked they are." (Exodus 32:9) The people were waiting in the desert for Moses to return from his prolonged meeting with God. Tired of waiting and saying, "as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." Then they set about to make their own god. Aaron, Moses' brother, steps up to collect the people's gold jewelry. He melts and forms the gold in a mold and casts an image of a calf. Announcing that the golden calf is the god of the people of Isreal, they make plans for a festival the following day.

The people of God are notoriously impatient and stubborn as an ox who won't yield to the yoke. We are easily distracted and are attracted to shiny objects particularly in times of uncertainty and waiting. We are accustomed to clicking buttons to satisfy our desires. We are in a hurry to get where we want to go. We are addicted to producing, doing, and accomplishing. We expect instant gratification and want others to accommodate us. And we want to know what to do to take away our fear and suffering and change the way things are.

In times like this many of us would prefer a god we can control, a god without mystery, whom we can bribe to serve our desires. It is grueling to wait, to be uncertain, and to have little or no control over the events and conditions in our lives.

Let's step back to take another look at the disciples, who, in a crisis, were so fearful about the future that they closed their eyes to it and fell asleep. Jesus, like his Father in Heaven is let down by his followers.

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them. "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

(Matthew 26: 26-46, excerpts)



It seems we either try to take things into our own hands, or go unconscious, fiddling with our phones and fretting.

In the story of God's relationships with human beings we may overlook how much God needs us. In Exodus, we see a disappointed, furious God, who was depending on the people to be faithful, while Moses was away. And then, there is the heartsick, heartbroken Jesus begging for his friends to stay with him and pray in his hour of need.

For many years before beginning to preach or teach or do some presentation, I would ask God, "What do you want me to tell the people?" I always heard, "Tell the people that I love them." One day I was invited

to speak to a women's luncheon in a small town in Kansas. As I was being introduced, I silently asked my question and heard, "Tell the people that I miss them."

Little makes one more vulnerable than love. Jesus, who came into this world to be with us on our terms, now desires us to return the favor and enter the realm of God on God's terms. You may know the anguish of rejection and the sting of unrequited love. Perhaps someone failed to show up in your hour of need.

I wonder if Jesus might sing along with Bob Dylan: *How does it feel to be a complete unknown, like a rolling stone?*

Here we meet the living, loving Creator who, becoming vulnerable, asks us to be vulnerable too.

The Holy One is more than an object who will give us things to meet our needs and take away our suffering. Not a golden calf of our making, this God is offering us a relationship of joyful loving mutuality.

As we give up knowing, we empty ourselves and make space for us to be known. In the silence and stillness God ceases to be an object and becomes an experience.

The periods of stalemate and impasse in our society and personal lives bring painful loss. Our desires and needs are unmet, frustrated or ripped out of our hands. Circumstances, often beyond our control, thrust us into a place of deep vulnerability, where we do not know what to do.

We are escorted by overwhelming events into the desolation of not knowing, not understanding, and not being able to fix what is wrong. We want to know *what's a-happening* and how to make it stop happening right now.

What is at stake here is our need to control and to protect ourselves, which is to say our egos. The illusion of a separate ego self, a self that is the center of the universe, rather than part of the universe gets in our way. The ego exists to dominate what it perceives as enemies or threats.

As we begin to recognize this in ourselves and little by little let go of this part of ourselves, we find our peace and all we need to know in union with Christ. Instead of grasping for knowledge or power to elevate oneself,

one discovers the delight and joy of humility.

It is okay not to know what to do, to be confused, afraid, and angry. There is a time for unknowing. What appears as an impasse may only be a pause, preparing us for something new, something previously unimaginable to appear. Reaching the limits of our intelligence, institutions, technology and our way of doing things may be the cue for the Holy Spirit to appear. Could we let go of our anxious need to know and do something for a while? Could knowing Love and being known by Love be enough and that all we need to know will be supplied? Could we empty ourselves of our egos and golden calves to create space for the selfless love of Christ to dwell?

> *To find peace and happiness we have to let go of the effort to know, because we really don't know.*
> Adyshanti

God needs our love. Love needs to have love returned. Love exists in relationships which require the give- and-take, a shared exchange with one another. We see and know God and our ourselves through these relationships, where we make each other possible.

We hold in our hearts and hands a self-giving love more precious than the rare metals in Ukraine or all the money in the world. Nothing can steal or contaminate it. This love is the source of our compassion, our desires for justice, truth, and the well-being of all forms of life. This vulnerable love both weeps with us and is the healing we seek. Its reach and power are beyond our imagination.

Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.

Psalm 32: 10



We cannot bring peace, justice, and truth into our world unless these gifts reside within us. We need to act from a place of quiet confidence in the ever-evolving will of God. Let us trust not in our technology, knowledge or wealth, but in life's surging energy and resilience, the fire of love, and the power of God pulsing in our blood.

Loretta F Ross



Outward effort for peace and justice is fruitful only when it is part of a profound inward change in a person's basic awareness of life.

- Tao

THE Praying Life

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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

Thank you so much for our time together Friday. As I was spending time with God this morning, I read your Autumn newsletter, my dream certainly lined up with the thoughts that you shared in your writing. Having a place to go that speaks my language is so good. It does help with that sense of isolation.

- Vicky

The Sanctuary heals me. It has brought peace and serenity to me in the chaos of the twenty-first century by regularly reminding me of the serenity that comes from the stability of following the teachings and life of Jesus in good and difficult times.

- Ron

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.

Explicit in the Tao Teh Ching, there is a sense of reality implicit in all prophetic scripture, a sense that sees the penetration of physical creation by spiritual force: not the existence side by side of two distinct realms, but their acting together in the single realm of reality.

- Herrymon Maurer. T*he Way of Ways, Tao*. Published in the Fellowship of Prayer, Vol 33, July 1982, Princeton, New Jersey

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

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