

Mid-week Reflection #12
The Final One (for now)
June 22, 2020
By The Rev. Nancy Yee

Greetings in the Name of the One who Redeems All Things!

This crazy world and this crazy life continues. I hope, in the midst of the world's craziness, you have experienced God's love. I hope God has come to you bearing the fruit of the Spirit in your inner being (Galations 5:22-23) which is love, joy, peace, forbearance (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. I hope in the past 12 weeks, your fear, anxiety, worry, frustration has lessened, not because you've become used to living in the middle of a pandemic. Or that you're fine with the other shenanigans in the world (I won't say his name!) to the south of us. I hope your fears, anxieties, worries and frustrations have lessened because you've allowed God to dwell in your hearts.

To be sure, if you allow these four horses of the emotional apocalypse to enter into your heart, you will find it nearly impossible to have spiritual fruit be born in you. So let go. Let God. Surrender all into God's care. Rest and wait, trusting in God's goodness. It's a daily practice and challenge to fight off those negative attitudes and feelings. It takes diligence to say no to sin.

But, God's heart and will is this: that you know God's love for you, that He desires nothing more than to dwell in your very inner being by the Holy Spirit. When you let God in Jesus abide in you and you in God, you will know nothing less than God's joy.

But, letting God live in you might be too scary. Scary, you say?! Is it frightening to let the Living God dwell in your innermost being, you ask?? Yes, yes, a thousand times yes!!! If God can shake nations, imagine what God can do in your heart and spirit! More than you can ask or imagine, I'd say!

One of my favourite quotes about the living God in the midst of us is from Annie Dillard. She writes:

*On the whole, I do not find Christians,
outside of the catacombs,
sufficiently sensible of conditions.
Does anyone have the foggiest idea
what sort of power we so blithely invoke?
Or, as I suspect,
does no one believe a word of it?
The churches are children
playing on the floor with their chemistry sets,
mixing up a batch of TNT
to kill a Sunday morning.
It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats
and velvet hats to church;
we should all be wearing crash helmets.*

*Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares;
they should lash us to our pews.
For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense,
or the waking god may draw us out
to where we can never return.*

To blithely invoke the name of our God is to risk transformation and/or destruction – destruction of the old, the worn, the tired, the decayed. For our God will never let death and destruction get the best of Him. Our God is light and life and will always, always, always work to redeem and make new anything that is dead and forgotten, even in your hearts. Believe me when I say this.

Scripture is full of the faith accounts of ordinary people worshipping and loving and disobeying the extraordinary God of creation. No matter what we do or don't do, God will always love, always save and always call us forth into newness of life. As Barbara Brown Taylor says, "If God is with us, nothing else matters. If God is not with us, nothing else matters." Our lives, no matter how much we've sinned, is in God's forgiving hands. We are called to live into that forgiveness and love. God doesn't want us to spend a day without knowing God's love, mercies and compassion. God treats us with loving-kindness, even when we don't treat one another, or ourselves, the same way. God is for us. And if God is for us, our lives become these amazing things of light to the world. We just have to believe! Remember that Mary Oliver poem I told you about a few reflections back? If the Living God touched your inner being, then, where would your wild and precious life be and what would you do with it?

This is my last reflection, for now. I'm taking a hiatus. I sense the Spirit moving me on to something else. I can't quite put my finger on why these writings are ending at this time. There may be several reasons for taking a break. There may be only one reason. There may be no reason at all. I don't know for sure. I just know that as my soul has been impacted by the self-isolation, and in my contemplations, I have a deeper sense of the Holy Spirit. And, I sense the Spirit is moving on and I must follow. Given my soul experiences in the last while, I do not ever want to miss those inner nudgings by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the Giver of all Life and when the Spirit says move on, I will obey. To disobey God's Spirit, to grieve or to quench the Spirit is to be chained to death. And, I need LIFE, the life of God coursing through my being, for that is joy and sweetness to my soul!

As I have entered into a more contemplative phase of my ministry and life, and as I continue to read about how to live the contemplative life in a more urban 21st century, I found a review of the movie, *Paterson*. I won't get into what the movie is about here. You can Google the movie and read about it yourself. It has excellent reviews and stars Adam Driver and directed by Jim Jarmusch. It came out in 2016 but you can watch it on a variety of streaming platforms. If you don't know what streaming is, ask your grandchildren!

The *Paterson* review was written by Stephen Copeland, an author and storyteller. His movie review is titled, "The Most Contemplative Movie I've Ever Seen." He concluded his review with some words that deeply resonated with my soul. I took his very articulate and eloquent phrases and made them my personal mantra. I added a few of my own words to his. This is what I came up with:

I'm a very emotional person who, in a sense, might always feel misunderstood and tortured in my soul because I do not feel like I belong in the world (and/or the church) —yet I eagerly look for those things that remind me **I can detach myself from the world, make my own rules in the world, and simultaneously rest in the spaces of belonging, security, and safety that are available through people, partners, and divine encounters in the world.** I look for those things, people, places, ideas and self-action that inspire me to see the beauty and depth in the seemingly insignificant moments of the passing day, where there is a deep peace, contentment, and joy existing in the ordinary and mundane. And I am working to avoid those things that try to steal, kill and destroy the abundant life that Jesus came to give me and all who seek truth and life in this broken world. Amen.

I have come through the dark night of the soul and God in God's love and mercy has given God's Spirit to counsel and guide me. I sense a deeper integration of all those fragmented parts of me into a more content whole self. Now, I sense, that after these past few months of self-isolation and inner struggle, I know what Paul means when he says in Philippians 4:11-13, "... I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

ANXIETY

It's been said we are living in an Age of Anxiety. We humans were an anxious lot even before the pandemic. But, now, with the pandemic still going on unabated, the anxiety is exacerbated.

Granted, mental health experts say we've been less anxious these past couple of weeks. We are getting used to the daily lifestyle changes, social distancing, the isolation, going to get groceries only once/week, etc. But, the experts are also saying that worrying about themselves and loved ones in a pandemic makes us feel more lonely, depressed, anxious.

The statistics are concerning. Binge drinking remained the same at precovid level – 25% of people binge drink with men binge drinking more than women (5 or more drinks/episode). There's a blurring of the lines between working and leisure time with zoom cocktail hours. There are higher rates of loneliness in young people – social lives are confined more than ever. They connect on-line. But, more meaningful interactions happen face-to-face and they're missing out on these types of interactions. Our young people are feeling the stress. They're worried about the future, having missed their graduations and not being able to work in their chosen fields.

A common prayer for young people

God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I've also attached a couple of .pdf files containing other prayers for our children and youth. Please pray daily for your own children and grandchildren and for the youth of this generation.

Jobs

Losing jobs, not being able to find a job, poorly-paid jobs...the job situation is always a concern in our society. And, of course, the pandemic has made our job situation worse. Our governments have always been hyper-vigilant about the economy and jobs. Giving people the assurance that the economy is good and that the governments are about job creation is what keeps our political parties in power. Promise people jobs and they will vote for you. It's not to say jobs aren't important. But, in God's economy, jobs aren't the only consideration.

Here's a nice piece of writing about jobs and money from a Christian theologian, Frederick Buechner:

JOBS ARE WHAT PEOPLE DO for a living, many of them for eight hours a day, five days a week, minus vacations, for most of their lives. It is tragic to think how few of them have their hearts in it. They work mainly for the purpose of making money enough to enjoy their moments of not working.

If not working is the chief pleasure they have, you wonder if they wouldn't do better just to devote themselves to that from the start. They would probably end up in breadlines or begging, but, even so, the chances are they would be happier than they would be pulling down a good salary as a bank teller or a dental technician or a supermarket bagger and hating every minute of it.

"What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?" asks the Preacher (Ecclesiastes 1:3). If people are in it only for the money, the money is all they gain, and when they finally retire, they may well ask themselves if it was worth giving most of their lives for. If they're doing it for its own sake—if they enjoy doing it and the world needs it done—it may very possibly help to gain them their own souls.

-Originally published in *Whistling in the Dark* and later in *Beyond Words*

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Mental health issues impacts everyone. But, God's Word, taken to heart, will put our anxiety in perspective. And, if we consistently put God's Word into practice, on a daily basis, our anxieties will slowly disappear. I've heard that one of the best bible verses to meditate on for anxiety is Philippians 4:4-8.

Final Exhortations

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

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OTHER STUFF

Here is one of my favourite websites. It's a website full of spiritual riches. Suzanne reflects on the weekly Sunday lectionary, guides the reader through a series of reflections on the Sunday readings and offers up a smorgasbord of quotes from spiritual giants of the past.

<http://www.edgeofenclosure.org/>

This is another quote from Frederick Buechner.

Jewels

"YOU WERE IN EDEN, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering," the Lord said to the king of Tyre, "carnelian, topaz, and jasper, chrysolite, beryl, and onyx; sapphire, carbuncle, and emerald." But then, as the Lord goes on to explain, because the king fell from innocence into sin, "I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and the guardian cherub drove you out from the midst of the stones of fire" (Ezekiel 28:13,16).

One way or another, we have all fallen like the king. Yet we all also carry within us a memory of Eden. It is perhaps why jewels fascinate us so and why we value them above almost all things. In their starry depths we see glimmers of where we have come from and also of where, according to ancient prophecy, we are going: the city whose "walls are... chrysoprase... jacinth... amethyst... and the twelve gates... twelve pearls... and the street... gold" (Revelation 21:19-21).

-Originally published in *Wishful Thinking* and later in *Beyond Words*

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This quote nicely leads into this video. It's more for women, but I think the men in our lives need to know God's love for them and that they, too, are jewels, in God's crown and kingdom. <https://youtu.be/uWi5iXnguTU>

What Really Matters in life

And here's a perfect way to end this reflection ... with a reflection on death, dying and new beginnings. I've attached an article on Dr. BJ Miller with this email. It's a long article worth reading about how his life changed in an electrifying instant.

This is Dr. Miller in a TED Talk.

<https://youtu.be/apbSsILLh28>

Well, I hoped you have enjoyed my reflections and in some small way, you have been built up, edified and encouraged. I hope to see you all soon, as God wills, as the government allows and as the bishop supports.

**May the God of New Life pour out blessing upon blessing
to refresh your soul, renew your spirit and keep your body strong.**

**May your summer days in this pandemic be filled with joy
and may your spiritual eyes be opened to God's wonder.
And may God redeem your loneliness, fears, anxieties and worries
so you can heartily give thanks for all that He has done for you.**

**Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—
and the greatest of these is love.**

1 Cor 13.13

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YF0yla2U3p8>

10 minutes of inspirational, spiritual encouragement

Have faith!

