



FINDING A STILL CENTRE

In the midst of our busy lives
A quiet place in the heart of our community
December 5th 2021

Music on arrival: Gloria - II The Prayer Laudamus Te (Karl Jenkins)

<https://youtu.be/teb9QJWEitA>

Opening Prayer:

Whenever we gaze into a crib this Christmas season
May new hope and joy flood our spirit
Whenever we watch babies and young children playing
May a new energy delight our hearts
Whenever we are tantalized by the aroma of a bbq
May we unwind, relax and enjoy time off
Whenever we provide a meal or bed over the holidays
May we experience love and appreciation
When we spy our reflection in the mirror or pool
May we find ourselves to be images of God
Whenever we put our feet up for leisure
May the humble presence of the Incarnate One companion us
Whenever we feel our distance from family and friends and all humanity
May the Christ child draw us into unity.

"Act Love Walk" Ann L Gilroy rsj and others. P. 49 (Adapted)



Backwoods Mama

Lectio Divina: Ecclesiastes ch 3 v 1-8 (NRSV)

Context and background:

The book of Ecclesiastes has sparked much debate as to its authorship and whether indeed it is written by one person. What seems clear according to E.T. Ryder is that the influence of a strongly individualistic mind is evident, and that the writer blends his inherited religious faith, with a spirit of critical enquiry and a poetic phrasing. This is likely in keeping with the manner of teaching at that time.

This very rational approach seems to distinguish between theoretical and practical wisdom and suggests that God has so fashioned the human heart that it cannot understand what God is doing. His view of human beings is that they can only stand in awe of God's overarching mystery and power. Writing in the Hellenistic period in the second half of the 3rd Century BC, the author does not experience the hope, relationship and divine generosity which is more embodied in 1st Century writings after the birth of Christ.

Nevertheless, this passage is well known and quoted as it speaks to much human experience, and preserves divine mystery.

For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones
together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sow;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.



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Centering Prayer and time of silence

Music for meditation: The Lord Bless You and Keep You (John Rutter)

<https://youtu.be/gmylZ7Cy7Hs>

Closing Prayer: Practice Hope

Dare to practice Hope
Dare to let the assurance steal upon you
that something is coming,
something greater,
deeper, not merely more, but more so.

This is not cheap optimism
that can be bought in any market,
nor a careful figuring of odds
that can always be beat,
nor mindless abandon.

I mean attentiveness to the
dense but dappled energy
that rises within. I mean willingness
to be taken up,
to be wielded deftly in this rough world
by an art which is beyond you.

You are a thread in a tapestry
too large for you to ever see,
a single leaf in springtime.
Practice hope:
let summer unfurl itself in you
and then, only afterward,
will you know the miracle of which
already you are a living sign.

"Practice Hope" by Steve Garnaas-Holmes. Published in Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life, Vol.XXV11, Number 2, p23.

Blessing

May God, who offers us
the wholeness of creation
the tenderness of Christ,
and the challenge of the Holy Spirit
Bless and direct us,
challenge and change us,
and keep us close. Amen.

"Lifting Women's Voices, Prayers to change the world, p383, (by Aldwyn Marriage).

Reading

The Donkey's Prayer

They had no use for us
this year, the year of the lock-down.

No crowds, no waving of palms,
no processions.

We're used to being overlooked.
Passersby fuss over the pretty ponies.

We stay in the corner of the field,
heads bowed, bearing the shame.

They've never had much use for you,
either, for all the hullabaloo.

They pushed you out
to a stinking rubbish tip,

strung you up and waited
for your body to gasp its last.

But we carried you:
at the beginning

in your mother's arms,
and again on your final entry to the city.

Though they have forgotten us,
we will not forget you.

Should you need us again,
our backs are ready to bear the weight.

Nicola Slee

*To be published in Abba, Amma:
Improvisations on the Lord's Prayer
(Canterbury Press, 2021)*

Guidance sheet for Lectio meditation

Begin by taking a moment to adjust your posture so you are comfortable yet upright, notice your breath....as it comes and goes...

Sit with each phase for 5 minutes.

1: As you read the text for the first time simply notice what strikes you, (*positively and/or negatively*) **about the reading itself.** What stands out or resonates? Mull over what strikes you most about the passage itself? What might your responses as a listener of this time be?

2: Meditatio (Meditation)

As you read the text for the second time notice what resonates this time, as you allow the passage to speak to you and your life today? How might this relate to you? Notice your responses, your thoughts and feelings. What comes to your mind? Allow yourself to dwell meditatively and compassionately on whatever arises.

3) Oratio (Prayer) and **Contemplatio** (Contemplation)

In this third phase after you read the text, silently share your thoughts, and responses with God responding simply with heart and mind. Speak to God quietly within, about any new word spoken and any desires it has stirred in you. Is there any action the Spirit may be calling you to consider? Listen for God's response. True prayer calls for honesty with ourselves and transparency before God. Rest in quiet awareness of God's presence.

Guidance for Prayer of the heart

Centering Meditation, or Prayer of the Heart, simply sitting quietly with an open heart, in God's presence for 20 minutes.

1) In preparation

-pay attention to your breathing, simply noticing your breath come and go.

-choose a word, or a phrase, as your 'sacred word' for this evening.¹

This '**sacred word**' gives an anchor for the mind, to help you let go of all that gets in the way of deeply opening to God.

You may invite a word, image or phrase to arise within you. A fresh image of God may draw you, perhaps a word or phrase from the opening prayer. Give yourself a moment now to choose your sacred word or phrase for tonight.

2) Begin by silently saying your sacred word or the phrase you have chosen, rhythmically and repetitively within.

3) When distractions or thoughts arise, simply notice them and let them go gently. Simply return to your word or phrase in an attitude of consent, or saying Yes to God. Imagine the distractions are clouds floating gently across the sky and let them go.

4) Should the word or phrase drop away, rest effortlessly in the silence and loving presence.

'Learning to Let Go'

The theological basis for Centering Prayer lies in the principle of kenosis, Jesus's self-emptying love that forms the core of his own self-understanding and life practice. . . .

Centering Prayer is a devotional practice, placing ourselves in God's presence and quieting our minds and hearts, but as Cynthia Bourgeault explains, it doesn't only work on that level. What the desert abbas and ammas, the author of the Cloud of Unknowing, and even Thomas Keating could not have known when he formally started teaching the practice five decades ago, was that it works on a physiological level as well, strengthening neural pathways, and making "letting go" that much easier. When it comes to releasing our strong preferences, especially our desire for power and control, it seems safe to say that some practice of kenosis (the act of letting go) is necessary for any movement forward.

The gospels themselves make clear that [Jesus] is specifically inviting us to this journey and modeling how to do it. Once you see this, it's the touchstone throughout all his teaching: Let go! Don't cling! Don't hoard! Don't assert your importance! Don't fret. "Do not be afraid, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!" (Luke 12:32). And it's this same core gesture we practice in Centering Prayer: thought by thought by thought. You could really summarize Centering Prayer as *kenosis in meditation form*. . . .

Every time we manage to let go of a thought in Centering Prayer, "consenting to the presence and action of God within," the gesture is actually *physically embodied*. It's not just an attitude; something actually "drops and releases" in the solar plexus region of your body, a subtle but distinct form of interior relaxation. . . . **And in time**, this gentle and persistent "inner aerobics," undertaken under the specific banner of Centering Prayer and in solidarity with Jesus's own kenotic path, will gradually establish that "mind of Christ" within you as your own authentic self.

Richard Rohr's Daily meditation 14.08.21