

North American Newsletter

Spring, 2020

The Redemption of Distance

Rev. Gisela Wielki

Now that we can no longer go to the gym there are other muscles to train. One of these is the ‘distancing muscle.’ In acting this is the art of stretching the distance between two actors on stage without letting the space between them go slack — or dead. In music, it is the art of stretching time, without completely losing the pulse. Today we are all being asked to practice social distancing. This does not mean that we should no longer face the world or each other. On the contrary. On a walk we can choose a tree in the distance, a flower on the ground, or a person — and enter into this space between ourselves and the other with conscious attention. Most likely we will first experience this space as an empty space, maybe even a dead space. However, if we decide to turn our attention to it, increasing and decreasing the consciousness we brings to it, we can learn to flex this attention like a muscle. We may even eventually begin to feel this in-between space become alive and take on a certain bounce or even a very subtle vibrating sensation to it. We can then try to see how far we can stand apart from someone and still feel this in-between space stay alive. In human relationships this space is often either suffocated — by being too close, or starved — by being too far apart. In both cases this in-between space is unable to breathe properly when not filled with that intentional consciousness, that attentive interest called love in its purest state. The French philosopher, mystic and political activist, Simone Weil wrote: “God created through love and for love. He did not create anything except love for itself and the means for love. He created love in all its forms. He created beings capable of love from all possible distances. Because no other could do it, he himself then went to the greatest possible distance, the infinite distance. This infinite distance between God and God, this supreme tearing apart, this agony beyond all others, this marvel of love, is the crucifixion.” And he did so for all of humanity to be held by His love within that distance, that in-between space, that divinely human, humanly divine space between.



The Corona of the Sun

Rev. Rafal Nowak

Sermon given on the first Sunday in Passiontide, when the Pandemic was beginning in the US.



Perhaps no other natural phenomenon is as equally terrifying and awe-inspiring as a total eclipse of the sun.

For a moment, in the middle of a sunny day, everything around us – the whole life of nature – is at a standstill. It is as if a great cosmic grave stone is rolled against the source of life, shutting us off from the grace of light and joy. Even the buzzing of insects and the singing of birds ceases.

And it is in this brief moment – the moment of separation from the source – that something extraordinary happens: the corona of the sun, normally invisible to our eye, is seen glowing majestically against the contrast of the dark disc of the moon. The sun, the giver of life and happiness, is seen wearing the crown exactly at the moment when its countenance is filled with paralyzing darkness.

What has happened to our lives in the course of just a few days is the solar eclipse of our social body. Millions of human beings all over the globe have suddenly become aware of the shadow side of our modern, civilized life. Fear of death, fear of the unknown, fear of the invisible illness creeping into our lives has brought our social life to a standstill. A tiny particle, a virus, has in just the course of a few days dethroned the uncontested crown of creation, filling our thoughts with darkness, filling our hearts with fear.

But it is exactly at a time like this, when on some level we all have to cope with the alienating and atomizing effects of fear, when we must all confront our anxieties and vulnerabilities as human beings, when our faith and hope may be shaken to the core – that the world needs examples, that the world needs witnesses to our highest. It is then that we can act as the apostles of the Christ-Sun in the world around us.

When we break bread with one another, when we share a good word with our neighbors, when we – in kindness and genuine concern – ask one another “Friend, What ails you?” – something of His Light, His Life, and His Love streams into our everyday life. And the darkness is filled with His presence, like the rays of sun of our higher, noble humanity.

For it is exactly in the hour of darkness, exactly in the hour of the eclipse, when our stars may become visible. Filling our social space with their calm, wise, motherly shining, they remind us

Eclipse, Wyoming, 2017. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

that they are always there, even when we can't see them, like guardian angels looking after us, bearing our destiny under their wings. They fill us with peace and confidence in our ability to find the way even in the face of adversities.

Then even the fear of death, the fear of loss, and the fear of doom – which like a corona of thorns has suffocated the heart of our social life – may turn into a bright, color-filled halo of resurrection. It may become the crown of the future social body, the crown of the Risen One, in us.

Camp Harmony Lake in Maine is ON!

Rev. Carol Kelly

We can only imagine how great it will be to be 'free again!' Our children will be happier than ever to get to camp, and our parents will be glad to have a little peace and quiet too.

August 6-22, please register! campharmonylake.org

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to live in community, to sing together, to make new friends while keeping the old, to share so many wonderful activities, meals, artistic work, nature and hilarity with a loving group of people of all ages. What a gift! It is time to give our children something to look forward to.

An Invitation to Help: There will be some of us who receive the 'stimulus' check of \$1,200 who will not necessarily need it. If you are one of those individuals, would you consider donating it to camp so that a child in need could attend? This would be a great gift and a way to turn this sad occurrence into something positive.



Please send all inquiries to
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Hear My Voice

Rev. Michael Latham

Being called a sheep is usually meant as an insult. It means being compliant, lacking individuality, blindly following without discernment. Sheep, however, may disagree. They are highly adaptive to almost any environment; from desert plains to snowy mountain sides. They are very social: gathering in small groups within the flock and, when sensing danger, intuitively seeking the protection of the gathered flock. They are also highly sensitive in hearing. They will follow the voice of the one who protects them, feeds them and cares for them. They come to know that voice.

As children we followed those who looked out and cared for us: parents, teachers, guardians, became our leading voice. They led us towards the freedom and responsibilities of adulthood. In taking ownership of our actions in life, through impulses, desires and thoughts, we see that we have been guided by a voice that lives in us. Perhaps our souls are able to know whose voice this is. That which we call the soul, however, is a complex organism; multi-layered, with different “sheaths” or aspects, straddling the doorway between the earth and the heavens. Many voices sound out with specific intentions from these worlds. Whose voice, then, do we follow?

Jesus, in this gospel reading, gives his disciples a picture of a voice to follow: the voice of the good shepherd. Perhaps we can sense that this voice has been there with us at some moments in our lives. Yet at other times, especially when faced with danger or during times of struggles, we may hear a voice in us and ask, “Is this the voice to follow? Do I recognize the sound of this voice?”

The tenth chapter of the John gospel as a whole, has a similar mood to that of Holy Tuesday. It is filled with contentious arguments, chaos surrounding him almost erupting into violence. Jesus is judged by loud voices, questioning him, seeking clarity in their own way. Yet we can sense that in the parable he tells the disciples, and in its explanation to them, there is a voice of calm assurance. He draws their attention inwards. He creates an expansive inner space where they can hear his voice of clarity, discernment and peace. This voice of the good shepherd, his voice, is the voice to follow he tells them, not those voices that want to snatch us away and kill us. This voice leads, through the door of the fold, to pastures green: to that which will sustain us in all worlds. We have to be alert, however; conscious of the voice we follow; willing to be guided.



Christ as the Good Shepherd by Lucas Cranach.
Image from Wikimedia Commons.

Do we recognize this voice in us? Do we hear a voice that leads to an expanding inner space where we find calm reassurance?

God's name – I AM – is that voice. But it has to appear in us through active attention, listening for and working out from its qualities. The qualities of the good shepherd.

'The Lord is my Shepherd' : a psalm so rich in comforting and healing forces, that it sings out with the voice of the good shepherd. The Lord - The I AM - is my shepherd.

Are we called to be a good shepherd also?

A good shepherd gathers all of his sheep to lead them to pastures where they can be sustained. A good shepherd cares for every single one of his flock, he knows each one of them. A good shepherd has an all-encompassing consciousness for the scattered flock. The I AM in us is the good shepherd. It leads the complex flock of our being to the healing forces that sustain us.

This I AM or – 'that which speaks the I in me' – creates an expansive inner space in the midst of chaos. It speaks to us clearly, calmly. Its sound is hope-filled, healing directed. Non-judgmental inwardly, and outwardly, it seeks the eternal over the temporal. As we discern this voice in us, again and again, we come to trust in it. And when we follow it, speaking and acting out of it, we learn to become the good shepherd.

As we learn to trust this voice, we gather the complex flock of our own inner being. We unite with those trusting in this voice also, and gathering together we pray.



Scattered as we are right now, in the sense of being isolated in our homes, it is comforting to know that here on earth, spread throughout the world, the Good Shepherd will be herding us together with His voice resounding out of the Act of Consecration. And the sound of that voice, penetrating into the air around our earth with that all-encompassing consciousness, will unite us in prayer as we look towards Him, hear Him and follow Him.

The Good Shepherd by Henry Ossawa Tanner.
Image from Wikimedia Commons.

A Letter from our Regional Coordinator (Lenker)

Rev. Craig Wiggins

Dear Christian Communities in North America,

The year 2020 will undoubtedly go down in history with two nicknames that begin with the letter 'C': corona and covid.

All of our congregations had to make tough decisions about how to respond to this world-wide phenomenon that was, in one way or another, knocking at everyone's door. The United States and Canada being governed as they are, with 50 states plus the District of Columbia and 13 provinces and territories, each congregation had to discover what the worldly regulations expected of them. At the same time, we all reached higher up and asked our community angel: "How shall we do this?" Consequently, each congregation came up with its own solution: some locked up completely, celebrating the Act of Consecration and the Children's Service in empty sanctuaries, others found ways to admit very small numbers of worshippers under stringent conditions. Inspiring stories have reached me, how members and friends found ways to participate in the rituals spiritually from home, creating a connection that sometimes felt stronger than if they had been there in person. Along with the services, many found their way to the Internet to continue or start study groups or give contemplations. At this writing, the development of the disease in our region is still uncertain, as is the lifting of restrictions.

While 'stay-at-home' is the great catch word of this moment, a movement of priests is imminent. Although our region may be far flung geographically, when one priest moves, it affects us all.

On the first Sunday in Advent Rev. Hugh Thornton was introduced to his new sending in Wuerzburg, Germany.

We are very happy to welcome Rev. Michael Latham, who was ordained in Stuttgart on February 14 of this year. He has since arrived in his new sending, San Francisco. We wish him and his community many blessings and inspiration. A festive introduction will have to wait until after the corona crisis. Great thanks go to Rev. Erk Ludwig, who carried responsibility for the San Francisco congregation since undersigned moved to Chicago.

Revs. Emma Heirman and Matthias Giles will move to Washington DC/Baltimore: After her ordination in Germany in 2016, Rev. Heirman arrived at her first sending in Denver to work together with Rev. James Hindes. After Emma's spouse Rev. Matthias Giles was ordained in 2019, he joined the Denver priest circle. Now that the time has come once again to look at the whole of The Christian Community in our region, the Circle of Seven has decided to send Emma and Matthias to the congregation in Washington DC/Baltimore. There they will be responsible for an active local congregation which has growing affiliates in Atlanta, GA and Chapel Hill, NC. Their move will take place around the beginning of July. We are very grateful to Rev.

Hindes, as he has agreed to take on responsibility for the Denver congregation for a temporary period.

Rev. Carol Kelly will move to Hillsdale, New York: Rev. Kelly was ordained in Forest Row, England in March of 2001 and worked as a priest in Spring Valley for 10 years before coming to Washington DC. After the death of Rev. Richard Dancey, she has carried the priestly work in this very active congregation. She has also carried regional youth work, the children's camp and the ASK2020 Atlanta conference. The Circle of Seven has decided to send Carol to the Taconic-Berkshire Community. This will be effective after the Children's Camp in August. Carol will be returning to her 'home congregation,' Taconic-Berkshire, where she became a member of The Christian Community in 1986.

Rev. Liza Joy Marcato will move to New York City: Rev. Marcato was ordained in Germany in February 2008. Her first sending was to Erlangen, Germany. Since September 2010, she has served the congregation in Hillsdale, New York and its affiliates and led the bi-annual East Coast Youth Conferences with various colleagues. The Circle of Seven has decided to send Rev. Liza Joy Marcato to New York City. She will conclude her work in Hillsdale and its affiliates in July and take time for moving as well as a short sabbatical. Liza will begin work in New York City at the beginning of Advent.

And a retirement: Concurrent with the sending of Rev. Marcato to New York City, Rev. Gisela Wielki will enter retirement. Rev. Wielki was ordained on November 15, 1970 in Munich, Germany and has served the New York Community since 1972, except for a period of service at the Priest Seminary in Chicago. While stepping back from active responsibility for the community, she will still participate in a reduced manner in the life of the congregation and in serving at the altar. With more free time she is looking forward to cultivating some of her interests that have taken a back seat for many years, to occasionally helping out in other congregations, as well as travel with her partner, Madelon, and visiting congregations in other countries or continents!

After her retirement, Rev. Franziska Hesse has helped out in New Zealand and, for a time, carried responsibility for the Spring Valley congregation. Now that Rev. Paul Newton has come to Spring Valley, Rev. Hesse will retire to Harlemville, NY and support the Taconic-Berkshire community as needed.

My good thoughts and fervent prayers accompany all congregations who are saying farewell to priests and those who are welcoming them!

Rev. Craig Wiggins

The Power of our Hearts

Rev. Carol Kelly

And eight days later the disciples were again gathered in the inner room, and Thomas was there. The doors were locked. Then Jesus came, stood in their midst and said, 'Peace be with you.' And then He said to Thomas, "Stretch out your finger and see my hands, and stretch out your hand and place it in my side. Be not rigid in your heart; but rather feel my power in your heart." Then Thomas said to him, "You are the Lord of my soul, you are the God whom I serve." And Jesus said to him, "Have you found my power in yourself because you have seen me? Blessed are those who find my power in their hearts even when their eye does not see me." John 20:26-29

We find ourselves in a 'pandemic' far more dangerous than the Coronavirus: We are in a disease of untruthfulness on a scale not known to humanity before. Perhaps the profusion of lies has created the conditions for the widespread illness. It makes people physically ill to live with so many lies because they are in constant conflict with our true nature. We feel this as children, but then our hearts become, like Thomas', hardened to it.

Seeking for Truth and striving for the Spirit are one and the same. Both require a degree of inner activity, a healthy questioning, an acknowledgement that Spirit and Truth are not 'of this world.'

We believe in all kinds of things that we do not see, from atoms to germs to conspiracy theories to gravity. Why wouldn't we choose to believe in the good that we cannot see all around us also? If we are attuned to it we can certainly see its effects.

Thomas was not there at the crucifixion. The disciples had run away except for John and Mary. But Thomas somehow believes that Jesus has been crucified, based on hearsay. But when his best brothers, his closest friends, tell him that they have seen the Risen One, he cannot accept it.

Jesus says, blessed are those who have not seen him but feel His power in their hearts. What is that like to feel his power in your heart? To have the stone rolled away from your heart? It is to say "yes" to a future you do not control, in which you are giving way continuously to Christ in you. What effect does the conscious "letting go" have on the human self? It causes it to shine. It makes space for something higher and more true.

Did the disciples just go back to being the same human beings they were after Christ had risen? Is that even possible to consider? When the quarantine is over, will we go back to being just like we were? Or will we take this precious pause in our lives to allow ourselves to be moved and changed?

Let us believe with power in our hearts! Let us learn to say, "My Lord whom I serve" with every waking breath. Let us be ready to move and change as the spiritual world is asking us to do, to find the way, the truth and the life we are meant to be a part of.

On the Theme of World Peace

Rev. Cynthia Hindes

World peace is one of those umbrella states everyone wishes for. Yet despite lots of plans no one seems truly to know how to attain it. This is probably because world peace is an ideal whose time has not yet come. It is a goal that will only be attained in the future, if at all, and only after much work by the human community world-wide. Yet we must make a start now.

One of the problems seems to be that, like a lot of long-term goals, there are a lot of steps to be taken before one gets there. It is further complicated by the enormity of the project. And it is also burdened by the sense that world peace is something ‘out there’, external to oneself.

Like all projects, one begins with the end in mind. And one then takes the next most logical first step. My field of influence starts with me. And that would mean that the first step would be to check in with oneself, and assess how peace-filled I am. For most of us there quickly comes the realization that although one may live a relatively peaceful outer existence, our own inner life tells a different story. Stresses, anxieties, worries, upsets, and little inner explosions are part of our daily life. How, with my own inner turbulence, can I be contributing to peace in the world?

The first thing to be clear about is that inner peace is not an absence of soul movement, not a flat soul landscape where nothing happens; it is not an static absence of challenges, but rather a dynamic, active but calm overcoming of them. In other words, an inner paradox.

Rudolf Steiner recommends cultivating an inner habit of equanimity, a state of inner equilibrium (calm composure). Like maintaining our outer bodily balance, it doesn’t mean ceasing to move, but rather continuously finding and returning to a center. Inner equilibrium means we need to develop a degree of self-awareness, to catch ourselves in the act of falling, and to come back to the emotional center, the balance point again and again. It is a dynamic practice.

The path of cultivating inner equilibrium is itself fraught. For there are spiritual beings who feed off our fears, our emotional extremes. They have a vested interest in keeping us from finding and operating out of a calm center. But we also have help from positive spiritual beings.

At Easter, after His resurrection Christ appears behind locked doors to his disciples. They are huddled together in the depths of fear and grief. And he says to them “Peace be with you.” (Luke 24:19) “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you’ ...and when he had said this, he breathed upon them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’ ” John 20:21-22

After all the unspeakable agonies he had gone through, he had achieved the ultimate calm center. This deep center is where He dwells. From this deep center he radiates peace, exhales peace, inspires peace. It is He who inhabits the deep center of every human being. Finding our own center means ultimately finding his help in the evolution of world peace. Finding our center means establishing world peace, one soul at a time.

The Breath of Life

Rev. Gisela Wielki

The two most powerful acts of breathing occur at birth and death. Ours is a life journey from breathing in to breathing out. I have never been with a newborn taking their first breath. I have been with people taking their last breath, the final exhalation and the unearthly silence that follows when airborne the soul is released from the body. To witness the cessation of life is a breathtaking, awe-inspiring moment. Spirit is embedded in the word ‘inspire.’

At present, the world is confronted with a virus that attacks the respiratory system not only of individuals but of humanity as a whole. It is airborne and reeks havoc in the act of breathing in and breathing out. It attacks the lungs, the organs that relate in a most intimate and contradictory fashion with our fellow human beings. It is the most social organ with a most antisocial after effect. When in the same space with another person, we cannot help but inhale each other’s breath. But we also happen to poison the environment with our breathing out. The greatest threat is the breath of the other person right now.

The Greek word ‘pneuma,’ as in pneumonia, has several meanings: air, wind, breath, spirit.

What is the present state of health of the breath, of the lungs of humanity, of the lungs of the earth? How much is the breath of humanity borne up by the spirit? How much is it weighed down, polluted by material concerns only? How can we enlist the help of the spirit to give us the inspirations needed to heal the lung organ, to heal the breath of the social body of humanity? Where can we find the source to help us create living social forms beyond the maintenance of our physical, material and transient existence? How can we come to breathe in concert with all who seek to affirm and manifest in thought, in word and in deed the reality of the spirit in each and every human being?

When He breathed his last on the cross, darkness fell upon the whole earth, enveloping it with a thundering silence. But when He appeared on the third day to the disciples as the Risen One, He breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit is the healing spirit, the world physician, the comforter, the counselor. The Holy Spirit is the breath of life the world needs. What a world we could create together if when in our breathing in of this holy, healing spirit we found one another breathing out together, inspired not to take life, but to give life — spirit borne, world transforming life.



Holy Spirit by Jakob Lazarus. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

How Can People Die ‘Before their Time’?

Rev. James Hinds

The Corona virus appears to be running wild in various parts of the world right now. Soon it may come your way. As a result, many people are giving a lot more thought to death, the how and when of its arrival. Is there a time for each of us? What can it mean when the young die? Can it be avoided by taking care so that accidents are less likely to happen?

There are those who say there are no accidents – it is all karma. Well, karma does preside over all that happens on earth. We know that everything we think, feel and do will have consequences, as B.B. King puts it, “a little further down the road.” Those consequences may arrive in a future life when we have lost all memory of our original action. So, anything that happens could be an inevitable karmic result of past deeds. But freedom is also a part of our daily life. And we know that accidents do indeed happen. Maybe we have even seen them unfolding. Someone blinks, or day dreams and control is lost. Gravity, the great enforcer, is always ready when wakefulness is in short supply. Most human lives are visited by tragedy at some point. Then, too often, all that can be said is: it was an accident. Clearly, from our personal experience here on earth it is simply false to say that there are no accidents. We could, indeed pass away ‘before our time.’ But does every human being have an appointed time to die?

Let’s consider this question from a Biblical perspective. In Jesus Christ’s farewell discourse to the disciples he speaks of the time when “Heaven and earth will pass away...” (Mark 13:31). He is speaking of the death of the earth; or, if you will, a metamorphosis so majestic that the earth we experience today will be no more. What is the appointed time for this event? Jesus continues, “But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” (Mark 13:33) So there *is* a definite time for the death of the earth but only the Father God knows.

What is true for the earth altogether is true for those of us who live on it. Our time here is limited because the earth is only our school, heaven is our real home. With so much to learn we return to school again and again, always to acquire new capacities and knowledge. Furthermore, we are here also to teach one another, ultimately, to learn to love. How much we can acquire in one lifetime will vary a great deal from person to person. When we have absorbed as much as we can, when our strength to help or teach others is exhausted, our time has come to go home, to die. Then we work with the angels transforming our newly acquired knowledge into increased abilities to learn and love during our next sojourn at school.

So, there is some kind of an appointed time for our departure from our earthly existence, even if only the Father God knows. But this sounds a lot like “there are no accidents,” a notion that contradicts everyday experience. We know that accidents do happen and that they sometimes lead to what is clearly an untimely death. How can this contradiction be resolved?

Actually, it is a contradiction only for a materialistic perspective that thinks of eternity as earthly time extended infinitely into the future. Eternity is better thought of as a spiritual 'place' existing outside time. Time, as we know it in our physical world, exists only here on earth. The Father God exists, lives, abides in eternity, outside time. To say that he 'knows' the time of someone's death does not mean that a time and date are entered in some celestial calendar that directly corresponds to earthly calendars. It means that he perceives it from eternity and it 'instantaneously' becomes part of a much larger story. From the perspective of eternity, the moment something terrible happens, something obviously not in God's current 'learning plan' for someone, that event is taken up by the Father, he 'knows.' In that instant, with his hands, which are the Holy Spirit's nine hierarchies of angels, the Father reaches right down to our individual guardian angels to conceive and work out another plan incorporating and transforming what is (was) a disaster here on earth. This wisdom of the Spirit at work in the hierarchies is sometimes called Holy Sophia. Any earthly disruption of human destinies immediately become a step on karmic paths that leads us forward to fulfill a greater plan, a more encompassing karma. Present and future earthly sojourns are transformed as such souls leave school perhaps early and then return again to earth at a rescheduled earthly date.

Then, it comes down to us here during our lifetimes to learn as much as we can, to love as much as we can and to endure the blows of destiny that may come our way. But we have heavenly help even here. For it is the Son God in Jesus Christ, who brings us the divine power to become, to transform any earthly destiny, no matter how much death and how many accidents may befall us.



The Trinity, from the Grandes Heures (Book of Hours) commissioned by Anne of Brittany. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

Saying Yes

Meet our Newest Priest, Rev. Michael Latham

In key moments of our lives there are opportunities to say *yes* to our destiny, even though we may feel unable, unworthy or unsure if we we can can meet the challenge.

My first *yes*, was to be born in Inverness, Scotland where my religious questions regarding Jesus Christ were answered with a very traditional and rather dull interpretation of the “text” of the Bible. *Not* was beginning to live within me. My living sanctuary was in the mountains and lochs of Scotland that my grandfather unveiled for me. He never tired of that child questioning everything. He died when I was 12 years old, and his death brought me to a strong inner conviction, that as I talked to him at his grave, he was listening and could hear me beyond a threshold.

I left Scotland, studied in Wales, a new field of study (Human Movement Studies), incorporating biology, kinesiology, sociology and ethics. The relationship between the movement of body and movement of ideas became a lifelong fascination for me as a threshold experience to spiritual truths.

The second *yes* was to emigrate to the US when I was 21 years old without my family. I took some ballet lessons and became a dancer and choreographer. With my choreography I explored, through movement, the soul’s yearning to connect to the spirit.

Spiritual paths were explored in Sufism, Buddhism and various so-called new age movements. Yet, the inner living Christ never left me. I felt called to be a minister or priest, and began the process of application to a traditional theological seminary. A few months before beginning study, I googled “reincarnation and christianity”, found the Christian Community in NYC, and in the first few moments of the service, I breathed out and felt — here was a threshold experience filled with the living Christ.

After a few years I made my way to the US seminary in Chicago, then began an internship in Darmstadt, Germany after 1 year. Then on to Stuttgart Seminary for another year. When I left the Seminary in 2008, I returned to New York in 2009. Why did I leave? I was inwardly critical of my shortcomings and pushed myself to an absurd level of perfection — creating a very tense inner life. I had not really said *yes*.

On my return to the US I took a break from The Christian Community and gave up my idea of becoming a priest. I worked in business for several years developing a love for factual analysis.



I began to return more often to the service. I resumed serving. My inner life until then was being sustained with study, meditation and prayer. The Act of Consecration of Man enlivened me but what was this for? What was I supposed to do?

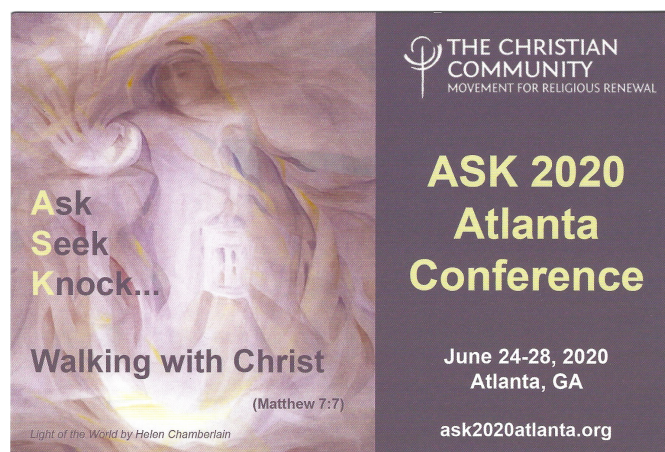
The third *yes*, was in 2018 when I was asked and given the opportunity to celebrate a wedding for a friend in Dornach. It was also a request to write the ceremony. After doing so, I revisited Darmstadt and its community, where the inner tension which previously lived within, had left me, and the spirit of community poured into me as though being bathed in light. The idea and reality of priesthood burst into flame. There is a need for the Sacraments and if I can serve the Christ in community, then I will say yes.

This fourth *yes* became reality when I was ordained on February 14th of this year. And the joy, blessings and power of that process to ordination is something that lives in me. It is a privilege to have found the renewed sacraments of Christian Community. It is a privilege to be able to serve at the altar. It is a great joy to be the sent by the Circle of Seven as the new resident priest to San Francisco. It is good to say yes.

ASK 2020 Conference Canceled

The planners for the ASK 2020 conference regret to announce that they have lost their venue (due to the Pandemic) and have had to cancel the conference.

We thank all who put so much time and effort into the planning process.



Pentecost (Whitsun) Today

Rev. Cynthia Hindes

Pentecost, the fiftieth day after Easter (or Whitsun, from the traditional White Sunday) marks a transition in the festival year. The previous festival seasons celebrated Christ's progressively deeper indwelling of the *individual* human body and soul of Jesus. At Whitsun, Christ sends the Spirit of His Father to indwell individuals who are gathered *in community*. Whitsun is a celebration of individuals gathered into a community for Christ. The community becomes Christ's new body, His new way of working on earth. This is especially the case when people are gathered in communal prayer, or, as the original event suggests, gathered in unity of heart and mind.¹ We can imagine the disciples in the upper room where the Last Supper had taken place, praying together. Perhaps they were singing Psalms, praying the proscribed prayers for the festival of Shavuot, all the while waiting for that Something that Christ had promised that He and the Father would send.

Acts 2:1 records the original event. *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.* (KJV) This opening verse describes the disciples being 'together in one place.' The literal Greek translation of 'being in one' signifies not only that they were together spatially, but also, and perhaps more importantly, inwardly, with one accord (as the King James version suggests). Being together inwardly is a practice we are encouraged to strengthen today, especially when we cannot be together spatially. Just as we imagine the disciples together then, we can imagine ourselves now to be together inwardly 'with one accord' at the same times the services are celebrated. The spatial dimension of being together then stretches out over greater reaches.

The voice of the Whitsun epistle read in the service is ours, a communal voice. We acknowledge that Christ sends the Father's Spirit of healing. We refer to this healing Spirit as a physician for the world's souls. In the act of consecrating ourselves, we ask that this world-healing Spirit unite with our offering, so that the weaknesses leading to infirmities of soul can be mitigated through Christ and made light through the Spirit.

This word 'Spirit' is perhaps something of a mystery. One can sense that by the word 'Spirit,' a living being is meant. But what is the essence of 'Spirit'?

I would suggest two things. First, among other things, Spirit Being has something to do with states or levels of *consciousness*. As a child, one has an intense awareness of what one sees, what one feels. The child's consciousness lives strongly in the here and now, in the moment. Yet the child usually experiences adults, particularly parents and teachers, as beings who are greater than itself. The adult has a higher and broader awareness and knowledge of the past and future world, and the child's momentary and future place in it.

If we transpose this expansion of awareness to the world of angelic beings, we can imagine that the consciousness of an angel is even higher and broader than the human's. And as we move up

¹ Acts 2:1. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. (KJV)

the ladder of the hierarchies to the Trinity above, the degree and breadth and width of awareness becomes unimaginable. The Divine is aware of everything.

Spirit is further characterized not only by its breadth and degree of awareness but also by its *quality*. Our language, for example, speaks of a spirit of fellowship, or of being mean-spirited. The Holy Spirit is God's consciousness. The Father's Spirit is filled with the quality of unconditional love and integrated wholeness. It is a consciousness permeated by an unimaginable degree and quality of love, a love that heals. Just as God's consciousness is aware of everything, so is His love all-permeating and all-inclusive. His Spirit's awareness extends over the fullness and breadth of all time and space. His Spirit knows and loves the whole. It recognizes what is ill or broken, what has fallen out of the wholeness. God's healing Spirit seeks to strengthen what is weak and heal the rifts and tears in the whole. It is for that reason that the Son incarnated.

Love seeks to redeem. God's Spirit wants to heal and gather. The Holy Spirit wants to enlighten us with a deeper understanding of the world, of ourselves and our collective destiny. God's Spirit-consciousness, drenched with love and healing, is like the sun. Its cosmic sun of love sheds the light of loving understanding on all of us. It illuminates everything in the world. In moments when we grasp this, this light of love can begin to shine out of everything we see. God's Spirit of love can even enlighten the way we perceive and understand. And when that happens, we are healed of our sense of separateness, even if only momentarily.

A respiration begins to take place between the healing Spirit and ourselves. As we take up God's Spirit, that Spirit can take up our enlightened knowing; and at the same time, a loving light of awareness can permeate our thinking, drench our feeling, inspire our actions. This may happen only for moments now; but can increase in the future, *if we will it*.

The inserted prayer at Whitsun speaks of human hearts aflame, hearts that are now not burning with sorrow, as they were in Holy Week, but hearts kindled in praise. This flame of praise is born of a glimpse into the greater awareness and love shining from the Father and His Son. The flames are those of self-offering. They are the natural and healthy response of hearts that have become aware of how great a sacrifice the Trinity has made. Father, Son, and their Spirit of Love continue to sacrifice themselves, not only so that we can exist, but also so that we can thrive and continue to develop. The Triune God has offered and continues to offer us substance, existence, creativity, love, and healing. Our heart's first response is to express awe, to counter-offer praise.

Through the Triune God and our celebration of all the previous festivals, we finally realize at Whitsun that we have a way out of an existential dead end. We have been given a future. And in that future, at Johnstide, our praise, our awe, and homage will turn into gratitude and heart-warm thanks.