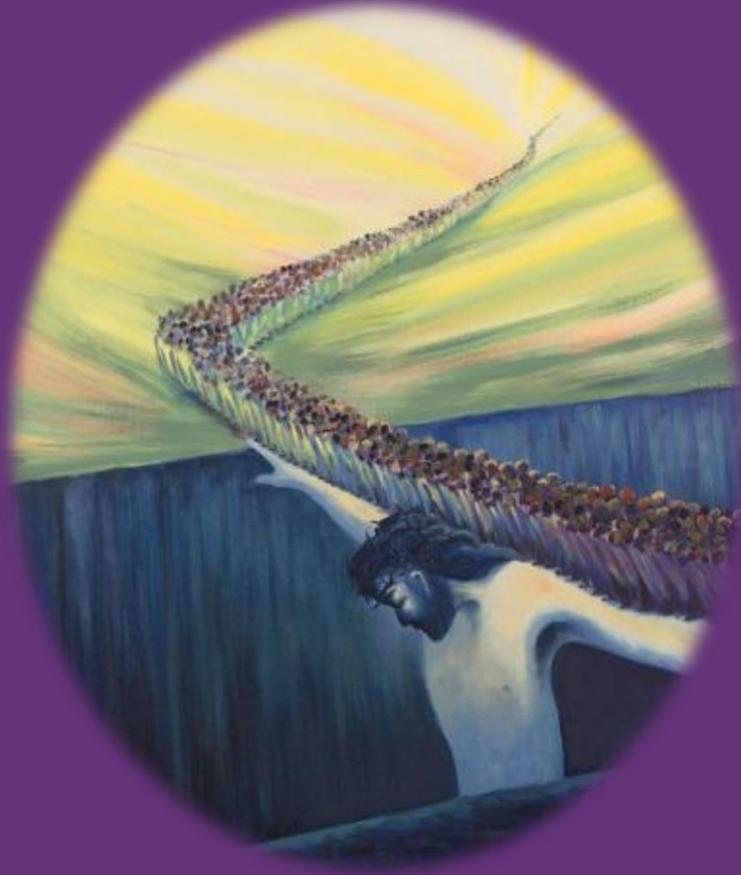


“BRIDGES”



Reflections for the Season of Lent
2018

The West Virginia Institute for Spirituality
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People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child—our own two eyes. All is a miracle.

— **Thich Nhat Hanh, The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation**



As I crossed the rope bridge, I felt like I was walking on thin air. The bridge swayed precariously. The planks were not as close together as the planks in the picture above. “Don’t look down!” my friends advised. But how could I ignore the sounds of the rushing waters hundreds of feet below? I couldn’t turn around. The only option was to go forward.

In the spiritual life, a bridge may appear as an invitation to cross from one way of being or thinking to another. These bridges are not always met with enthusiasm, but rather with fear and trepidation because we don’t know what is on the other side. The passage ahead may not be one that draws us closer to what is good and of God, but rather to a scary place.

In any crossing into the unknown, there are possibilities for making a mistake. Whether walking across a bridge, down a path, up a mountain, or through a meadow, there are always unexpected things that can happen. It is the nature of life that one incorporates change and growth by moving ahead and by risking the consequences of not remaining in a static position. There are also consequences of remaining where you are. The guide to action – to cross the bridge – must come from an inner sense of truth combined with an inner sense of love – an appraisal of the messages of the heart that tells us that, here, nourishment for the soul is being offered and love can be found.

Prayer Practice: Where is God calling you to move forward? Imagine that you are crossing that bridge with your best friend, Jesus. Breathe deeply. Take a step. Rest. Repeat.

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February 25, 2018

In today's Gospel reading Jesus takes His disciples to the top of a mountain. Why? Was it only to reveal His glory in His transfiguration? To give them a glimpse of what is to come, glory and sorrow?

*O Jesus, who, in thy cruel Passion didst become
the "reproach of men and the Man of Sorrows,"*

I worship thy Divine Face.

*The tears that flowed so abundantly from thy Eyes
are to me as precious pearls that I delight to gather,
that with their worth I may ransom the souls of poor sinners.*

*O Jesus, whose face is the sole beauty that ravishes my heart,
I may not see here below the sweetness of thy glance,
nor feel the ineffable tenderness of thy kiss,*

*I bow to thy will—but I pray thee to imprint in me thy divine likeness,
and I implore thee so to inflame me with thy love,
that it may quickly consume me,*

and that I may soon reach the vision of thy glorious face in Heaven.

Amen.

—St. Therese Of Lisieux based on the Prayer to the Holy Face

Prayer Experience:

Are you on a mountain top, full of encouragement and assurance of God's love and plan for you? Or are you in a valley, struggling to remember the place you are journeying to? Examine your heart and your relationship with God. What do you need to do: Perhaps, start your day with quiet time? Pour a cup of coffee or tea, light a candle, sit in the silence of the morning with your devotional(s) and journal.



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February 26, 2018

Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD. . .

Isaiah 1:18 (NRSV)

In this passage from Isaiah, the prophet is invited into a dialogue with God who declares that God will bear the burden of proof (the tone and usage in Hebrew is juridical) to demonstrate God's love and bent for reconciliation toward the people of ancient Israel. In short, our very relationship with God is dialogical. If God, who engenders absolute truth and right is willing to enter dialog with humanity, how much more incumbent upon human beings is it to be in dialog with one another.

In an era noted for its polarity, partisanship, sensationalism, and divisiveness, it is a fresh wind of grace to be able to stop, appreciate the humanity of the other, and listen as one human being to another, with the Holy Spirit as the Divine suspension within which community is incubated and formed. If the Body of Christ cannot, through its example, forge a new way of being together in community and dialogue, is there any hope for our society? May we resist this new form of the tyranny of the ideological as a grave human injustice and continue to be bridge-builders who follow the example of a God who never ceases to dialogue with God's beloved—humankind.

Prayer Practice: Practice listening and hospitality toward those with whom you most categorically disagree.

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February 27, 2018

*Yes we shall build a bridge to heaven
From mother earth right on to paradise
And when our hearts will melt the sky
We shall have found the keys of life
Yes we shall build a bridge to heaven
Together we will drink the wine of sky
And as the sun will melt the night
We shall be one as morning light
Shall be one with the dawn
(Uli Jon Roth & Sky of Avalon)*

During Lent I often think about death, dying, and lately, I've been reading books on the topic and listening to songs. My books? [Aging as a spiritual practice](#), [Miracle of Mindfulness](#), [God's Unconditional Love Healing our Shame](#)

The above song by Uli Jon Roth captures the transition, the passing that relates to our 2018 'Bridge theme', and says we go alone. Yes, as the song continues the images of 'keys of life, together, sun melting the night, being one...the positive aspects of dying that bolster faith. These positive images help me to stay faithful to the daily 'breathing' and 'being present' to the ordinary. This staying present characterizes maturing faith. Thich Nhat Hanh says 'wash the dishes to wash the dishes', not to have them clean, or to think of the future cup of tea. The author of the Cloud of Unknowing counsels in the same way as does St. Paul who says 'Pray always'. We can make 'pray always' harder than 'just breathing and being conscious'. Yet, being conscious of who I am and what I'm doing is the essence of being Christ-among-us.

Practice: Today just be present and be aware of the bridge to heaven you are for those who see you 'just being present' and listen to the song 'Bridge to Heaven'

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February 28, 2018

Cast away from you all the crimes you have committed, says the Lord and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. EZ 18:31

As I reflected on the readings of the day, one thing stands out for sure, “become the change you wish to see in others.” Jesus tells us to follow the ideals of the heart but do not follow the scribes because they do not practice what they preach. We are invited to examine hearts and to be washed from our sins. Recently, I completed a move and humbly came to the realization that I had more possessions than I needed. As my family assisted me in my move, they teased me about this fact. It would have been very easy for me to me to justify, rationalize, react or make excuses. Instead, I was graced to reflect on what was said and take to heart the direction needed. On a deeper level, I have come to understand how the accumulation happened. I have created a plan to keep my life beautiful and simple. Using Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, I will be letting go of those things that do not serve me. There has been a radical freedom in letting go. As I continue my Lenten and Life’s journey, I will open those dark places where the heart becomes cluttered with fear, judgement and rationalization. I will not do this alone. I will seek those who courageously seek change for the good.

Prayer Practice: What are the areas of your life that need change? What are you willing to let go of that you may experience interior freedom? Journal these questions and share with a trusted confidant.

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March 1, 2018

Please read Mark 1:1-15

“Mary, Did You Know,” a contemporary Christmas song, invites us to ponder what Mary may have known as she cradled her new-born son in her arms.

The opening verses of the Gospel According to Mark led me to a similar question, this time asked of Mary’s son grown into a man, “Jesus, what did you know as you rose from the water, as you emerged from the wilderness, as you proclaimed good news?”

I’ve raised these questions because for many months I’ve been hearing a similar question asked of me over and over in my prayer, “Diane, deep down, in your inner being, what do you know?”

This question has led me to quiet and disquiet, to looking at, listening to, and learning from what is going on in the world around me as well as the world within me. Which brings me full circle to Mary and to Jesus. Mary, known for her pondering, and Jesus, known for his praying, were not in isolation from the affairs of their lives as they pondered and prayed. They were deeply engaged in the challenges and opportunities of their days. There is something in how Mary and Jesus lived their lives that is calling to me in the living of my life, something that seems related to the theme we have been asked by WVIS to pray with and to live into, *building bridges*.

I have taken these ponderings of my heart with me into this Lenten journey and I invite you, at least for today, to do likewise.

Before you begin your prayer, you may want to print a copy of ‘Mary, Did You Know’ lyrics. You may also want to reopen your Bible to Mark 1:1-15. As you read the texts, imagine yourself with Mary, with Jesus, as they respond to the questions above.

Now, listen for what rises in you when asked ‘What do you know, deep down, in your inner being?’

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March 2, 2018

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. John 16:33,
New International Version

Whenever the subject of bridges comes up I think of one of my favorite songs from the 70s, *Bridge over Troubled Water*. I give thanks to God for the many times God has been that bridge—through Scripture, a friend or other sacramental ways—over troubled waters. But there are times when nothing takes us *over* the trouble but we are smack-dab in the middle of the trouble and see no way *through*.

During the weeks over which I have been thinking about and writing this reflection, I have been going through a very difficult time at work, resulting in my resignation after only seven months on the job. For a nurse who has worked in a variety of roles in multiple institutions and organizations over the span of four decades and excelled at all of them, hearing I was “not meeting expectations” would be a crushing blow to anyone—especially an Enneagram One!

Although God did not provide the bridge *over* these “troubled waters” I see now that he was the bridge *through* them; the bridge or connection between one season of life to another. It’s not that I did not receive the discernment I sought before the job; rather, for reasons I have yet to learn, God was helping me bridge *through* to a new day.

Practice: Take a few moments of silence to quiet your heart. The next time a difficult experience you have experienced or are experiencing comes to mind, think of before and after—and how this experience has been or can be a bridge between that painful experience and a new awareness of how the love of Christ has enabled/is enabling you to “overcome the world” of this otherwise negative experience. Give thanks to God for this overcoming love, available within us *through* Jesus Christ.

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