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Ongoing Opportunities
Page 2

One-Time Opportunities
Page 5

Reading Opportunities
Page 7

Afterwords
Page 8

Thin Places, an ecumenical sampler of events and resources for spiritual growth, with a particular interest in the contemplative spiritual journey, is published by the Spiritual Life Community of Westminster Presbyterian Church.

Look for *Thin Places* at:
thinplaces.us
westminstermpls.org/publications



Westminster Presbyterian Church
1200 Marquette Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55403-2419
612.332.3421
westminstermpls.org

George and our thin places . . .

by Vivian Jenkins Nelsen

George and I met in a small rural Danish Lutheran college in Nebraska. I was a freshman; George was a sophomore, but a veteran and eight years older. My Dad, a Lutheran pastor, was active in the civil rights movement. One evening during the first week of school there was to be a panel talk on race. I was the only African-American girl on campus (and the youngest—my big secret) and full of opinions, so I was asked to be on the panel. Several of the younger faculty attended. George was friends with some of them and came with his special friend, Norman Bansen. George was very handsome in a blond, Danish way, and arrived in a tan Brooks Brothers suit (I thought he was a faculty member). George knew Norman had served in India in the army and had gathered some marble shards from the floor of the Taj Mahal, the great monument to married love. That night he told Norman that I was the woman he was going to marry and asked Norman to send him one of the shards, as a wedding gift.

George and I were married forty-two years. He was calm and reserved if you didn't know him well, friendly if you did. His Nebraska plains hardiness was evident whenever he felt there was danger for me, either physical or emotional. A tough guy with a sweet spirit. He held strong progressive views and had a wicked sense of humor. Whenever I had a big project, writing deadline, or training to do, he never left my side. As we would work into the wee hours, he would look at me and say, "It's you and me, Toots!" Always affectionate and loyal. In fact, he helped me find my feminist voice. George was a very elegant man and loved children. He was always a driver for my girls' choir, The Prince of Glory Singer's, whose theme song was, "We've Come This Far by Faith" which we both loved.

I had grown up in a Lutheran parsonage, and George was a lifelong Presbyterian; his faith always seemed stronger than mine. We belonged to different churches before and after we married—Lutheran and Presbyterian. He taught Sunday school at my church for years, and then we would jump in the car and run across town to Westminster just in time to dash into the last couple of rows. His faith deepened as his Parkinson's progressed in later years, though he did not wear his religion on his sleeve. In the most desperate times—financial or health-wise—he would say "'God has never failed,' the money always comes when we need it." He always reminded me that, "God had not brought us this far to leave us."

Although we knew that Parkinson's would take George's life, the end came unexpectedly. We were heading out to a sunny May meeting when he tumbled down our front steps, rupturing his spleen. He survived surgery and ten days in the hospital, and—after two nursing home experiences—was anxious to get home. But one afternoon, after I got home from my twice-a-day visit, a call came saying that he "was

not responding.” “To what?” I asked. George had died, collapsing with a heart attack right in front of the nurse’s desk.

That day was the worst day of my life. I found myself overwhelmed by a darkness that was full of pain, loss and fear. This was unknown territory for me. Would I ever be happy again? The sadness just sat there, making it hard to breathe. I tried to get through the darkness with work and volunteering. Busy. Busy. But the more I tried to stoically “move on,” the more stuck I got. My fear of entering this bottomless darkness simply prolonged it. Yes, I prayed and meditated. But there were no “ah, hah” moments, and I didn’t hear anything from God. No voice.

The darkness of night can also bring calm and healing. After George died, I slept for days. I had been on high alert for years, sleeping lightly; listening for any breathing or swallowing problems. Over time, the darkness was sometimes only shadows, but it never went away. Then, after eight years of fighting the darkness, the unexpected death of a dear friend brought new darkness. And first healing. Sam was another faithful person, we prayed together often. She had been with me the afternoon that George died, and then she died unexpectedly early on Easter Sunday this year. As I sat with her body, I knew that I had lost a true friend. The sadness was profound. Who else besides Sam would move in when my other knee needed surgery? We shared so many crises, with George and in life. As I made her memorial service preparations, I could feel George’s presence. I kept hearing the gospel tune he loved best. This was truly the first time that sorrow didn’t overwhelm me at a loss of this magnitude.

Over a month ago, I experienced something that built on that first healing and gave me pause. I had been worrying about money when my old friend and editor, Boyd, called, urging me to see a YouTube video of the famous gospel singers, The Barrett Sisters: “One of them looks so much like your mother, Beal—I’ve watched it over and over.” When I finally did watch it, I was astonished by the resemblance. I noticed several other YouTubes of the Barrett’s and clicked on the next one. The first song’s chorus was, “I don’t believe He’s brought me this far to leave me.” And—after clicking at random on another link—there it was again, with our favorite line, “trusting in his Mighty Word, He’s never failed us yet . . . can’t turn around, He’s never failed us yet.” Some might say that it was coincidence, but there were too many choices and no play list to choose from. And, more importantly, I felt enveloped by God’s presence and the desperation left me.

In the following days, I kept finding evidence of George. That marble shard from the Taj Mahal, inside a beautiful little enamel box, with a rooster on the top, the Chinese horoscope sign for the year I was born

that he had given me on our 25th anniversary. A love note to me, in another small porcelain box. Jewelry he bought me, that I hadn’t seen for decades and assumed was lost or stolen. It was enough to get me through the month until my seminary check came for my part-time course. Not long after, I was telling my friend, Ruby, about this and she said, “I am surprised it took this long for you to experience the love he had for you from beyond the grave.” Bette, my oldest friend from high school days, quoted the *Song of Songs* 8:6-7, “For love is as strong as death . . . Many waters cannot quench love.” I have been astounded by the number of deeply religious family members and friends who said the same thing. So, I finally realized that they knew what I should have known. God had not brought us this far to leave us.

Love is stronger than death.

For a number of years, George had worked on a manuscript for a book called, *Gift Giving for Husbands* and was working on it when he died. George asked me during that last week how many chapters we had left to finish. “Not many,” I said. He was the greatest gift of my life.

Vivian Jenkins Nelsen is a Senior Fellow at Augsburg University and adjunct professor at Luther Seminary and co-founder of INTER-RACE, a diversity think tank, at Augsburg. Vivian teaches and publishes on group facilitation, inter-group dialogue, diversity, conflict and grief, and has authored books, articles and essays. The former director of administration at Humphrey Institute at the University Minnesota, Vivian was a Bush Fellow at Harvard University. President Obama awarded her the nation's highest volunteer award, "President's Lifetime Volunteer Call to Service" Award. She may be reached at: vjn@inter-raceinstitute.org.

Ongoing Opportunities

Restoration Ministries

is a gentle place to care for your soul

Founded in 2006 by the Rev. Jean Leih, we are a collective of trained spiritual directors who are ready to welcome you and be a safe place for you to share your story. We prayerfully listen and come alongside you as you discern the movements of God’s Spirit wherever you are in your journey of faith.

Many who come to meet with a spiritual director are longing to experience the quiet, loving, guiding and healing presence of God in their life. Spiritual direction can foster that experience. Many who come are just beginning to create spaces for quiet and listening in their lives.

We also offer other opportunities for people to begin to experience and practice this kind of listening

in safe community:

- **Listening Prayer: An Experience of *Lectio Divina* Weekly on Wednesdays, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.,**
11985 Technology Drive, Eden Prairie
Anyone is invited to attend.
- **Facilitated Retreats and Prayer Experiences**
We work with your leadership team to facilitate a retreat or prayer experience specifically adapted for your group or ministry team.
Past themes have included: Sabbath Rest, Befriending Your Story, Discerning God’s Will as a Ministry Team, Creative Prayer Experiences, Simple Ways to Pray for Healing, Introduction to Contemplative Prayer.

We would love to meet you. Learn more about us and about these up-coming opportunities at:
www.restorationmn.org or info@restorationmn.org
or 952-241-4150.

Kim Isaak, our Executive Director, who completed her supervision training with Together in the Mystery, also provides supervision for spiritual directors. She may be reached at: kim@restorationmn.org.

Evensong Service with Folk Ensemble

Join us in worship as we sing the music of Iona and Taizé, accompanied by a folk ensemble [including hammered dulcimer, folk harp, cello, violin, piano, and Native American flute] . . . *Lectio Divina* and extended silent meditation . . . praying for self, our wider circle, and the world.

Following the service there will be an optional opportunity to ask for and receive prayers for healing and/or for anointing with oil.

Light reception afterwards. Everyone is welcome:

Third Sundays, 5:15-6:00 p.m., September-May
[please note change from Second Sundays]
St. Paul’s United Church of Christ, in the Sanctuary
900 Summit Avenue, St. Paul

Contact Us

Do you know of anyone—it’s free to all who ask—who would like to receive this ecumenical newsletter?

If you do, please contact Kristin Kieft at news@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421.

If you know of an up-coming Opportunity that would be of interest to other readers, or

if you have any other questions or comments, please contact us at: thinplaces_us@msn.com.

For information: www.SPUCConSummit.org or 651.224.5809 or spoffice@comcast.net.

During World War II, a radio tower was built

. . . on high ground in St. Paul. Some years later, no longer being needed, the tower was taken down, and the now-wooded land was sold to Edgcombe Presbyterian Church, whose property adjoined it.

Edgcombe has recently created and continues to enhance a **Meditation Path**, with stops, which winds through the woods. It is a place to connect with nature and retreat from daily routines, . . . to unplug from technology and slow down, . . . to breathe and walk and sit in peace and contemplation:

Always open, all invited, park in the parking lot and follow the path towards the woods

also:

Edgcombe’s **12-Step-Friendly Centering Prayer** group:
Tuesdays, 3:00-4:00 p.m.

Edgcombe Presbyterian Church
2149 Edgcombe Road, St. Paul

For information about either opportunity:
651.698.8220 or pastorjuliegg@epchurch.org.

Contemplative Worship at Westminster

Centering Prayer

Wednesdays, 12:00-12:30 p.m., in the Bates Room

Contemplative Evening Prayer

Candlelit quiet prayer and silence, with music in the Celtic, Taizé and other traditions

Wednesdays, 6:00-6:30 p.m., in The Clearing

“Another gift came to me while we were courting,

. . . a gift that carried with it the gift of family. I was told that George’s Grandmother—who as a young woman had immigrated from Denmark to the plains of Nebraska—wanted to see the young black woman he had chosen. We went. I was somewhat anxious and took my crocheting, to give my hands something to do. We got there, I was introduced and was seated next to her in a corner of the living room. I got out my crocheting. She was immediately interested, asked questions, and we began to talk.

And talk. And talk, as others in the family glanced at us from across the room. When we were leaving, she lingered behind, and then came out to the car and handed me, as a gift, a piece of her own Danish embroidery. . . .”

Vivian Jenkins Nelsen

Quiet Worship

Taizé Sung Prayers, Lectionary Scripture, Prayers of the People, and silence

Third Saturdays, 9:00-9:45 a.m.,

around the fireplace in the Bushnell Room

also:

“Exploring Traditional Religious Practices”

a class, using Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*

Fourth Mondays, Nov. 26, Jan. 28, Feb. 25, Mar. 25,

Apr. 22—7:00-8:00 p.m., in the Garden Room

Westminster Presbyterian Church

1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

For information: 612.322.3421 or

www.westminstermpls.org or jteliczan@wpc-mpls.org.

Ecumenical Taizé Evening Prayer

Join members from six Minneapolis Faith Communities:

Thursdays, light supper at 6:00 p.m., Prayer at 7:00 p.m.

- **December 6, Prospect Park United Methodist Church**

- **February 28, St. Frances Cabrini Catholic Church**

- **March 28, Prospect Park United Methodist Church**

Something special happened

. . . on October 3 when two hundred twenty-five people—amidst heavy rain (driven nearly horizontal by high winds) and stopped-up traffic—gathered in The Clearing at Westminster for the Twentieth Anniversary Ecumenical Worship Service. Many notes since have called it “beautiful” and “holy.” And even more have said, simply, that the Holy Spirit was present in that place.

Coming in out of the storm . . . the candle-lit setting (with the Taizé Cross at the Center) . . . the twelve prayer Stations around the worship space (each containing a brief Quotation from an archived *Thin Places*, plus appropriate works of art and candles) . . . the music (with choir members sitting in the back rows, surrounding us) . . . and the voices, sharing familiar and treasured words (the voices of leaders from throughout the larger ecumenical community) . . . all seemed to come together, creating an enveloping sense of peace and of Presence.

And these elements also created a deep sense of oneness, made us feel that—from wherever we may normally worship—we were the Children of God, coming together to worship God. It was a very special worship experience.

- May 9, Faith Mennonite Church

For information about these services and the six sponsoring Faith Communities: 612.339.3023 or chris@cabrini.org or www.cabrini.org.

Minnesota’s Own Taizé Cross

. . . which was used at the *Thin Places* Twentieth Anniversary Service, is one of the two duplicate Crosses that the Taize Community’s Br. Eric (who also illustrated the *Taizé Bible* and much more) made in the 1980s. The other one is still used by the Taizé Community, every Friday at Evening Prayers, for “Praying around the Cross.”

This one came to Minnesota in 2001 after an eleven-day Taizé Brothers’ Pilgrimage here. It is housed at Westminster in Minneapolis but **is available to any church or group** who would like to use it for a worship service of their own. Please consider doing so. **For full details:** go to www.westminster-mpls.org and search for “Taize Cross”

To make arrangements to borrow it: Dr. Rodney Allen Schwartz at RSchwartz@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421

Westminster Presbyterian Church

1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

The woods are lovely, dark and deep

The Hermitage at Clearwater Forest has moved itself (with some helping hands). Still in the woods but now with its own lake view (and, during the summer, its own dock and canoe/kayak). And it is still a very special place for relaxation and renewal, . . . for reflection and writing, . . . for solitude and prayer.

It has a large picture window, a screened porch for nature watching, and a winding path down to the lake. Inside you will find simple comforts, an extra-long bed, a broad writing table, and a comfortable reading chair. There is electricity for lighting, a coffee maker, a microwave, and a small refrigerator. The propane fireplace provides warmth in cooler or cold weather, and the outhouse is heated!

The Hermitage is open to all, for only a modest fee, and is available **free of charge** to clergy, religious, and church professionals of all denominations or faith traditions. (It was first put in place by *Thin Places* as both an appreciation of the ministry all clergy and church professionals offer and as an encouragement to them to take time away, to find some time for themselves.)

Please consider coming to the Hermitage in these quieter days of winter, to watch the woods fill up with

snow. Or anytime. It is a place of peace, deep peace:
Available seven days a week, all year around
Clearwater Forest Retreat Center, Deerwood, MN
For information or to reserve a time:
office@clearwaterforest.org or 218.678.2325 or
www.clearwaterforest.org .

One-Time Opportunities

The Mystery of being Human

The greatest mystery of being human is our freedom. Freedom is our greatest gift, as well as our darkest. This mystery is at the heart of Advent. “Creation was subjected to transience and futility . . . in the hope that creation itself would . . . come to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.” This will be our day’s exploration through reflections, practices, and personal discernment work.

Facilitated by the Rev. Ward Bauman, long time head of The Episcopal House of Prayer:

Saturday, December 1, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality

Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul
For information or registration for these and other up-coming opportunities—like **Group Spiritual Direction during Advent** (Dec. 4, 11, 18) and **Winter Solstice - Beauty in Darkness: Music for the Longest Night of the Year** (Dec. 21): www.wisdomwayscenter.org or 651.696.2788 or rdobias@wisdomwayscenter.org.

An Urban Pilgrimage

As many already know, City House focuses on spiritual listening with people in our community who are generally unseen and unheard. Motivated by faith, City House seeks to be fully present with people who are experiencing difficult times.

This one-day small group event—led by our Executive Director, Rolf Lowenberg-DeBoer—will include visits to several of our partner agencies in Minneapolis, with a focus on learning, listening, reflection, and relationship building.

It will introduce you to the ministry being done by some of our Partners and will foster a deeper appreciation of spiritual listening:

Friday, December 7, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

City House

For information or registration for this or other up-coming Opportunities—like **Spiritual Listening Training** (St. Mark’s Episcopal Cathedral, Nov. 30): www.city-house.org or rolf@city-house.org or rena@city-house.org.

Advent Silent Retreat: Holy Darkness, Joyful Home

Advent is a time of both darkness and hope. In the silence and absence of the darkness, we wait in joyful hope for what we know will come, a waiting that is not passive, but is rather a period of active preparation.

This weekend retreat offers an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which we are called to embrace both the darkness of absence and the coming light of Christ:

Friday, Dec. 7, at 8:00 p.m.-Sun., Dec. 9, at 12:45 p.m.

Christ the King Retreat Center, Buffalo, MN

For information or registration about this or other up-coming opportunities—like **Women’s Silent Weekend Retreat** (Jan. 25-27) or **Men’s Silent Weekend Retreat** (Feb. 1-3): 763.682.1394 or jpolman@kingshouse.com or www.kingshouse.com.

The Christos Center—which this year is

Celebrating Forty Years of God’s Faithfulness—

offers our **Annual Christmas Quiet**

Join us this Christmas Season as we consider the sign promised to the shepherds of a child wrapped in swaddling clothes.

How might this still be a sign for us today? It will be an evening of reflection, music, Eucharist, and prayer. Reception to follow. All are welcome to come as we open our hearts and look for signs of Christ this Advent:

Tuesday, December 11, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

also:

New Year’s Quiet Pause

Pause . . . before the evening celebrations and the New Year. Come, open your heart and listen for God. The time will include Scripture, contemplative singing, prayer and quiet reflection. We will close with Communion and an opportunity to be prayed for:

Monday, December 31, 4:00-6:00 p.m.

Christos Center for Spiritual Formation,

1212 Holly Drive, Lino Lakes, MN

For information about these and other up-coming opportunities—like **New Year’s Quiet Pause** (Dec. 31) and **SoulCollage** (March 23): www.christoscenter.org ladonna@christoscenter.org or 651.653.8207.

Speaking Out: Writing as Witness,

Protest and Transformation

In this intensive retreat, we will explore our responsibility and right to use our words to confront injustices of many kinds. Each writer will find her or his form of expression—poetry, essay, letter to the editor, blog, newsletter, whatever it may be.

The retreat will include shared silence, provocative readings and each other’s company.

Writers at all levels are welcome. We invite those who want a deeper immersion experience to stay overnight:

Friday, Dec. 14, at 6:30 p.m.-Sat., Dec. 15, at 3:30 p.m.

Spirituality Center, Saint Benedict's Monastery
104 Chapel Lane, St. Joseph, MN

For information or registration for this and our many other offerings—like **Studium: A Scholar's Program** or **Sophia Program for Women in Ministry** or **Spiritual Direction** or our **Hermitages**: 320-363-7112 or -7172 or www.sbm.osb.org or spiritualitycenter@csbsju.edu.

Women's Christmas: An Epiphany Celebration for Wise Women

Women's Christmas is rooted in the delightful Irish tradition of women—on Epiphany, celebrating the coming of the Wise Men—leaving the care of their households to the men for a few hours so they could enjoy each other's company away from their domestic responsibilities.

Whether you claim an Irish heritage or not, you are invited to leave behind your responsibilities for a few hours to enjoy the companionship of other women. Beginning with a simple meal, we will reflect on the Celtic seasons of *Lughnasadh* (harvest), *Samhain* (renewal), *Imbolc* (awakening) and *Beltane* (vitality).

As we celebrate, we will share with each other our unique wisdom and our wise women gifts of harvest knots, anointing oil, seeds and shawls:

Thursday, January 3, 5:30-8:00 p.m.
Franciscan Spirituality Center

Fr. Thomas Keating—mentor to many of us—

died on Thursday, October 25, at 10:07 p.m., at his home monastery in Spencer, MA, at age 95. As will be imagined, tributes have come from far and wide (many may be found on-line).

In its caring announcement of his death (also available on-line), *Contemplative Outreach*, quotes from one of Fr. Keating's last works,

"I am at the point where I do not want to do anything except God's will, and that may be nothing. But nothing is one of the greatest activities there is.

It also takes a surprising amount of time! What time is left each day is an opportunity for God to take over my life more completely on every level and in every detail."

God Is Love: The Heart of All Creation

920 Market Street, La Crosse, WI

For information or registration for this and other upcoming opportunities—like **Silent Night: An Advent Singing Bowls Experience** (Dec. 1)—and for ongoing enrichment groups that meet at FSC like **Mindful Meditation** or **Conversations that Matter** or **Saturday Morning Men's Group** or **Depressed Anonymous**, a 12-step group: www.fscenter.org or 608.791.5295 or fscenter@fspa.org.

Spiritual Grandparenting: Ideas & Inspiration for Passing Your Spiritual Legacy on to Your Grandchildren

Maybe your adult children no longer practice your faith and you're wondering how to share your beliefs, values, and worldview with your grandchildren in a way that does not make waves with their parents. Or maybe you do all share one tradition and you want to make the most of your role as the spiritual matriarch or patriarch of your family.

For a fun mix of storytelling, individual reflections and group discussions, come to this workshop and gain:

- a clearer picture of wisdom received from your own spiritual journey
- age-appropriate ideas and storytelling seeds for passing this wisdom onto next generations
- an understanding of the psychological importance for young people to have a spiritual faith:

Saturday, February 23, 1:00-4:30 p.m.
Loyola Spirituality Center

389 North Oxford Street, St. Paul

For information or registration or other up-coming opportunities—like **Joyce Rupp's Boundless Compassion** (2nd Wednesdays, Oct.-May): 651.641.0008 loyolassr@comcast.net or www.loyolaspirtualitycenter.org.

Enneagram Retreat

Deepen self-understanding and use of the Enneagram's nine personality types to enhance your spiritual life and relationships with this one-day workshop on Saturday, March 16, from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Central Lutheran Church in downtown Minneapolis.

More information and registration details will be described in the next issue. Don't miss this opportunity! Save the date!

Central Lutheran Church

333 South Twelfth Street, Minneapolis

For information or registration: www.centralmpls.org or 612.870.4416 or bobbiespradley@comcast.net.

Reading Opportunities

Spirituality, An Art of Living: A Monk's Alphabet of Spiritual Practices, by Benoit Standaert, OSB

This is a remarkable book. In part because of its gentle tone of a fellow pilgrim sharing, rather than of an expert telling. And, also, because of its insightful content and concreteness.

"Spirituality," as used by some in the past, and in the present, implied that there is a distinction between the spiritual and the material levels of human existence, between "interiority," a life of prayer and contemplation, and "exteriority," our outer, everyday lives of action and interaction. This is clearly not where Fr. Standaert is coming from, as his title and his book make clear: Spirituality is an Art of Living.

For him, these ninety-nine different practices are "entrances to the spiritual life" . . . they "fit together and form a philosophy of life," . . . they open us to being transformed, to living differently:

"Sitting behind the steering wheel of a car for hours on end is experienced differently by somebody who has learned to sit still in meditation, or who regularly reads a Bible passage in the morning, or whose memory is filled with verses from the *Psalms* . . ."

And if we are to open ourselves to being transformed by them, Standaert suggests, we should come to them with our bowls empty:

"Once upon a time, a Zen master received a guest at his monastery. The gentleman came from the city, he was a professor at the university, and said he wanted to expand his knowledge of Zen Buddhism. The monk received him and, according to custom, offered tea. He poured hot water over the broken tealeaves in the bowl and filled it to the brim. He kept pouring: the water overflowed.

Observing this, the professor exclaimed, 'Watch out! Don't you see that the bowl is full already?' 'Indeed,' said the master, who calmly put the teapot aside and continued, 'What are you doing here? Your bowl is full, and you ask me to pour you some more. First empty your bowl, and then I'll be able to offer you something! . . .'"

The book's ninety-nine entrance gates are drawn from the author's forty years as a monk and from his wide and deep reading of spiritual classics, and especially of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Some are familiar, others may surprise: *e.g.*, **Confession – Dancing – Emptiness – Friendship – *Lectio Divina* – Listening – Meditation – Memory – Music – Pilgrimage – Rituals – Smiling – Vulnerability – Zero.**

With so many choices, one might wish to skim through these pages—lectio-like—until a practice seems lifted

up. Perhaps having just re-read the Introduction, "Memory" was the one lifted up this time, "Memory" which is both a treasure and a liability.

Memorization, committing to memory, is a discipline no longer encouraged, as it once was. The very name of the Sufi poet, Hafiz, is said to mean, "one who knows the Qur'an by heart." John Muir's father forced him to learn much of the New Testament by heart.

Too much, perhaps. But nearly all of us will find our way enriched if we have at hand a treasury from Scripture and from poetry and songs and hymns. To draw from one reader's list, familiar and treasured passages like,

"But the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire . . ." or *"Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you . . ."* or *"What does the Lord require of you but to . . ."* or *". . . For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* or *"Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring . . ."*

And—Standaert asserts—the ultimate consequence of carrying self-chosen memories like these is that, somehow, they seem to form a foundation and that drawing upon that foundation, somehow, in situations great and small, gives rise to hope.

Standaert also carefully emphasizes that "Memory" is not an unconditional entrance, for there are memories that limit and damage. "Memory preserves just about everything . . . past wounds pile up, consciously and, especially, unconsciously." "A wounded memory needs healing," needs to be set free, needs forgiveness. "Our humanity only comes through completely," he declares, "where there is room for that difficult forgiveness and this good forgetting."

And one last core understanding from a fellow pilgrim: **"One of the remarkable aspects of [spiritual practice as] envisioned in this book is that, while everything is grace, everything is also discipline—a central paradox."**

With your bowl empty as you read, you may find here a "spiritual" practice that you already do that can become more intentional, or a new practice to explore . . .

Knowing that we don't know

"I encourage you, then, to make experience, not knowledge, your aim. Knowledge often leads to arrogance, but this humble feeling never lies to you."

The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counsel

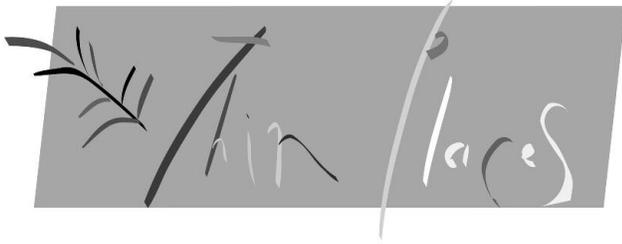


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“George and our thin places . . .”
“During World War II,
a radio tower was built . . .”
“Not knowing . . .”



Afterwords: “Not Knowing . . .”

Lying on a mat, after exercise . . . perhaps too strenuous exercise . . . looking up at the ceiling . . . letting the mind run free . . . watching a string of boats—coming from somewhere—float by . . . not trying to make sense of them . . . yet having a sense that they are going somewhere:

One great gift—from the Spiritual Journey—is becoming comfortable with *Not Knowing* . . .

knowing has significantly to do with intellect and ideas and words and comprehension . . .

intelligence and language are great gifts . . . knowing/making sense . . . satisfies, reassures . . .

Augustine’s **scientia** knowing . . . **sapientia** knowing . . .

knowing intuitively . . .

experiencing the rich fullness of silence . . .

Not Knowing has something to do with surrender . . . and surrender has to do with giving up control . . .

maybe intelligence and the desire to know and understand and explain can take us to the threshold . . . then let go . . . and step out into *Not Knowing* . . .

remembered words, read years ago: *Deus semper major* . . . God always greater . . .

Afterthought: perhaps another gift to be found on the Spiritual Journey is being able to say,
“I am willing to tell you what I think. But I cannot tell you that what I think is right . . .”