



Thin Places

Barbara Beshoar

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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 or
westminstermpls.org/publications



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Transforming disappointment . . .

by *Dan Johnson*

I don't know how it has been for you, but for me another wave of Covid and the underlying sense of fear in our society is exhausting and disappointing. Here's an example. After seeing the pandemic shrinking last spring, a dream for a grand Fall Kick-Off at Loyola had begun to take shape. Freshly painted offices, a vibrant group of spiritual directors, and an energized Board were all ready for the doors to open wide, welcoming people in for face-to-face encounters. Today, I'm sitting in quarantine. Arghh.

While praying within this disappointment, a previous experience came to mind. Several years ago, I went on an early April extended retreat in the Ozarks. Preparing to spend eight days in silence—in the mountains and praying with an adaptation of the Ignatian Exercises—was exciting. Even the twelve-hour drive from Minneapolis became part of the preparation, both intentionally and surprisingly. The highway miles hummed by with regularity. Just south of Joplin, I turned the cell phone off, and then the radio. Half an hour further down the road, the landscape began to change. The emerging fresh beauty of the hills raising into mountains ahead was powerful. It was just the beginning of Spring, before the tourist season, and it felt as if the road was all mine.

So, inspired by the vistas, I pulled over at a spot with a fire tower, hoping to climb it to see an even wider panorama. The parking lot was empty, the buildings locked, and a chain link fence with a tall spindle security gate surrounded the tower. Yet, a sign on the fence read that for only twenty-five cents the gate would unlock, and one person could push through a quarter turn of the spindle and be inside. This is where the surprising element of my preparation began.

I am a larger guy and sometimes don't fit comfortably in tighter spaces. The issue became abundantly true while working through the security gate. It wasn't a spindle that was just waist high like a turnstile. This one was seven feet tall, axis running up and down, and sets of round steel bars going out from the center in four directions. From the top it would look like a pie cut in quarters. I stood with my back to the axis, one set of bars pushing out to my left, another to my right.

As I started to turn with the spindle, my stomach began to contact the fence pole, and I felt a bit squished. I paused, wondering if I would get stuck halfway through . . . a

very uncomfortable feeling considering there was no one around to help . . . a feeling that was actually closer to panic. The spindle only went one way. I had heard the click and knew that I was past the point of being able to squeeze back out. With a charge of adrenaline, I pushed harder and felt my girth compress past the end pole, releasing me into the delightful openness inside the fence. The climb up the tower was rewarding for the view, stretching out in all directions, but that abiding sense of dread at being confined was the starting point for a surprising prayer experience later that week.

The retreat started well, meeting new people and reconnecting with two old friends. The setting was ideal on top of the mountain with a stunning eastward view across the valley. After dinner the first evening, we met our directors for the eight days and settled into a rhythm of deep silence. Two days in, I was reflecting on Psalm 139 and got stuck at the fifth verse, “You hem me in, behind and before and lay your hand upon me.” The Psalmist expounds on the marvels of this experience, but my feelings of being hemmed in at the fire tower flooded over me, and I frankly wanted nothing more to do with the meditation.

That night I went outside, lay down on the grass, quietly looking up at the stars, and started my evening Examen, prayerfully reviewing the day. I wrestled again with Psalm 139:5 and remembered the uncomfortable squeeze at the security gate. Yet, in those moments that night, I also felt the firm earth under my back and was delighted to see planets and stars far off in the sky above me. Behind and before, God’s creation was hemming me in without constriction. I inhaled the cool mountain air, experiencing deep gratitude for the felt presence of God in that moment. Off in the trees an owl began to hoot as if joining me in a song of release and thanks. Much to my surprise, a day that had been marked with

“. . . a certain pure awareness . . . ”

“In the experience of silence, especially if it is deep, you may experience at times a certain pure awareness. Even if it is brief, you are in contact with That Which Is, and this Reality is obviously in love with you. . . . ”

Thomas Keating,
God is Love: The Heart of All Creation

frustration and restriction was shifted towards welcome and openness.

Welcome and openness. These gifts move today as well. The disappointment of dreams lost is real, and so, too, is the deep movement of the Divine in and around it. My prayer these days is for the gift to welcome what is and to be open to the creative presence of God in all of life.

Dan Johnson has been listening to people’s spiritual stories in their everyday life for over twenty-five years. Early on, he worked in construction management during the week and would do direction in the evenings and on weekends. Today, his vocation includes spiritual direction, teaching at Augsburg University, and organizational leadership at Loyola Spirituality Center.

Dan’s first introduction to contemplative prayer was at Christos Center in Lino Lakes. His continued practice and studies lead to an MA in Christian Spirituality from Creighton University. His additional interests include good coffee with new acquaintances, road trips to national parks, and playing with his grandchildren whose imaginations never cease to amaze him. Dan may be reached at: dan.johnson@loyolaspiritualitycenter.org.

Ongoing Opportunities

Pandemic uncertainties are still producing changes in plans for In-person, Zoom and Live-streamed gatherings. Please check with sponsoring organizations for the latest.

A Practical Spirituality of Aging: The Paschal Mystery

During this stay-at-home retreat—**beginning soon**—we will reflect on how the Pascal Mystery of loss, letting go, and new life can help us embrace the invitation to a deeper and richer life in our later years. We will learn together through teachings and interactive conversations:

Monday-Friday, February 28-March 4,

9:00 a.m.-noon daily, via Zoom

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

For information or registration for these and other up-coming opportunities—like **TRIDUUM** (walk with Jesus, Last Supper-Easter Sunday, April 14-17) and **Studium: A Scholar’s Program** (available year around): 320-363-7112 or www.sbm.osb.org or mholicky@csbsju.edu or eantony@csbsju.edu.

The ARC [Action. Reflection. Celebration]

Retreat Community

In these times, would you like a few days away in the north woods, with trees and trails and a pond? with quiet and locally sourced home cooking?

For more than thirty years, ARC—in addition to their organized retreats—has offered just that for individuals and groups, in March when there is still snow on the ground, in late April and May when Spring is bursting, and throughout the year.

There are three lodging options:

- **The Hermitage** (off in the woods, comfortable, cozy space for those desiring more solitude, for time to read or write or pray)
- **The Cottage Stay** (separate, private space, good for families and small groups [up to 6])
- **Lodge Options** (double rooms, with spacious shared space—perfect for large groups or individuals/couples looking to meet others)

Meals included, and all three are facilitated and supported by members of the resident community:

Year Around, Season after Season

ARC Retreat Community, Stanchfield, MN

For information or registration for these or for organized retreat options—like their **Spring Healing Retreat** (April 8-10): 763.689.3540 or www.ARCretreat.org or ARCretreat@hotmail.com.

Compassion:

Imagined Together in Prayer and Reflection

Join us on the Wednesdays of Lent as together we expand our awareness and understanding of compassion, by sharing our insights and life experiences as we read Joyce Rupp's *Boundless Compassion*:

Six Wednesday evenings: March 9-April 13,

7:00-8:15 p.m., via Zoom

Loyola Spirituality Center

389 North Oxford Street, St. Paul

Contact Us

Do you know of anyone who would like to receive this ecumenical newsletter?

—it's sent free to all who ask—

If you do, please email

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 or registration for this or other up-coming opportunities—like the weekly 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. Thursday **Morning Centering Prayer** and Thursday **Evening Examen Prayer** and the one-on-one **Spiritual Direction** which is offered Over-the-phone, Via Zoom, and In-person-Outdoors: www.loyolaspiritualitycenter.org or 651.641.0008 or info@loyolaspiritualitycenter.org.

“Joy in the Desert,” Four Lenten Days of Prayer

Our four Lenten Days of Prayer will focus on the life a desert experience can yield in one's faith. While the desert can be barren it is also full of flora and fauna. It's the place the Israelites came to develop a deeper relationship with God following their escape from Egypt. It's where John baptized, and Jesus went for forty days and nights prior to his public ministry:

Four Wednesdays, March 9, 16, 23,30, 9:00 a.m.-

2:30 p.m., In-person

Franciscan Retreats and Spirituality Center

16385 St Francis Lane, Prior Lake, MN

For information or registration for this or other up-coming opportunities: 952-447-2182 or www.franciscanretreats.net or director@franciscanretreats.net.

Footprints

*Like a baptismal rite,
the waters flow upon the sandy shore
marred by the feet of travelers.*

There, in the golden glow of sun,
where sky and land and ocean meet,
each scar is washed away
by the deep reach of faithful waves,
poured from the font-like sea;
here liquid spirit bathes the pitted beach
and leaves behind unblemished purity.

I walked along the water's edge
and saw the prints I made,
which in a moment's time were gone—
the shore, agleam without a flaw,
and I exulted in the holy clime –
as if my soul, like scarred and trampled sand,
was mended by the hallowed sea's great hand.

Sandra Haight, *Tides: Life's Ebb and Flow*
chosen by Tim Hart-Andersen as the poem
for “Silence and Song,” the Wednesday Evening
Contemplative Service, 12 January 2022

Groundings: "Finding God in All Things"

Gather monthly throughout the program year to explore topics such as "Resilience in Times of Change" and "Hearing the Call to Deep Listening." Gatherings facilitated by Sacred Ground staff members:

Third Thursday each month: March 17, April 21, May 19—4:00-5:30 p.m., via Zoom

Sacred Ground Center for Spirituality

Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph, St. Paul

For information or registration for this or other

Opportunities—like their **Prayer Circle**

(prayercircle@sacredgroundspirit.org) or their long-

standing and widely recognized **Spiritual Director**

Formation Program: www.sacredgroundspirit.org

or 651.696.2798 or Dana@SacredGroundSpirit.org.

Iona Pilgrimages

You are invited to join **John Philip Newell** on Scotland's Isle of Iona for a pilgrimage week of reflection, spiritual practice, and community life. Each day begins with silent prayer and meditation in the 13th-century Chapel of St Michael. Then mid-morning, John Philip offers teachings grounded in Celtic wisdom, inviting us to further awaken to the sacredness of the earth and every human being, and calling us to translate this awareness into action in our lives and world.

"The root word *buddh* means . . .

to wake up, to know, to understand; and he or she who wakes up and understands is called a Buddha. It's as simple as that.

[And] this capacity of waking up, of being aware of what is going on in your feelings, in your body, in your perceptions, in the world, is called Buddha nature, the capacity of understanding and loving . . ."

"Smiling is very important. If we are not able to smile, then the world will not have peace. It is not by going out for a demonstration against nuclear missiles that we can bring about peace. It is with our capacity of smiling, breathing and being peace that we can make peace. . . ."

I would like to offer one short poem you can recite from time to time, while breathing and smiling:

**Breathing in, I calm my body.
Breathing out, I smile.
Dwelling in the present moment
I know this is a wonderful moment."**

Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace*

Lunchtime and afternoons are free for hiking, conversation, and rest. Then in the early evening, we gather again, this time in the ancient Chapel of St Oran, to reflect on the themes of the day through simple chant, ritual, and prayer:

Six Opportunities: March 29-April 5 – April 23-30 – June 11-18 – Sept. 10-17 – Sept. 17-24 & Nov. 3-10

Earth & Soul, Offices: P.O. Box 254, Denver, CO 80211

For Pilgrimage information or registration:

info@stcolumba-hotel.co.uk

For information on other up-coming opportunities in

the U.S.—like their three-part **School of Earth & Soul**

their quarterly **Solstice Celebrations:**

www.earthandsoul.org or info@earthandsoul.org.

One-Time Opportunities

Thich Nhat Hanh

Thich Nhat Hanh died on January 22 at age 95. He—with the Dalai Lama—was the Master Teacher for many of us on both Buddhism and the spiritual journey itself. There have been many remembrances—Krista Tippett devoted her "On Being" program to him on January 27 (archived on MPR)—Sounds True Publishing has many of his recorded teachings (www.soundstrue.com).

The range of his teachings was so wide and so deep that one hesitates to choose. But perhaps among his most affective were his leadership in the movement toward Engaged Buddhism, his close linking of Mindfulness and Action, and his belief that the path to Bringing Peace must begin with Being Peace.

*Thanks be to God for the life and ministry
of Thich Nhat Hanh.*

Annual United Day of Prayer

sponsored by **Contemplative Outreach**

Once again we can come together for twenty-four hours of continuous prayer and contemplative practice, facilitated by twenty-four affiliated groups from all over the world (MN Contemplative Outreach sponsored an hour last year). Each hour begins with Centering Prayer, followed by a local video, chanting, poetry, prayerful walking, or other contemplative practices. In Minnesota, the Day begins Friday evening at 9:00 p.m..

Consider joining contemplative colleagues from around the world for an hour or more that works for you:

Friday, March 4, at 9:00 p.m.-Sat., March 5, at 9:00 p.m.

For additional information:
info@minnesotacontemplativeoutreach.org or
www.minnesotacontemplativeoutreach.org or
questcarol@gmail.com.

“The Touch of Jesus,” A Leaders Lenten Retreat Day

In this time marked by many absences we continue this year's theme of **Presence**. How did Jesus **incarnate core things of the heart and spirit** through loving presence, healing touch and enfleshed blessing? What postures of the heart help us consent to Jesus' healing touch? As those who serve, what postures help us impart it to others?

Together we'll ponder two Gospel encounters in which **Jesus calls forward wholeness** in ready hearts through loving, empowered physical presence:

Monday, March 7, 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

sponsored by **WellSpring Life Resources**

held at **Benedictine Center, St Paul's Monastery**

For information or registration: www.wellrefreshed.com
or info@wellrefreshed.com.

“Working Together to Heal our World,” A Retreat for Mothers-Grandmothers-Daughters-Sisters-Friends

What does it mean as women to live a spirituality of action? . . . to own our gifts, using them to make the world a better place? As Christian women, we are invited to grow in intimacy with God and, out of that relationship, to serve our neighbors.

This retreat day offers us an opportunity to reflect on what it means for us as women to work—individually and collectively—on behalf of God's plan to heal our world. Our day will include talks by the presenter, periods of individual reflection, and time for sharing:

Saturday, March 12, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m., In-person
Christ the King Retreat Center, Buffalo, MN

For information or registration about this or other up-coming opportunities—like **Men's and Women's Midweek Retreat** (April 5-7) or **Hope Day (Dealing with Loss)** May 19: www.kingshouse.com or 763.682.1394 or christtheking@kingshouse.com.

“Conversations with the Prodigal Son,”

A Lenten Retreat

The parable of the prodigal son touches something deep inside of us and about God's compassion and our longing to be reconciled—within ourselves, with others, and across societal divisions. This retreat enters the imaginations of writers and poets for a fresh conversation about the parable:

Saturday, March 19, 9:00-Noon, In-person

Wood & Water Retreats

**St. Christopher Episcopal Church,
2300 Hamline Avenue North, Roseville**

For information or registration for this or other up-coming opportunities—like their month-long **All Write: A Month of Structure and Support** (March, On-line):
info@woodandwaterretreats.com or
<https://wood-water-retreats.square.site>.

Come & See:

Tending the Holy Spiritual Direction at Christos

Do you hear the call to Christian contemplative spirituality? . . . long to experience God in a deeper way? . . . feel drawn to learn more about spiritual practices - silence, solitude, reflection, prayer and retreat? Whatever your longing, God may be nudging you to see what Christos may have for you, to see if you may be being called to deepen your own journey and to companion others.

One of the longest-standing programs nationwide, Christos Center's *Tending the Holy* Program has been preparing people for the ministry of spiritual direction since 1990. *Tending the Holy* is a Christian ecumenical program with an experiential emphasis. Come & see: **Monday, March 21, 7:00-9:00 p.m.**, On-line
**Christos Center for Spiritual Formation
1212 Holly Drive, Lino Lakes, MN**

For information about this and other up-coming opportunities—like **Tending the Holy Retreat: Spring, Springing, Sprung** (March 19: 651.653.8207 or kathryn@christoscenter.org or www.christoscenter.org).

“My prayer these days is for the gift to welcome what is and to be open to the creative presence of God in all of life.”

Dan Johnson, “Transforming disappointment . . .”

“This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
. . . each has been sent
as a guide from beyond. . . .”

Jalal ad-Din Rumi, “The Guest House”

Welcoming Spring

Gather with others as we welcome the first day of spring! This will be an opportunity to try different spiritual practices with a focus on what is budding or awakening within and for you.

Facilitated by Quaker chaplains at **Way Opening Workshops**, the event will bring us out of hibernation and prepare us for gifts of new life:

Sunday, March 20 10-11:15 a.m., via Zoom

For further details, www.wayopeningworkshops.com

To register, wayopeningworkshops@gmail.com.

Awakening to Wholeness: Healing Fragmentation by Holding the Tension of Opposites

As an ongoing exploration, in 2022 EHoP will be offering reflections and connections to teachings to support the practice of holding the tension of opposites in order to facilitate the experience of wholeness—details in our monthly newsletters

also:

A Day of Chanting the *Psalms* with EHoP

This will be a special experience. Chanting the *Psalms* on a simple setting—beginning with *Psalms 1* and moving through them, with some skips—becomes a form of contemplative prayer and a vigil-like response to darkness in the world.

We'll take breaks and have soup and bread for lunch:

Saturday, March 26, 8:45 a.m.-3:00 p.m., In-person

The Episcopal House of Prayer

The House of Prayer in the City

Opening to Others

Have you ever met a person you didn't know, or whom you thought you wouldn't like, or whom you didn't like and had the encounter turn out very differently than you expected?

"When you encounter another, when there is mutuality, when there is presence, when there is giving and receiving, and both are changed in the encounter—that is the moment when you can begin to move towards transformation.

Don't let the word transformation scare you. You just allow what you have met change you. You look back at it with different eyes. And now you are able to look at the rest of your life with different eyes."

Richard Rohr, from the CD, *A New Way of Seeing, A New Way of Being: Jesus and Paul*

Bluegrass Camp Plus

Deserts have always been known for their more easily sensed presence of Spirit. You are invited to come and experience this for yourself at Ghost Ranch, in the High Desert of northern New Mexico.

There are 150+ retreat and workshop possibilities this year, listed under God and Nature, Spirituality, Health and Wellness, Arts and Crafts, both In-person (many) and Virtual (some). There is a variety of lodging options and a campground. There are eight on-ranch hiking trails, two museums, Christ in the Desert Monastery close by, and much more.

If you like to make music together, consider coming for the **Bluegrass Camp Plus**—perhaps "Plus" is for the individual workshops offered for the Guitar, the Fiddle, the Banjo, the Bass, and the Mandolin:

Wednesday-Sunday, May 11-15, In-Person
Ghost Ranch and Casa Del Sol at Ghost Ranch Abiquiu, NM

For information or registration for this or other up-coming opportunities—like (two of the 150+) **Early Spring Excitement** ("Hiking the Land of Enchantment" and four other possibilities) and **Bones and Blossoms: O'Keeffe and You** (May 8-14): www.ghost ranch.org or info@ghost ranch.org.

To be added to the Newsletter mailing list or for details about these and other up-coming opportunities: www.ehouseofprayer.org or houseprayer@csbsju.edu or 320.363.3293.

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And there are many more Opportunities—  
offered by familiar main line retreat centers—  
available throughout the region:

### "Hot Topics in Spirituality," with Wisdom Ways' new Director, Marian Diaz

Three Thursdays, Mar. 10, Apr. 14, May 12, via Zoom  
**Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality**

**Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul**

For information about this and other up-coming opportunities—like the **Holy Saturday Meditation** (April 16, In-person), the **Men's Centering Prayer Circle** (Centering Prayer—a practice of self-surrender that supports extending interior silence and calm into daily life—followed by a time for sharing and mutual support, via Zoom): [www.wisdomwayscenter.org](http://www.wisdomwayscenter.org) or 651.690.2794 or [office@wisdomwayscenter.org](mailto:office@wisdomwayscenter.org).

### School of Lectio Divina

The School adapts the ancient monastic riches of

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*lectio divina*—the dialogue with God through a sacred text—to contemporary practice: Friday-Wednesday, March 18-23, In-person

**The Benedictine Center, St. Paul's Monastery**

For information or registration for this & other upcoming opportunities—like their **Seeing God: 2022 Juried Exhibit of Sacred Art** (In-person daily through March 25)—email us or apply on-line: info@benedictinecenter.org or 651.777.7251 or www.benedictinecenter.org.

**Ready, set, Gogh . . . the Fifth Annual Art Dash: Bringing local artists and community members together in a Celebration of Creativity, Beauty, and Connection**

Thursday, March 24, In-person

**Franciscan Spirituality Center**

920 Market Street, La Crosse WI

For information or registration for this and other upcoming opportunities—like **Mindfulness for Everybody** (Thursdays, March 15, 22, 29. In-person) and the FSC Book Discussion Group's **How to Be a Good Creature: A Memoir in Thirteen Animals** (a deep dive into the human spirit, exploring the otherness and the sameness of humans and animals, Tuesday, April 5, via Zoom): www.fscenter.org or fscenter@fspa.org or 608.791.5295.

**Living the Paschal Mystery: A Lenten Day of Reflection**

Saturday, March 26, via Zoom

**Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, in the Gathering Place**

116 8th Avenue SE, Little Falls, MN

For information about this and other up-coming opportunities: 320.632.2981 or www.fslf.org or info@fslf.org.

## Reading Opportunities

***A Spirituality of Living*, by Henri Nouwen**

This compact volume, developed through a partnership between The Henri Nouwen Society and Upper Room, draws together key passages and concepts from across Nouwen's major writings. Its major sections present what Nouwen believes are three central parts of the spirituality of living: "Solitude," "Community," and "Ministry." And underneath all three is Nouwen's certainty—based on his own life experiences and his experience as a pastor—that our deepest human need is to know unequivocally that we are loved unconditionally, that we are truly beloved by God.

This is shown in passages included throughout. In the section on "Solitude," Nouwen writes,

"Real freedom to live in this world comes from hearing clearly the truth about who we are, which is that we are beloved. That's what prayer is about. . . . It is the essential attitude that creates in us the freedom to love other people, not because they are going to love us back but because we are so loved. And out of the abundance of that love, we want to give."

and:

"This is [also] where ministry starts, because our freedom is anchored in claiming our belovedness. Being the beloved allows us to go into this world and touch people, heal them, speak with them, and make them aware that they too are beloved, chosen, and blessed.

When we discover our belovedness, we begin to see the belovedness of other people and call that forth. It is an incredible mystery of God's love that the more we know how deeply we are loved, the more we will see how deeply our sisters and our brothers in the human family are loved."

And there is much more, like,

*"Let's remind ourselves that what brings true joy is not successfulness but fruitfulness . . ."*

and,

*"Fruitfulness in the spiritual life is about love . . ."*

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**Afterwords:** continued from back page.

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And in this time—with all of the challenges sparked by the pandemic, with all that seems to deeply divide us—our especial hope is that we can be true parts of our own congregation (and that we can continue to be nurtured by it) . . . and parts of the larger ecumenical community to which we all belong . . . and of the vast and diverse human family.

We need God, and we need to be able to serve, and—especially in this time—we need others. For when we truly open ourselves to others, we can know even more deeply that we are in this thing called life together . . . that we are not alone . . . that we are a treasured part of a Whole.

And when we know deeply that we all Belong, space is created . . .



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## Address Service Requested

*“Transforming disappointment . . . ”*  
*“Thich Nhat Hahn . . . ”*  
*“Iona Pilgrimages . . . ”*  
*“Creating some space . . . ”*

## Afterwords: “Creating a space . . . ”

Hope and purpose in this Season of Lent have come—for us—from a small essay Henri Nouwen wrote for *Leadership* in 1995 (later summarized in *A Spirituality of Living*). The essay begins,

“A biblical text that has been very, very important to me is the story in Luke (6:12-19) where Jesus spent the night in prayer on the top of the mountain. In the morning, he came down and created a community of apostles around him. Then in the afternoon, with his apostles, he ministered—he went out and healed and proclaimed the good news.”

Nouwen then adds that he was drawn to this text so strongly because it sets forth “the vision Jesus starts,” it sets forth—through Jesus’ example—three central things that we as Christians are to do:

**“One, communion with God, prayer, or being in solitude with God;  
secondly, creating community; and thirdly, doing ministry.”**

Nouwen believed—and it resonates deeply—that we are not Christians primarily by what we believe but much more centrally by what we do, by how we live our lives. And to live life abundantly, Jesus’ example shows, we need to open ourselves to God’s presence and God’s love; we need to open ourselves to others, to form community; and we need to find concrete ways to serve God and to serve others.

Nouwen describes each of these three things we are to do as being “disciplines,” declares bluntly that “a spiritual life without discipline is impossible,” and then asserts that

a spiritual discipline is **“an effort to create some space in which God can act.”**

Our hope for ourselves is that in this Lenten Season and in all that lies ahead, we will seek to follow the example that Jesus sets, that by daily coming to God in prayer or being in solitude with God, by opening ourselves to others, and by seeking to serve, we can—within ourselves and within the world—create some space in which God can act.