

The Furrow

Worship in Place

May 17, 2020

Today was to have been the inaugural gathering of ***The Furrow*** - a monthly worship experience in which “nature is an active participant, not merely a backdrop.” Covid-19, the pandemic virus that has brought the world to a standstill and moved us apart and indoors, had other ideas. Instead of gathering together, for the past many weeks we have been “sheltering in place.”

In lieu of the physical gathering we had intended, we invite you to “worship in place”, in the spirit of The Furrow gatherings we anticipate, utilizing the following resources in the locations where you are.

☀ **Readings**

ECCLESIASTES 3:11

“God has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, the Creator has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.” (NRSV)

ISAIAH 43:18-19

“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” (ESV)

FROM THE POETRY OF WENDELL BERRY

*We must learn to acknowledge
that the creation is full of mystery;
we will never entirely understand it.
We must abandon arrogance and stand in awe.
We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation,
and the ability to be worshipful in its presence.
For I do not doubt that it is only on the condition
of humility and reverence before the world
that our species will be able to remain in it.*

☀ **Threshold Experiences**

- In the Celtic tradition... “thresholds are the space between when we move from one time to another, as in the threshold of dawn to day or of dusk to dark; one space to another, as in times of inner or outer journeying or pilgrimage; and one awareness to another, as in times when our old structures start to fall away and we begin to build something new. We encounter thresholds each day through the movement across the hinges of time. We encounter thresholds in our experience

as well - those times when life shifts, sometimes out of choice, and often because of circumstance.” *

- This present moment is conspicuous with thresholds. Here in this emergent “betweenness” we sense that “what has been” is passing away, but the “what will be” is yet undefined - or as the Apostle Paul described it, “seen through milky glass.” What is clear is the awkward/intriguing/vulnerable/beckoning reality of the transition itself. Springtime buds are forming on the branches and stems, but fruit - if there is to be any - is still remote; blossoms are still coyly, tightly clenched. Graduations, albeit virtual ones, are closing one door and opening some yet ambiguous other. And now, after weeks of precautionary confinement, restrictions are gradually lifting, opening the door...to what? In nature and in life, thresholds confront us. Perhaps with trepidation, perhaps with enthusiasm, we take a step.

☀ **Spiritual Tools**

- Cell phone camera (for “receiving images as gifts”, not “taking photos” *)
- Mindfulness Bell app (free, with optional upgrade), or simply your phone’s built in timer
- Some means of recording experiences - journal, notepaper, etc.

☀ **Spiritual Exercises**

- Set a timer, using the Mindfulness Bell app or some other device - for a minimum of 15 minutes but preferably longer - a half-hour, perhaps.
- Take a slow walk outdoors - around your yard or down your street; through a park or into the woods.
- Watch for “edge zones” - natural thresholds. If the threshold is spatial, stand first on one side of the edge, and then the other. What changes? What about the sides is different? If the threshold is temporal - a bud, for example; a caterpillar - consider the movement from one stage to another. What is lost? What is gained? Recalling the words of Isaiah, what is “the new thing” that God is doing?
- Receive as a gift an image of these thresholds with your camera.





- When your timer alerts you, find a quiet place to sit with your images, your journal, and your thoughts.

- Read again the poem by Wendell Berry. Reflect on his observations about the mystery of which creation is full, and the need to “be worshipful in its presence.”

- Consider the wisdom of Ecclesiastes that we can never, in any given moment, completely know what God is up to.

- Reflect on the thresholds in nature that you noticed in your walk - those conspicuous places where God is vividly “up to something”.

- What are the edges, the “thresholds” you notice in your own life. What is going away? What is emerging? Locate your feelings of grief. Name your hopes for renewal or rebirth. What other feelings are you experiencing with the change?

- Journal your observations and insights, and consider sharing something of your experiences via the “Contact Us” tab at TheFurrow.org. We will look forward to posting a collage of the responses we receive.
- Close with a prayer of self-offering, and for a heightened awareness of and gratitude for the “new things” that God is doing in and around you.

* references from ***The Soul’s Slow Ripening: 12 Celtic Practices for Seeking the Sacred*** by Christine Valters Paintner.