

## REFLECTION FOR EASTER SUNDAY ~ 09 April 2023

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

"God will repair what has been shattered, but not by mending it with something else. Rather, out of the old and very same material of its origin, God will impart to it an appearance of beauty pleasing to Godself." These words, written by Hilary of Poitiers – a 4<sup>th</sup> century Doctor of The Church, are a profoundly comforting lens through which to rejoice in the Resurrection. Sixteen centuries later, a philosopher and contemplative, Beatrice Bruteau, would echo Hilary's words:



#### **Resurrection**

Alma Woodsey Thomas

What we call "resurrection" is the full manifestation of the Incarnation itself. This is the revelation of what and who we really are... the divine life comes down from heaven and is sown in a perishable body. But the divine life gradually rises up as the imperishable that it truly is. . . The first humanity was from the earth, a humanity of dust; the second humanity is from heaven....Just as we have borne the image of the humanity of dust, we shall also bear the image of the humanity of heaven (see 1 Cor.15:47,49).

The stories of the Risen Jesus as he was recognized by the disciples are the source of both Hilary's and Bruteau's pondering. The disciples come to know their beloved Jesus as the Risen One, not by lightning or thunder or a startling appearance, but through those ordinary actions that he had shared with them while he lived with them before his death:

- ❖ he walks along the road with them (the two women in Matthew's account read last night at the Vigil)
- ❖ he shares a meal with them (with the disciples in the Upper Room, with Mary and Cleopas in Emmaus, and with the disciples on the seashore)
- ❖ he prepares a meal for them (for the disciples on the seashore)
- ❖ he calls the person by name (Mary Magdalene in the garden as we read in today's story in John's Gospel)
- ❖ he shows them and encourages them to touch the wounds in his hands and feet and side (the disciples in the Upper Room and Thomas eight days later).

Until Jesus repeats these ordinary actions, the disciples do not recognize him. Jesus bears both "the image of the humanity of dust" and "the image of the humanity of heaven" – "the old and very same material of its origin has now an appearance pleasing to Godself." When Jesus rises, the humanity of dust remains, now enlivened by the humanity of heaven. Philip Chircop sj has written a beautiful prayer-poem entitled "Invitation" that sends this same message – note the beautiful phrase "the warmth of your holy breath softening the hardened clay from whence we come":

Stand in our midst again, today  
enter the circle of our fears  
penetrate the darkness of our doubts  
meet us where we are.



May we listen to your sung Shalom:  
'Peace be with you ... Peace be with you'.  
May we see your hands and your side.  
May we feel the warmth of your holy breath  
softening the hardened clay from whence we come.

Invited, curious like a little child,  
we place our trembling hands not only on your wounds  
but on ours too, and on the lovely brokenness of others,  
breathing in, forgiveness; breathing out, forgiveness  
wounds becoming the sacred place of mutual compassion,  
and the springboard to an intimate song of communion and possibility  
crafted in the heart: 'our Lord, and our God.'

We still walk the earth, we still share meals, we still call each by name, and we still have our own wounds, but with Jesus' resurrection and the promise that we, too, will finally share that resurrection, our ordinary actions become the ways in which Christ's hands and feet and heart remain on this Earth. Our joy in the certainty of Jesus' resurrection and our belief that we share in his resurrection are shown by how we treat each other, how we support each other, how we love one another. The "other" whom we love and hold in the "sacred place of mutual compassion" includes Earth herself and all Earth beings. Together we become part of the "intimate song of communion and possibility."

Peter reminds his listeners in the Acts of the Apostles, "God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (Acts 10:40-41). He is reminding us that the disciples ate and drank with Jesus and that we are to be witnesses as Jesus had invited the women to be. We are not passive witnesses to this wondrous reality; we are active participants in living lives that are grounded in and energized by that belief.

There is little wonder that our readings today find reason to rejoice. Last night we heard both the angel and Jesus tell the women, "Do not be afraid" (Matt 28:5, 10). The angel says it confidently because, "I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay" (Matt 28: 5-6). Jesus says it to give the women a way to live into the resurrection, "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me" (Matt 28:10).



**Resurrection Chapel, National Cathedral-DC**  
[Tim, 2011 Flickr](#)

Jesus has just greeted the women with the word, "Chairete" (Χαίρετε), meaning "Rejoice!" In an earlier chapter in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus uses that very same word, "Rejoice (Χαίρετε) and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt 5:12). Jesus calls the women to their ministry just as he has encouraged the Samaritan woman to go to her community (Jn 4:28-29), Martha her ministry to preach his resurrection (Jn 11:20-27), and Mary

Magdalene to begin her ministry when she and Jesus meet in the garden (Jn 20:17-18).

All these women accept Jesus' invitation, knowing that it will come at cost to them. Ron Rolheiser omi echoes Matt 5:12, "We also celebrate the voices and wounds of the ones who died on Good Friday. The task of Easter is to rekindle the creed within ourselves. The earliest Christians, immediately upon experiencing the resurrected Jesus, spontaneously voiced a one-line creed: 'Jesus is Lord!' One of the tasks of Easter is to strain to hear the voices of Good Friday."

The psalmist reminds us that, at the heart of the resurrection story just as at the heart of the ongoing creation story, is our complete trust that "God's steadfast love endures forever" (Ps 118:1, 2). This certainty leads the psalmist and us to cry aloud, "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes!" (Ps 118:23). The Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, shows us that Easter may be a noun, but it is also a dramatic action verb as he pleads with our God, "Easter us to joy and energy and courage and freedom; Easter us that we may be fearless for your truth."

It is another source of joy that the three religions descendant from Abraham also share our holiest days at this time of the year. For Jews, Pesach (Passover) is an eight-day celebration that commemorates the emancipation of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt. On the first two nights of the festival, the seder meal is eaten. This year Pesach begins on the evening of April 5 and ends on April 13. For Muslims, Ramadan is the month that celebrates the time when the first verses of the holy book Quran were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad more than 1,400 years ago. During this holy month, Muslims fast during the daylight hours from pre-sunrise to sunset. This year Ramadan extends from March 22 to April 20.

Now we bring our reflections full circle, back to our belief that resurrection and Easter do not mend our brokenness with something new. Even more wonderfully, with the resurrection, our creator God and Risen Christ and enlivening Spirit take our brokenness and shape it into something new, something joy-filled, something hope-filled, something life-giving.

Roddy Hamilton, in his poem-prayer, delights in the sounds of resurrection:

Stop! Did you hear it:  
the stone roll  
the grave clothes being folded  
the body rise  
it was like a whispered alleluia in the stillness of the dawn  
but it was real

Did you hear it:  
the angels muffled laughter as the women reached the tomb  
the dawn break over the garden revealing footprints in the dew  
the mountains bow in slow grandeur just out the corner of your eye  
it was like something shifting at the edge of your sight  
but it was real

Did you hear it:  
The world hold its breath  
the stars hesitate  
the sun linger  
creation fill its lungs  
the air swell



so that the whole earth can proclaim: Christ is risen!

This is resurrection morning

We see the same images visually in the beautiful *Stations of the Resurrection*, created by the artist, Sister Mary Stephen, a member of the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre who reside in Essex in the United Kingdom. During this Easter week, let us stop and listen and look. Hear one of these “sounds” or see one of the images from the resurrection story and allow it to nourish our spirits, enliven our minds, and delight our senses.



Sealed Tomb



Resurrection



Rolling Stone



Angel ~ Empty Tomb



Women ~ Tomb



Peter and John



Mary Magdalene



Women meet Lord

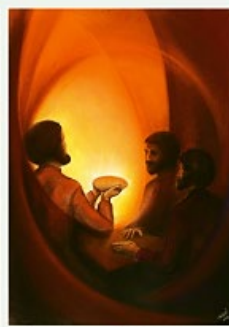
~~~~~ ¡Felices  
Pascuas! ~~ Happy  
Easter! ~~  
Joyeuses Pâques!  
~~~~~



Disciples



Walk to Emmaus



Supper at Emmaus



Thomas



Seashore



Lord and Peter



Ascension



Pentecost

***Stations of the Resurrection***  
**Sister Mary Stephen**  
**Canonesses of**  
**the Holy Sepulchre**  
**Essex, UK**

## REFLECTIONS FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER ~ 16 April 2023

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” – today’s Psalm 118 says so succinctly and so reflectively that each day is gift, gift from our creating God, gift for which we give thanks. This is especially true in these holy days of Eastertime. It truly is “marvellous in our eyes” (Ps 118:23).

This Sunday marks the eighth day after Easter Sunday. The Lutheran pastor, Gordon W. Lathrop, tells us that the eighth day is not incidental timing, “Christians have met ‘eight days later’ (John 20:26) down through the ages. That meeting has always meant for them the encounter with the risen one and so with the end of death and the endless cycles of loss. To encounter Christ risen is to encounter God’s spirit and God’s mercy, things that have been promised for the last day when God’s dwelling is to be with humankind and tears are to be wiped away. Christians believe the eighth-day meeting is already the dawning of that day. The eighth day is the beginning of a new creation.”

In a moment of new awareness for me, I recently read Richard Rohr’s words that speak to the connection between creation and resurrection:

Resurrection is a pattern of creation that has always been true. Resurrection and renewal are, in



**Resurrection, Charles Blakeman**

fact, the universal and observable pattern of everything. We might just as well use non-religious terms like “springtime,” “regeneration,” “healing,” “forgiveness,” “life cycles,” “darkness,” and “light.” If incarnation is real, and Spirit has inhabited matter from the beginning, then resurrection in multitudinous forms is to be fully expected. We should not be surprised that the word we translate from the Greek as *Christ* comes from the Hebrew word *mashiach*, which means “the anointed one,” or Messiah. Jesus the Christ reveals that all is anointed! Resurrection is just incarnation taken to its

logical conclusion.

“Resurrection is just incarnation taken to its logical conclusion.” Incarnation, first in the creation of the cosmos and then in the coming of Jesus the Christ, carries with it the richness of created beings and the woundedness of created beings. In his appearance to the fearful disciples in the Upper Room, Jesus makes himself known by showing them his hands and his side (Jn 20:20). Before and after he did so, he speaks the same calming, consoling hope-filled words, “Peace be with you” (Jn 20:19, 21). Does the peace come from knowing that their beloved Jesus is now the Risen One? Does the peace come from knowing that their beloved Jesus continues to share their pain and suffering, continues to understand their woundedness, continues to show that in their woundedness is their hope? We remember the words scribbled on a piece of paper and smuggled from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s cell a short time before his death, “Only a suffering God can help.”



The spiritual writer, Jan Richardson, expresses this so beautifully:

**Forces of nature, Andrew Ostrovsky**

Being in the world and loving one another – even from our most intact, integrated places, much less our less-intact ones – exposes us to wounding, to the giving and receiving of pain. Christ's wounds exemplify this. They underscore the depth of his willingness to enter into our loving in all its hurt and hope and capacity for going horribly wrong. In wearing his wounds – even in his resurrection – he confronts us with our own and calls us to move through them into new life. Christ beckons us not to seek out our wounding, because that will come readily enough in living



humanly in the world, but rather to allow our wounds to draw us together for healing within and beyond the body of Christ, and for an end to the daily crucifixions that happen through all forms of violence. The crucified Christ challenges us to discern how our wounds will serve as doorways that lead us through our own pain and into a deeper relationship with the wounded world and with the Christ who is about the business of resurrection, for whom the wounds did not have the final word.

Jesus will repeat the words, “Peace be with you,” a third time in this short passage from John. One of the Twelve, Thomas, was not present on Easter day with the other disciples. We know Thomas from earlier passages in the Gospels – he is named whenever the Twelve are listed. Thomas is the only one of the disciples to say that he will accompany Jesus to Bethany where Lazarus has died, even though they all know it is a high risk for them, “Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him’” (Jn 11:14-16). Thomas is also the disciple who, at the Last Supper, challenged Jesus with the words, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (Jn 14.4-5). He was a faithful, courageous follower of Jesus and was certainly heartbroken at the death of his beloved Teacher.

Little wonder that Thomas could not accept without question the story of the other followers who, even though they had seen the wounds of Jesus and had spoken with him, were still in the Upper



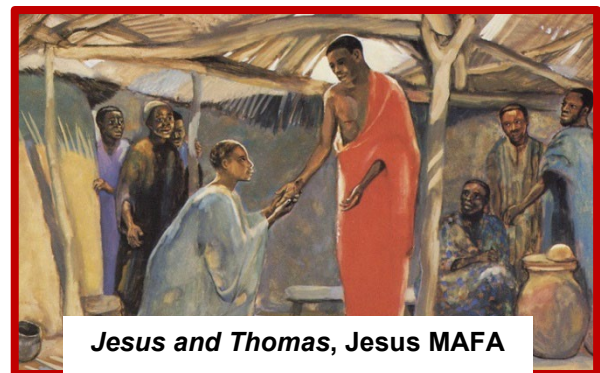
Room eight days later, not confident enough to leave. He exemplifies what Rainier Maria Rilke speaks to in his *Letters to a Young Poet*: “Try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live with them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now.” To name this faithful one, the “Doubting Thomas,” is to do him a great disservice. In Jan Richardson's words, “As Thomas reaches toward Christ, as he places his hand within the wound that Christ still bears, he is not merely grasping for concrete proof of the resurrection. He is entering into the very mystery of Christ, crossing into a new world that even now he can hardly see yet dares to move toward with the courage he has

previously displayed.”

Thomas is every one of us Christ-followers who did not personally see Jesus immediately after his resurrection. In the words at the end of today's Gospel narrative, the writer of the Gospel says so when he notes, "these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God" (Jn 20:31). For Thomas, faith comes on the following Sunday when he hears the words of the Risen One addressing him personally. For those who come after, faith comes through hearing the Word of God, through hearing the Risen One speak through his apostolic messengers, human and other-than-human (do not forget that this coming Saturday is Earth Day, when we thank our God for the heavens and the firmament who proclaim God's handiwork – see Psalm 19).

In his poem "St. Thomas the Apostle," the British theologian, Malcolm Guite, speaks to the Thomas who is the faithful follower, not the doubtful one (note especially last two lines):

"We do not know . . . how can we know the way?"  
 Courageous master of the awkward question,  
 You spoke the words the others dared not say  
 And cut through their evasion and abstraction.  
 O doubting Thomas, father of my faith,  
 You put your finger on the nub of things:  
 We cannot love some disembodied wraith,  
 But flesh and blood must be our king of kings.  
 Your teaching is to touch, embrace, anoint,  
 Feel after him and find him in the flesh.  
 Because he loved your awkward counter-point,  
 The Word has heard and granted you your wish.  
*O place my hands with yours, help me divine  
 The wounded God whose wounds are healing  
 mine.*



The members of the first community who follow the way begun by Thomas and the other disciples in the Upper Room and who become the bearers of the tradition that comes down to us today are described in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple,



they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts" (Acts 1:42, 22, 46). Dennis Hamm sj gives further detail to this description, "The apostolic 'teaching' would, no doubt, include the sayings of Jesus and the interpretations of his life by way of texts from the Hebrew Scriptures. The 'communal life' includes the generous sharing of possessions mentioned later in this description. The 'breaking of the bread' seems to be, as in the Emmaus account in Luke's Gospel (Luke 24), the celebration of the Lord's Supper." The Presbyterian theologian and pastor, Thom Shuman, describes what it means for us to be that Christian community today:

When we are blinded by anger, you pour out your love for all to see;  
when we wonder what tomorrow will bring, you call us to trust in you;  
when sadness fills our lives, you plant gladness in our hearts.  
God of Easter: touch us with your grace.

You show us your hands, so we may reach out to mend the broken;  
you show us your feet, so we may walk with those the world passes by;  
you show us your face, so we may know what our sisters and brothers look like.  
Risen Christ: touch us with your compassion.

You open our eyes, so we may see God's love;  
you open our minds, so we may welcome God's Word;  
you open our lips, so we may be God's witnesses.  
Spirit of Hope: touch us with your peace.  
God in Community, Holy in One, open us to your presence.



At this time in your life, which specific prayer in this prayer-poem has special meaning for you?  
Let each one of us contemplatively answer that question as we remember Father Philip Chircop's  
poem from last Sunday's reflection:

Invited, curious like a little child,  
we place our trembling hands  
not only on your wounds but on ours too,  
and on the lovely brokenness of others,  
breathing in, forgiveness; breathing out, forgiveness  
wounds becoming the sacred place of mutual compassion,  
and the springboard to an intimate song of communion and possibility  
crafted in the heart: 'our Lord, and our God.'



## REFLECTIONS FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER ~ 23 April 2023

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

*May we, O Living Lord, in this reborn light,  
Shape a new relationship with the future,  
And meet you there, with all those in every conflict and hunger.*

These words from a poem-prayer by Roddy Hamilton speak so beautifully to the heart of the Resurrection stories – the ordinary of our lives remains, but for those who are Resurrection people the ordinary becomes extraordinary! In today's narrative from Luke's Gospel, we see this happen for Cleopas and Mary, two disciples on the road to Emmaus. A simple walk home, a supper meal, and a walk back to Jerusalem – everyday happenings in their lives – are transformed and a new relationship with the future is shaped. Let us reflect now on the transformation of the path of the lives of Mary and Cleopas. The spiritual writer, [Jan Richardson](#), writes that every step of this happening is "Blessing":

Already a blessing in the walking  
already a blessing on the road  
already a blessing drawing near  
already a blessing in the listening  
already a blessing in the burning hearts  
already a blessing in the almost evening  
already a blessing in the staying  
already a blessing at the table  
already a blessing in the bread  
already a blessing in the breaking  
already a blessing finally known  
already a blessing give us eyes  
already a blessing let us see.

**A simple walk home** – Cleopas and Mary are walking home from Jerusalem in the late afternoon of the first day of the week. They are brokenhearted, discouraged, in despair. The one whom they believed would be the Messiah has been crucified and has died. To make matters even more upsetting, some of their women friends are insisting that they found Jesus' tomb empty and that angels there told them Jesus was alive. As they trudge home with all hope gone, a stranger joins them. In the conversation with them, he seems to be trying to convince them that their holy books, their Hebrew scriptures, assure them that all of this makes sense, that there is hope in this moment of despair. I love the way in which William H. Willimona Methodist theologian, applies this to our lives, "If you want to experience the resurrection of Jesus Christ in your life, where you live, just get up in the morning and put one foot in front of the other and head down the road. Follow the way. But please, go with a bit of imagination. Walk with the expectation of the possibility of surprise."

**On the Road to Emmaus  
Icon by Sister Marie-Paul**



**A supper meal** – Even though Mary and Cleopas cannot make any sense of what Jesus is saying, they are gracious in inviting him to supper with them. Gracious hospitality to a stranger had been one of Jesus’ teachings while he walked on Earth (“I was a stranger and you welcomed me” – Matt 25:34). While they grieved his death, Mary and Cleopas are following this teaching little knowing that their simple act would be life-changing for them. Jan Richardson



Breaking Bread

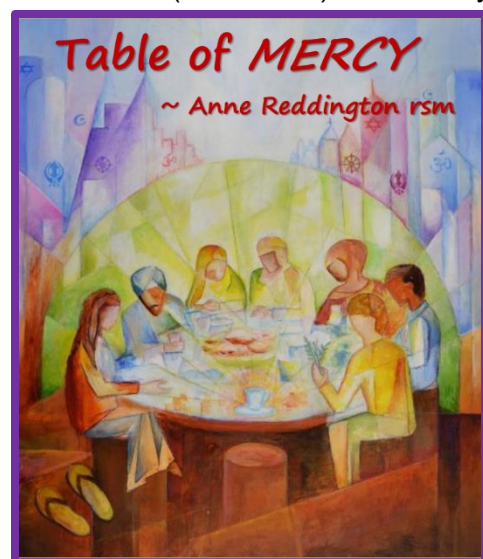
reminds us, “A shared table is a sacred space where we acknowledge, in the presence of others, that we are hungry: not only for the feeding of our bodies but also of our souls. There is a profound connection between eating and knowing. This knowing that we experience at the table comes both as a deep comfort and also a keen challenge. As Cleopas and his companion discovered on that evening in Emmaus, the presence of Christ persists when his followers gather to eat. Particularly in times of confusion

and grief, his presence at the table comes as comfort and solace indeed.”

Veronica Lawson rsm echoes the same thought, “Extraordinary things can happen to those hospitable enough to ‘break bread’ with ‘strangers’ in whom they do not immediately recognise God’s presence. If we open our hearts to those who have sought a welcome on our shores and are still awaiting a path to permanency, we might come to participate more deeply in the joy of the resurrection.” As Jesus breaks bread with them, Cleopas and Mary realize who the stranger truly is!

**A walk back to Jerusalem** – Their first response to recognizing Jesus is the acknowledgement that they should have seen it the moment he began to speak about the Scriptures, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Lk 24:32). The second response is that this news is too good to keep! They turn around and go back to Jerusalem, to tell the disciples “what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Acts 24:35). John Foley sj takes their message to the next step, “We see him in the breaking of the bread, but also and astoundingly in the breaking bones of the world.”

In 2013, the Archbishop who would become Pope Francis challenged us with these words, “We need a church able to dialogue with those disciples who, having left Jerusalem behind, are wandering aimlessly, alone, with their own disappointment, disillusioned by a Christianity now considered barren, fruitless soil, incapable of generating meaning...But we need to know how to interpret, with courage, the larger picture. Jesus warmed the hearts of the disciples of Emmaus.” Remember that Jesus not only reveals himself at the meal – he reveals himself to us in those with whom we eat. This week let us ask ourselves what we are hungry for, what kind of table hospitality we are giving or



receiving. Let us ask ourselves, “How is the table a place of comfort for us? a place of challenge for us? a place of knowing for us?”

**Emmaus and Earth Day** – As we read the Emmaus story, we hear Sister Elaine Wainwright’s teaching on the ecological dimensions of this narrative:

Materiality fills these narratives: details of time and place, eyewitness accounts. This Gospel speaks of resurrection as an enhanced experience of body and body in place, not as an escape from the body. They tell about the resurrection, setting the story in time and place – “early in the morning”, “two days since it all happened”, “at the tomb”. They describe the resurrection as material – not ethereal. Resurrection takes place in bodies and is encountered in and through bodies. And the encounters are not limited to human bodies but to other forms of life and matter around us. Our Emmaus journey can be to see more clearly that we are enmeshed in the communion of the planet and cosmos.

She challenges us to live the truth of Emmaus, that we not only see but we must recognize and discern, opening our eyes through words and actions of gratitude and hospitality. “As ecological readers, this means being attentive to the material – eyewitness to everything we see around us – but also maturing in our understanding so that we recognise the relationships that form the Earth community.”



Saturday, April 22, is Earth Day. Indeed, every day is Earth Day! This year, the theme is “Invest in our Planet” -- we need to act boldly, innovate broadly, and implement equitably – businesses, governments and citizens becoming a partnership for the planet. The *Laudato Si’ Movement* suggests three overall goals to achieve this partnership or Earth community:

- ✓ *Ecological Conversion* – To encourage a change of heart of the Catholic faithful and motivate a more passionate concern for our common home, enshrining creation care as a Catholic priority.
- ✓ *Full Sustainability* – To help the Catholic community lead by example by embodying the “Less is More” motto and shrinking its footprint to zero, in line with the urgency of the climate and ecological crises.
- ✓ *Prophetic Advocacy* – To mobilize the Church to raise a prophetic voice for climate and ecological justice, calling for bold policies to accomplish the Paris Agreement’s goal of 1.5C and halt biodiversity collapse.



We bring our reflections together with this prayer-poem from Steve Garnaas-Holmes:

Our deepest grief is not that we have lost what we loved  
but that in our aloneness our hearts burned within us  
and we didn't notice.

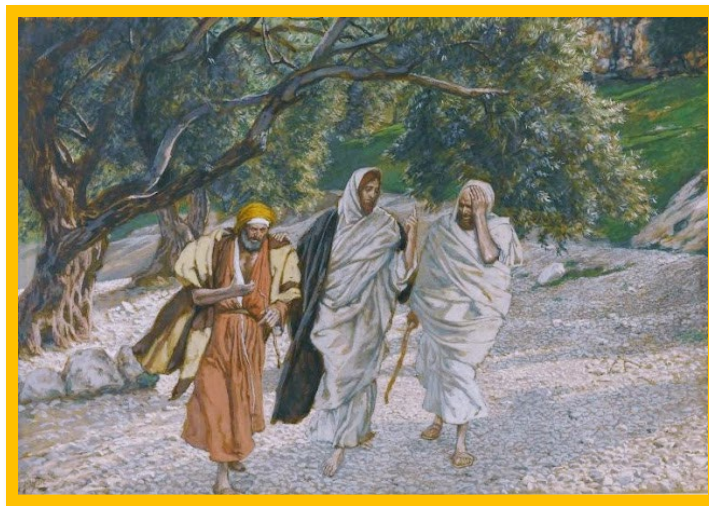
That as we walked through the shadowed valleys  
we were accompanied and didn't believe it.  
That we were in the presence of the holy and weren't aware.  
That we, too, because we are so beloved, are holy,  
and held in the umbilical arms of life and raised from death  
and don't even realize it.

Our deepest grief is the burning of our hearts,  
not a hankering back but a reaching forward,  
the labor pain of a birth unbirthed, a newness we haven't embraced yet,  
a resurrection we haven't yet made real.

As our holiness blossoms within us  
we allow ourselves to be led by the burning of our hearts,  
shedding what is expected of us – molting – and becoming, always newly becoming  
who were are created to be, real-izing resurrection.

We go back now to our opening words. The living Lord showers reborn light in our midst! There is little wonder that, at Pentecost in that first moment of our Church, Peter can reflect on Psalm 16 (both readings in today's Liturgy of the Word), "My heart is glad, and my soul rejoices. . . You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy" (Ps 16:9, 11 and Acts 2:28).

Let these words resonate in our lives this week with fullness of joy. Let us walk with the expectation of the possibility of surprise! Let us see the ordinary happenings in the path of our lives as truly extraordinary, lived in the presence of the Risen One! Let us trust that, because we are so beloved, we are holy!



[The Pilgrims of Emmaus on the Road](#), James Tissot

## REFLECTIONS FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER ~ 30 April 2023

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

We are now half-way through the Easter season. It is not surprising, but it is delightful that the Church has chosen the images of sheep and the good shepherd as the theme for this Sunday's Liturgy of the Word. These images are deeply embedded in both the Old Testament and the New



Testament. Indeed, the word "sheep" is used 220 times, "lamb" is used 200 times, and "shepherd" is used 118 times. Knowing the importance of repetition as a key to interpreting Scripture, we have good reason to believe that Jesus knew his Scriptures very well! Knowing that there are many, many wisdoms permeating the images, let us choose three for our reflection today: knowing, compassion, and voice.

**Knowing** – Jesus tells us that, as the good shepherd, "I know my own" (Jn 10:10). Recent studies carried out by scientists at the Babraham Institute in Cambridge in

England (led by Jenny Norton, a neuroscientist) give us new insights into knowing sheep. These studies show that sheep possess a sharp sense of individuality and can recognize the faces of people and other sheep for at least two years. They react to facial expressions, prefer a smile to a grimace, mourn absent individuals, and will show visible signs of depression. Ewes, in particular, are more sensitive to the faces of other sheep, especially lamb faces – they will instantly recognize the needs of the lamb by looking at its face, allowing them to raise lambs more positively. Sheep have a good memory and a good learning capacity and are far more emotionally intelligent than we thought. They have high levels of social intelligence, relying on other members of the herd to provide protection for each other. Indeed, sheep have a 'sense of self' with individual characters and personalities.

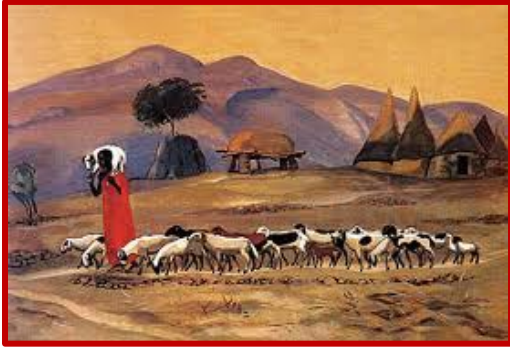
Shepherding is among the oldest occupations, beginning some 5,000 years ago and existing in all parts of the world. Unlike farmers, shepherds had to move constantly from one pasture to another. Therefore, they lived apart from society, being largely nomadic. It was mainly a job of solitary males without children. Their duty was to keep their flock intact, protect it from predators, and guide it to market areas in time for shearing. They were often wage earners, being paid to watch the sheep of others, and were often the younger sons of farming peasants who did not inherit any land. Although essential to the life and economy of the people, shepherds were poor, smelled of sheep, and were not welcomed in ordinary society.

Yet Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all used the metaphor of the shepherd to image God and those who would be godlike in their actions. This in itself is an implicit invitation to inclusion and a reminder that being godlike is not about being powerful, dominant, privileged, and controlling. On many occasions in the Old Testament, God is compared to a shepherd. We heard from the best known of all psalms (sung in our Liturgy today), "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake" (Ps 23:1-3). In a beautiful chapter in Ezekiel, God says twice "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says



**Jesus the Good Shepherd,**  
Amiens Cathedral. [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

### ***The Good Shepherd, Jesus MAFA***



the Lord God” (Ezek 34:15, 31). And in John 10, Jesus is imaged as the shepherd – indeed, he tells us twice, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. . . I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. I am the good shepherd” (Jn 10:10, 14).

All the major figures of the Scriptures of these three religions insist that the leaders of the people must lead as shepherds. The patriarchs Abraham and Jacob, the twelve tribes, the prophet Moses, David, and Amos were real shepherds. Jacob met his future wife Rachel at a well when she was shepherd for her father’s sheep and where he impressed her by ensuring that her sheep were given water (see Genesis 29). Moses received his call to become leader of the people when he was tending the sheep of his father-in-law and saw the burning bush on Mount Horeb (see Exodus 3). David was named by Samuel to become the second king of Israel – David had to be called from his shepherding duties after his six brothers were rejected (see 1 Sam 16:13-15). In Islam, referring to himself, Moses, Abraham, and Jesus, Mohammed says, “There was no prophet who was not a shepherd.”

In our Christian tradition, the word “pastor” (the Latin word for “shepherd”) has become strongly identified with ministry. Ordained leaders in Christian denominations are almost all called pastors (including Roman Catholic priests). Pastoral care and pastoral ministry are terms used to describe ministry in hospitals, long term care facilities, parishes, prisons, universities, schools, etc. Indeed, the term is now used for such ministries of care and compassion outside the religious context. It is often an expectation outlined in accreditation surveys for hospitals and universities with no links to any religious groups – and, more significantly, an expectation of the persons being served in such places.

On a number of occasions, speaking to bishops and priests and to Christian managers, Pope Francis has told them explicitly, “Jesus knows how to go in front of the flock to show the way, knows how to stay among them to see what is happening there, and knows how to stay behind, to make sure that no one loses contact – you must be shepherds with the smell of sheep.” Muhammad says, “All of you are shepherds and every one of you is responsible for his herd. A leader is a shepherd, a man is the shepherd over his family, and a woman is the shepherd over her husband’s house and his children. So all of you are shepherds, and every one of you is responsible for his herd.”

**Compassion** – In today’s reading from John, Jesus uses the image of the sheep and the shepherd to explain why he has come, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” How do ministers as shepherds, as pastoral ministries, follow that promise of Jesus? They do so (as Harold Rowdon summarizes succinctly) by “protecting, tending to needs, strengthening the weak, encouraging, feeding the flock, making provision, shielding, refreshing, restoring, leading by example to move people on in their pursuit of holiness, comforting, guiding.” Matthew says clearly that being a shepherd has one quality above all others, “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt 9:36). The image from Isaiah speaks profoundly to compassion, “He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep” (Is 40.11).



**Christ as the Good Shepherd,**  
**Lucas Cranach**



The use of images of the lambs and ewes highlights that this compassion is for humans and for



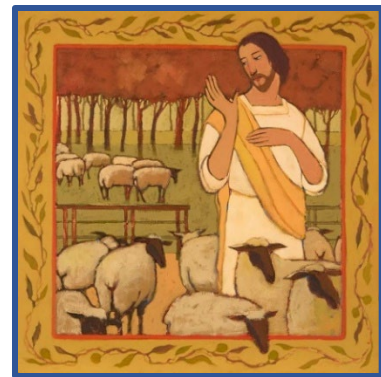
all Earth beings. We sometimes forget that, over time, we have domesticated sheep and conditioned them to depend on us humans for their safety and care. We have violated their trust as we now treat these domesticated animals badly in the interest of profitability, the “bottom line.” While the creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2 assumed that we would eat only fruit and vegetables, we have moved far from that vision. Norman Wirzba (quoted in Margaret Daly-Denton’s *John: An Earth Bible Commentary*) warns us that, if we are to continue to eat animals, we must respect them and give thanks to God

for the gift of their life that nourishes ours, “For this condition to be met, it is critical that these animals be accorded the attention and care that reflects God’s own self-giving care for creation. True animal husbandry – patterned after God the Good Shepherd – the sort that grows out of a caring bond between person and animal can be a suitable context for the eating of meat.”

**Voice** – Perhaps the most moving dimension of today’s reading is found in the words, “The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers” (Jn 10:3-5). The sheep know the voice of their shepherd. The Cambridge study I mentioned earlier gives credence to these words. The sheep do know the voice of their shepherd, trust their shepherd, and reject the trickery of the thieves and bandits whose voices they do not know.

Later in the passage from John 10, Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me” (Jn 10:14-15). Remember that “my own” includes you and me, every Earth being, Earth herself, and the entire cosmos. Can you even imagine more intimate words: “I know my own and my own know me”? Is there any simpler and more complete way to describe the sacred communion of all creation?

The shepherd knows the sheep, and the sheep know the shepherd. Being known to the other and being called by name means that we are in a relationship – the knowing must be and is mutual. As the liturgist, Gail Ramshaw, says, “Jesus’ call to us is grounded in his desire for a relationship with us, to know us and to be known by us. He expects us to engage in discernment, to ask questions, to be wise in the ways that we follow him.” Psalm 95 calls us to trust that God knows us and calls us by name, “For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would listen to his voice!” (Ps 95:7). When you listen to and truly hear God’s voice, what is the name by which God calls you?



**Other Sheep**  
**Kathleen Peterson**

Steve Garnaas-Holmes has written poignantly to God’s calling us by name:

I bet God doesn’t call you Robert or Elizabeth.  
The Beloved has a name for you  
no one else has given you,

a name no one else has. No one.  
Better than a nickname,  
or even a heartfelt term of endearment.  
The name of your soul,  
declared to the universe in the language of mystery,  
pronounceable only by God.  
When you pray, it is for that name you are listening.  
When God speaks your name,  
it is as when God says "Let there be light."  
It is the name of who you alone are created to be,  
the name by which God knows you,  
calls you into life.  
Listen for the silence in which that name is spoken.  
(It takes time; it's a deep and wide silence.)  
Listen for that name.  
Let the one who alone calls you by name lead you out.



**Jesus as shepherd with the lost sheep, Anon**

In our hearts this week, let us be comforted by knowing that God knows us and we know God. Let us rejoice in God's compassion for us, inviting us to compassion for one another, human and other-than-human. Let us thank God for sheep and for shepherds and for all that they teach us. Let us rejoice in our own name and thank our God who calls us by our name! "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me."



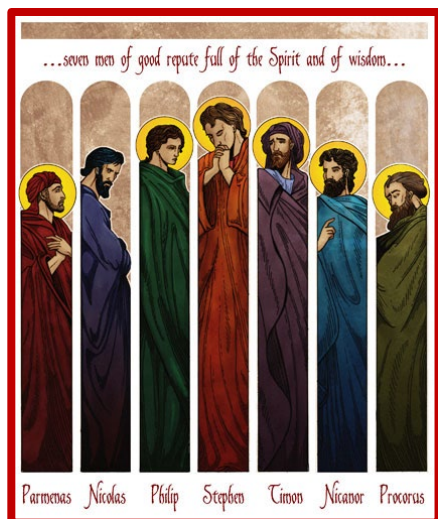
**Jesus with lamb, St Paul's,  
Halifax, Nova Scotia**



## REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN EASTER ~ 07 May 2023

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of the one who called you out of darkness into this marvellous light” (1 Pet 2:9). These words from the second reading in today’s Liturgy of the Word are a touchstone for all four of our readings. God chooses to create all beings – all who are created are worthy, all who are created are called to proclaim God’s presence and to live in God’s marvelous light.

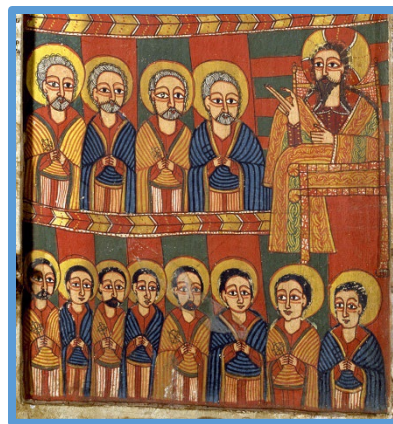


In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the followers of Jesus the Risen One know very quickly that the ministry of preaching and teaching God’s Word is not enough for this Way of being Christ-followers. It must be accompanied by caring for one another, most especially, those most at risk within the community. They also recognize that central to Jesus’ teaching is inclusion. The first disciples are Jewish followers of the Way. Now they are challenged by Greek-speaking people to include them, and they are challenged to attend to the needs of those made vulnerable by the society – in this instance, widows.

The ministers that the Twelve choose all have Greek names, they are deemed to be “of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3), and they are designated by the laying of hands and anointing (Acts 6:6). In other words, this new

ministry has the same marks as the ministries of preaching and teaching. Despite the apparent sense that this ministry is less than the first ministry, it is quite clear that all the qualities required and the ways of being appointed to the ministry are the same whether your ministry is preaching God’s Word or caring for people and Earth.

After having wandered from this teaching for far too long and granting privilege to ordained ministry and ministers, we are slowly but carefully returning to the importance of all ministries, no matter what our age or ability or role in the Church. The Vatican Council reinforces this theme of all ministries being grounded in baptism when it teaches about the “call to holiness” (see *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 5). In his *Joy of the Gospel* (#120), Pope Francis gave us new language to say the same thing when he calls all of us to be “missionary disciples.” Now the *Working Document for the Continental Assemblies of Synod on Synodality* deepens this same thought (#67), “The theme of ministry as central to the life of the Church, and the need to articulate the unity of mission with the plurality of ministries, emerges from the consultation of the People of God.” It calls for a Church which is “a communion of different charisms and ministries.” The very title of this *Working Document* reinforces this teaching, “Enlarge the space of your tent” (Is 54:2). As we read in 1 Peter, **we all belong** to “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people,” and **we are all called** to proclaim the mighty acts of the one who called us out of darkness into this marvelous light.



[Christ Teaching the Disciples](#)  
Walters Art Museum



This central theme of the mingling of God's word and God's works is beautifully imaged in Psalm 33, "For the word of the Lord is upright, and all God's work is done in faithfulness. God loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord" (Ps 33:4-5). God's steadfast love is shown in God's word and in God's faithfulness, righteousness, and justice. We who are called to proclaim God's presence rejoice that this is so – indeed, the psalmist cries out to us to "Praise the Lord with the lyre; make melody to God with the harp of ten strings" (Ps 33:2).

When we return to 1 Peter, we are given a simple but profound metaphor from the larger communion of all creation, "Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight" (1 Pet 2:4-5). The image of a rock or stone is used as a name for God throughout the Old Testament:

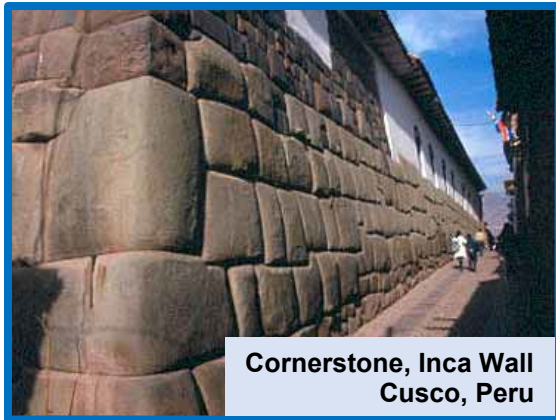
- "For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, God's work is perfect, and all God's ways are just" (Deut 32:3-4)
- "There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God" (1 Sam 2:2)
- "The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge" (2 Sam 22:2-3)
- "For who is God except the Lord? And who is a rock besides our God?" (Ps 18:31)
- "God alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken" (Ps 62:2)
- "Trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock" (Is 26:4)
- "Do not fear or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one" (Is 44:8)

Rocks and stones are Earth beings – they can be found everywhere on Earth, they are diverse, they come in many colours and shapes. They fall into three broad classes: (i) igneous rock (e.g., basalt, granite, quartz) formed through the cooling of lava, (ii) sedimentary rock (e.g., chalk, coal, limestone, sandstone) formed at the earth's surface by water and wind wearing down large rocks into smaller pieces, and (iii) metamorphic rock (e.g., marble, slate, soapstone) formed by subjecting any existing rock to high heat, high pressure, or to a hot, mineral-rich fluid to create a new kind of rock – all creatures of earth, fire, water, and wind. Rocks have been used by humans throughout the history of humankind – for building, for weapons, for walls and fences and dams, for religious altars, for art, for dating the age of Earth. . .



The writer of 1 Peter takes the image of the stone or rock used for God in the Old Testament to describe Jesus the Christ. The writer extends to Jesus Christ the metaphor of the stone which connects Earth and the built environment, the cornerstone. The cornerstone is the first stone set during the building process. Careful measurements are taken to ensure the cornerstone is square, providing the proper alignment of the rest of the building. All other stones will be set in reference to this stone. A cornerstone also marks the geographical location by orienting a building in a specific direction. Ancient cultures believed that the position of heavenly bodies regulated life, fortune, and success; therefore, cornerstones were commonly placed facing the Northeast because it was thought this location would bring harmony and prosperity to the building and its owners. The cornerstone reflects the truth (it is square, providing proper alignment), the way (it is

the first one laid and sets the reference for all the other stones of the building), and the life (the belief that the geographic location determined by the cornerstone would bring harmony and prosperity).



**Cornerstone, Inca Wall  
Cusco, Peru**

The Old Testament image of the stone is also used by the writer of 1 Peter to describe the followers of Jesus Christ. In the book of Exodus, twelve stones represent the people of Israel (“There shall be twelve stones with names corresponding to the names of the sons of Israel; they shall be like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes” – Ex 28:21, 39:14). The context for these stones is the covenant between God and the people. In Exodus 24, the people promise, “All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do” (Ex 24:3). Moses then builds an altar and sets up twelve pillars of stone, representing the twelve tribes of

Israel. He dashes half of the blood of the sacrificed animals on the altar, and, after reading the book of the covenant, he dashes the rest of the blood on the pillars with the words, ‘See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words’ (Ex 24:8).

Now we, the followers, are called living stones, and “like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:5). With Jesus the cornerstone setting the way, the truth, and the life, we the living stones are built into a spiritual house, becoming “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet 2:9). As a living stone, Jesus enlivens the covenant relationship between God and the people. As a cornerstone, Jesus links humans and other-than-humans in communion.

In the Gospel of John at the Last Supper, Jesus speaks to the disciples immediately before his death. He reinforces the themes that we have seen in the other three readings. The passage begins with the comforting words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled” (Jn 14:1), an echo of the words that we heard in Isaiah (44:8) as the writer there reminds us that God is our rock. For Sisters of Mercy, we are also reminded of the prayer which our founder, Catherine McAuley, passed down to us, “Take from my heart all painful anxiety.” In this prayer, she speaks about her trust in the mercy, tenderness, and love of God as she promises to be faithful to her God for time and eternity. We sing this prayer often, but we sometimes do so without truly reflecting on the intermingling of the themes: the matters which cause us deep anxiety, trust in the God of mercy, love, tenderness, and compassion who chooses us; and the relationship between God and us now and for all eternity.

In his words to his disciples and through them to all of us, Jesus makes this startling statement, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). In Sister Veronica Lawson’s words, “Jesus makes three claims: ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life.’ The prologue to the gospel, which functions as an overture to the gospel, has introduced the notion of the incarnate Word as ‘full of grace and truth’ and the bringer of ‘grace and truth’ (1:14, 17). The Word is the life that is the light of all (1:4), the bread of life, even the resurrection and the life. Jesus’ claim to be ‘the way’ is



**Lenten Labyrinth, Mike  
Moyers**

foreshadowed in the parable of the gate: I am the gate for the sheep (10:7)." Thom Shuman's prayer echoes these three "I am" statements:

Our Way: you call us to celebrate your peace in a world which worships war;  
to celebrate your freedom in the face of oppression;  
to celebrate the seed of faith planted in the doubts of our hearts.

Our Life: you would have us celebrate the safe ground of hope  
emerging from the flood of our tears;  
celebrate those who love us in the midst of hurt and hatred;  
celebrate our salvation as we struggle with sin.

Our Truth: you teach us to celebrate our new life in the gift of the Risen Lord;  
to celebrate the grace of your heart which melts our fears;  
to celebrate that all our moments are cradled in your hands.

Jesus makes two other startling statements: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9), and "the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these" (Jn 14:12). Too often, we read these words of Jesus as if they are for the future time. As he speaks at the Last Supper, in fact Jesus is referring to the future time, but with his death and resurrection, that future time has come. The scripture scholar, Walter Brueggemann, tell us, "For us, the important message of today's pericope is that the risen, exalted Christ continues his words and works in his church." The good news is already alive and active among us since the moment of the Resurrection. Catherine of Siena says it succinctly, "All the way to heaven is heaven because he said, 'I am the way.'" We who are believers in Jesus, followers of the Way, are to do the works of Jesus on Earth in whatever place we now live. This is what it means to be missionary disciples, to be ministers of God's word and works, not matter what our age, our ability, our status, or our role.

Let us hear this reflected yet again in words attributed to Teresa of Avila but may have been written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Guy Pearse, a Methodist minister, and Sarah Eliza Rowntree, an English Quaker:

Christ has no body now but yours  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours  
Yours are the eyes through which He looks  
Compassion on this world  
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good  
Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world  
Yours are the hands, Yours are the feet  
Yours are the eyes, You are His body  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours

During this coming week, reflect on times when yours are the eyes through which Christ looks compassion or the feet with which Christ walks to do good or the hands with which Christ blesses all the world – looking with compassion, walking in mercy, blessing the whole world by your presence. This is what it means to be a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. This is the covenant into which our God of mercy has called you and me and every created being.

*I am the Gate*  
[Peter Koenig](#)





## REFLECTIONS FOR ASCENSION SUNDAY ~ 21 May 2023

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Today we celebrate Ascension Day! Some parts of our world celebrated this special moment on Thursday past. The Gospels give different times for the Ascension. In Luke 24, the Ascension occurs on Easter Sunday evening or, at the latest, the next day; in John 20, it occurs sometime between the appearance to Mary Magdalene (who is told not to touch the risen One because he has not yet ascended) and the appearance to Thomas (who is invited to touch him); and in Acts 1, the event happens after the forty days. Each Gospel has its own symbolic reason for the timing of this moment in the life of Jesus the Christ.

The Ascension has been observed liturgically as a Christian feast since at least the fifth century, but initially it was recognized either with Easter or Pentecost. In recent centuries,



**Ascension, Jesus MAFA**

following Acts 1, it has been celebrated “forty” days after Easter on the Thursday, ten days before Pentecost. Since the 1990s, many countries including Canada received permission from the Vatican to celebrate it on Sunday before Pentecost. Previously, the Easter candle was extinguished after the Ascension Day Mass to reflect Jesus’ return to the Father. Today, the Easter candle remains near the altar to emphasize the ongoing presence of the risen Christ in the Church.

The Ascension is marked by two key themes: (i) the absence of Jesus from this Earth yet with the promise to the disciples that Jesus will remain with us (although now in a new way) and that the Spirit will come, and (ii) the calling of the disciples to continue to spread the good news on Earth. Veronica Lawson

rsm tell us, “Today’s Feast invites us to face the experience of loss in a transformative way. Over Lent and Easter, we have been re-mem-bering his death and resurrection. The Ascension draws us into another aspect of the Mystery, that of the presence of the Risen One even in his absence.” This sense of presence even in absence is described beautifully by Ron Rolheiser omi:

What the pain of absence does is stretch our hearts so that the essence, the beauty, the love, and the gift of the one who is absent can flow to us without being colored by the tensions, disappointments, and the flaws of everyday life. As well, the other’s absence can work to stretch our hearts so that we can receive him or her in a way that more fully accepts and respects who he or she really is. The mystery of saying goodbye is really the mystery of the Ascension, the most under-understood mystery both inside and outside of religion. The Ascension is about going away so that our loved ones can fully receive our spirit. It is about the mystery of saying goodbye, when goodbye is not really goodbye at all, but only love’s way of taking on a different modality so that it can be present in a way that is deeper, purer, more permanent, less-clinging, and less-limited by the tensions, disappointments, inadequacies, wounds, and betrayals that, this side of eternity, forever make our intimacy a work in progress.

Keeping visible the Paschal candle after the Ascension is the Church’s way of communicating this sense of Jesus’ presence even in his absence. Indeed, this is a celebration of “love’s way of taking on another modality” so that it can be present in an even more intimate and permanent way. The writer of the letter to the Ephesians prays for us in a touching way that God, “may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of Jesus’ glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the

immeasurable greatness of Jesus' power for us who believe" (Eph 1:17-19). What wonder and joy come from seeing with the eyes of the heart!

At the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, with Joseph's Visitation, the angel tells him that the child to be born to Mary will be Emmanuel, God-with-us (Matt 1:23). Now Matthew's Gospel ends with Jesus telling the disciples, "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20). Elizabeth Johnson csj deepens our understanding of "deep incarnation, the radical divine reach in Christ through human flesh all the way down into the living web of organic life." Both the cross and the resurrection can now be understood as intimately connecting God to the suffering, death and new life not only of human beings but of all creatures. There is little wonder that the Psalm invites us, "Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy" (Ps 47:1).

At the time of the Ascension, Jesus also promises that the Father will send the Spirit to be with the disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). At the Last Supper in John's account, Jesus makes the same promise, "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (Jn 14:25-27). Note that the coming of the Spirit will be accompanied by the peace of Jesus.

The commissioning of the disciples will be confirmed at Pentecost, but Jesus announces it before his departure. Earlier in chapter 28 in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus commissions the women disciples first, "Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me'" (Matt 28:10). In today's reading, Jesus commissions the male disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20). In Luke's Gospel, the commissioning words are spoken by him in the Upper Room after the gatherings with the disciples there and with Mary and Cleopas, "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (Lk 24:47-48).



Ascension, Fr George Saget  
[Abbaye de Keur Moussa](#)

We see that, over and over again, we are reminded that our commission, our missioning, is to the ends of Earth. Although the accounts in the Acts of the Apostles (1:8), the Gospel of Matthew (28:20), and the Gospel of Luke (Lk 24:47) differ in many ways from each other, they all challenge us to go out beyond our own borders and boundaries (geographic and otherwise) to bring the good news. Even the psalmist says twice in six short verses, "God is king of all Earth" (Ps 47:2, 7). What new frontiers have you dared in your life in this past year? Do you hear God's call to dare these new frontiers and Jesus' promise that you will not be alone? Do you trust the Spirit's presence poured out abundantly on you?

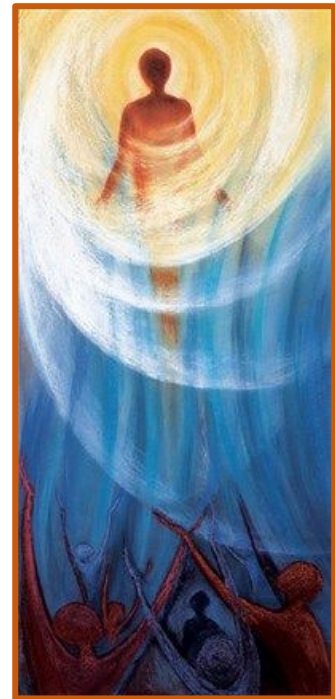
There is a delightful conclusion to the Ascension in the Acts of the Apostles account, "While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly **Ascension, John Giuliani** stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven?' (Acts 1:10-11). There is a lovely prayer-poem by Rev Karla in RevGalBlogPals which hears and responds to this reproach from the two angels:

Holy One, we gaze towards misty heavens  
knowing you were just with us, and now you are gone.

We watch the skies for just a glimpse of your dazzling grace,  
and you send us angels, to bring our hearts and minds and soul  
back into our lives, our bodies, this very present moment,  
where your presence is more difficult to see in the midst of war,  
of random killing sprees, bloody revolutions,  
and random thoughtless cruelty.

Your angels come to us through the ordinary moments,  
reminding us to pray in spite of and because of...  
Your angels remind us that You indeed will empower us  
to be your light and life and hope in this world,  
to the ends of the earth,  
wherever courage and grace is needed.

We are your people, God, and as much as we love sky-gazing,  
we know that you call us to give witness  
in the middle of terror, anxiety, illness, death, and apathy.  
Help us to listen deeply, see far and wide, and live faithfully.  
In Christ we pray, Amen



**Ascension**  
**Sr Mary Stephen CRSS**  
**Canonesses of**  
**the Holy Sepulchre, UK**

This week we finish our journey from Easter to Ascension to Pentecost. Let us see with the eyes of our hearts, trust that the Spirit is showering wisdom on us, and know the hope to which God has called us. Find yourself in the Ascension images on these pages. Let us be both sky-gazers and earth-walkers, witnessing to the love of the God who creates, sustains, and empowers us (all of us, human and other-than-human) every single day.



**Ascension of Jesus**  
**Giotto**



## REFLECTIONS FOR PENTECOST SUNDAY ~ 28 May 2023

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Today is Pentecost Sunday! This feast marks the birth-day of our Church, the day when the Spirit of God is poured abundantly on the disciples with the promise that the same Spirit will be poured abundant on us who follow.

The first Pentecost happens at the moment of the creation of the cosmos. In Genesis 1, we read, "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the spirit of God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Gen 1:1-3). The Spirit and light bring the cosmos into being. Psalm 104 beautifully echoes the presence of the Spirit in the creation of the cosmos, "In wisdom you have made them all; Earth is full of your creatures" (Ps 104:24), a creation that continues from day to day to day, "When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground" (Ps 104:30).

Later in Genesis, we read of God's first covenant, a covenant with all Earth and Earth beings, "God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living



creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and Earth" (Gen 9:12-13). The Spirit and light mark the relationship between God and all Earth. A further chapter of Genesis, however, shows the breaking down of that relationship marked by the attempt to build the Tower of Babel for, although "the whole earth had one language and the same words" (Gen 11:1), the people turned against God. In response, God

"confused the language of all the earth" (Gen 11:9), and the people no longer understood or trusted each other. A new Pentecost was needed.

In today's readings in the Liturgy of the Word, we welcome that new Pentecost, described in two different ways. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read of the experience of the disciples, hearing "a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability" (Acts 1:2-4). In the verses which follow, the people of many languages are amazed – their languages do not become one; rather "in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power" (Acts 1:11).

The second telling of the coming of the Spirit is in John's Gospel which happens immediately after Easter. The disciples are gathered in the Upper Room, not in hope as they are in Acts, but in fear. There are no sounds of mighty winds or divided tongues of fire. Instead, Jesus gently appears among them and shows them the wounds of his hands and side. The disciples' fear turns to joy as Jesus tells them that he is sending them out. Then he "breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (Jn 20:22).

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, assures us that this diverse memory of the coming of the Spirit is at the heart of our faith, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:4-7). It has taken us so long to treasure that diversity, to delight in our differences, to say with Elizabeth Johnson csj, "The dignity of difference is a source of blessing."

It has been said of Hildegard of Bingen that for her theology is as much visual as verbal. Let us then reflect visually on the wonder and the joy and the hope of today's Pentecost with a painting entitled *Pentecost* by the German priest and artist, Sieger Köder.



The colour red dominates – the color of the fire, the embers, love, the Passion, the Spirit. The old Tower of Babel is replaced with a house of windows wide open. Below on the right and left, we see the remnants of that tower unfinished with people standing in the dark: closed, isolated, grumpy, resigned, lonely, exhausted, anxious, and in despair. They have lost their relationship with God and, without a relationship to God and without God's Spirit, they have lost their relationship with one another – the house remains unfinished.

At the bottom centre, we see Peter, holding a book with both sides covered by the Greek word, εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*, *good news*). Around him are the disciples of Jesus, gathered to pray and covered with tongues of fire (with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, on the right in a headscarf). Above them are 20<sup>th</sup> century witnesses from three ecclesiastical traditions: the Lutheran pastor, theologian and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, holding the Bible; the Orthodox Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople (1948 to 1972) who championed *unity through diversity* with his "brother Paul VI" and, in 1965, revoked the

ecclesiastical excommunication of 1054 against the Catholic Church, holding the Easter candle; and Pope John XXIII with his trademark, outstretched arms and open hands as a sign of warm affection for all people and above him his encyclical, "Pacem in Terris."

On the next level is the younger generation: an altar boy with a censer spreading the fragrance of Christ out into the Earth, a German youth leader holding a flag with the *Chi Rho* monogram of Christ, and a young woman and a young black man holding a banner with the Inscription "*Shalom – Peace*." At the uppermost level, you can only see the lower part of the window and, while open, it is still empty. Sieger Köder said that this is the most important window, the window of the future. It is the window where you and I will stand. What are we holding? Whom are we welcoming? Who is welcoming us? To whom are we reaching out? Who is leaning out the window with us?

Köder's painting holds the power and flames and energy of the Acts account. The painting also holds the wounds (perhaps the kindling for the fire) and the gentleness, the peace of the account in the gospel of John. The diversity between the two accounts is highlighted by the diversity of languages written in the painting and the diversity of faith traditions, ages, genders, and roles of the figures in the painting – all coming from different periods of history. It holds our past, our present, and our future. I invite you this week to take time with this painting. I invite you to gaze on it with the eyes of your heart.

Having been led by Hildegard into this visual theology of Pentecost, we end with one of her poems. describing her vision of God's Spirit. This is the same Spirit who is poured out abundantly every day on you and me, on every person we meet, on every Earth being we encounter, on Earth, and on the cosmos:

Spirit of fire,  
Paraclete, our Comforter,  
You are the *Live* in alive,  
the *Be* in every creature's being,  
the *Breathe* in every breath on earth. ...  
Holy Life-Giver, Doctor of the desperate,  
Healer of everyone broken past hope,  
Medicine for all wounds,  
Fire of love, Joy of hearts,  
fragrant Strength, sparkling Fountain,  
in You we contemplate  
how God goes looking for those who are lost  
and reconciles those who are at odds with Him.  
Break our chains!  
You bring people together.  
You curl clouds, whirl winds,  
send rain on rocks, sing in creeks,  
and turn the lush earth green.  
You teach those who listen,  
breathing joy and wisdom into them.  
We praise You for these gifts,  
Light-giver, Sound of joy, Wonder of being alive,  
Hope of every person, and our strongest Good.

Happy Pentecost!



***Veni Sancte Spiritus*, Adam Kossowski  
Ca.1955  
[Original source](#)**



This miniature from Hildegard's *Vision Three* depicts the universe in the urform of the world egg, illuminated by stars and planets and refreshed by winds, has our common home (Earth) at creation's center. Hildegard's cosmic egg also resembles a nest, symbolizing God's Alpha-and-Omega nature. We see that the miniature's outermost ovoid of shining fire signifies God's Spirit holding the cosmos together with all-embracing divine love, bathing the world in the celestial fire that incubates new life.



## REFLECTIONS FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER ~ 14 May 2023

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

We are two weeks away from Pentecost. Today's readings in the Liturgy of the Word begin to ease us into images of the Holy Spirit who will be at the heart of Pentecost.



In the first reading from Acts, we learn about Philip's bringing of the good news to Samaria, ending with the baptism of many and works of healing. "There was great joy in that city." In the second half of the reading, Peter and John were sent to Samaria by the Apostles in Jerusalem to place their hands on the believers so that they would receive the Spirit. The story is not complete with baptism and healing; the coming of the Spirit is needed to bring fullness to the Christian community and Christian believers at Samaria.

The second reading from 1 Peter explains why this is so, "Christ suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit" (1 Pet 3:18). Christ is made alive in the Spirit, thus enabling him to bring us to God. The first part of the reading cautions us that, when making our defense to account for the hope that we have, we must do so with gentleness and reverence. This image of the Spirit is profound – bringing life to the Christ that he might bring us to God, so filling us with hope despite all the realities around us that people challenge our integrity, and encouraging us to respond with gentleness and reverence.

We are reminded of the words of the liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, as he reflects on God's first named covenant in Genesis – the covenant with all Earth and all Earth beings (Gen 9:8-17):

Human beings must feel that they are sons and daughters of the rainbow, those who translate this divine covenant with all the beings existing and living, with new relationships of kindness, compassion, cosmic solidarity, and deep reverence for the mystery that each one bears and reveals.

Only then will there be integral liberation, of the human being and of Earth, and rather than the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth there will be common celebration of the redeemed and the freed, human beings in our own house, on our good, great, and bountiful Mother Earth.



Psalm 66 echoes these words of Boff, celebrating God's covenant with all beings existing and living, "Make a joyful noise to the God, all the earth; sing the glory of God's name." Think of all the ways in which Earth makes a joyful noise to God – the gentle breeze blowing through the leaves, the raindrops falling on the flowers, the brook gently dancing over the rocks, the waves rolling on the beach, the gulls crying out, the sheep bleating as they graze, the baby giggling as she catches her toes, the teenage boy teaching his little brother to throw a ball, the young woman reciting her own poetry, the woman religious praying with a dying patient, the old man singing songs from his memory – all making joyful noise to their God, all held in the reverent embrace of the gentle Spirit.

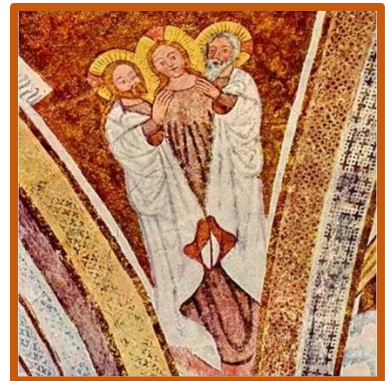
In John's Gospel, we listen again to Jesus' words just before his death. In these words, Jesus makes a promise, "I will ask the Father who will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. . . the Spirit of truth . . . who abides with you and will be in you" (Jn 14:16-17). The qualities that Jesus emphasizes for the Spirit are "truth," "abiding with" and "being with." Jesus goes on to say, "Because I live, you will also live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me, and I in you" (Jn 14:19). In this Gospel account as well as in Acts and 1 Peter, we see the beginnings of our image of God as Trinity (Father, Jesus, Spirit), Trinity abiding with us and being with us.



While Trinity is not fully developed in the New Testament (it will be in later Church Councils), we see in these three texts the sense of relationship that is at the heart of Trinity. The theologian, Roger Haight, in his latest book, *The Nature of Theology*, follows theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez and describes Trinity in this way, "God, as Creator, Mediator and Spirit can only be appropriated as 'Presence,' each individually

and all as one." He believes that God is encountered subjectively by the person, and that encounter is wholly relational, "Revelation of God includes revelation of self in relation to God and God to the self." The hope that is named in 1 Peter flows from this relationship described by Haight, "Out of love for a suffering world, we dare to give an account of our enduring hope in the God of creation; in Jesus Christ, who reveals the character of God; and in the Spirit of God, who liberates human freedom and provides the courage to help realize and defend God's dream for humanity."

Given the importance of "presence" and "relationship" in understanding the Trinity, we need to revisit our image of the Spirit as a dove ("peristeran", a feminine noun). It is a beautifully ecological image, but it can be an image which makes it difficult to see the Spirit in relationship with us, as one who abides in us. In the Old Testament, the word for "Spirit" is "ruach," a feminine noun which is translated in our New Testament passages by the Greek word "pneuma" which is a neuter noun. The image of Woman Wisdom ("Hokmah" in Hebrew, "Sophia" in Greek, and "Sapientia" in Latin – all feminine nouns) has been used by theologians since the early Church fathers to describe the Spirit. Indeed, there is a 4<sup>th</sup> century medieval fresco from a church in Germany which shows the Trinity as father (an older man), son (a younger man), and spirit (a younger woman). Many recent theologians image the Spirit as female. For many years now, I see, speak about, and pray to the Spirit as female as I do to Jesus as male. This has deepened my sense of Trinity, understood and loved through presence and relationship.



***The Trinity***  
**St. Jakobus (Urschalling)**

In many parts of the world including Canada and Peru, today is Mother's Day. The liturgist, Cara Heafey, has written a beautiful prayer to the Trinity which ascribes the image of mother to each member of the Trinity, building on the many images of God as mother in the Old Testament, the growing images of the Spirit as female, and Jesus' own description of himself as a mother hen (Matt 23:37):

Mothering God, you birthed the universe into being.  
Home-maker, your creation is habitat and sustenance to all that lives.  
How costly for you our freedom must be.

How painful the separation  
From the parent who has numbered the hairs on our head  
And written our names on her heart.

Mothering Jesus, you shed your blood to give us life.  
Of your own flesh, you fed us, saying "this is my body, broken for you."  
You taught us with authority and endless patience, how to live and how to love.  
You beheld your lost and wandering children  
And longed to gather us in  
As a hen sheltering her brood beneath her wings.

Mothering Spirit, you dance and weave in the spaces between us.  
We hear you in the echoes of the stories our mothers told us  
And in the songs their voices sang.  
You pull the threads that connect us to one another  
And to those who have gone ahead of us.  
Yours is the deep wisdom beyond words, the love that calls us home.

On this Mother's Day, we thank our God as Mother and we thank God for our mothers who have given us life, have sustained us in our growth, and hold us in love whether they are still on Earth or are in their eternal home forever connected with us by a very thin veil. We conclude with the prayer-poem of Rev. Dr. Laura, celebrating our mothers and the image of God that they have been and are for us:

The universe yet incomplete,  
on the sixth day God created her  
Woman  
and God said to her, I shall give you  
A heart full of compassion  
a spirit free to fly with the birds  
a vessel to carry life into the world  
Wisdom to know great truths  
courage to rise out of oppression  
Strength to move mountains  
gentleness to kiss the earth  
Passion to set the world on fire  
vision to respect the earth that bore you  
A playful nature to dance with the children  
laughter to fill the valleys  
tears to wash the pain away  
Hands for laboring and loving  
intuition to know the unknown  
desire to be that which you were created to be  
and God said to her  
Woman  
I have created you in my image and likeness and  
You are good



Happy Mother's Day!