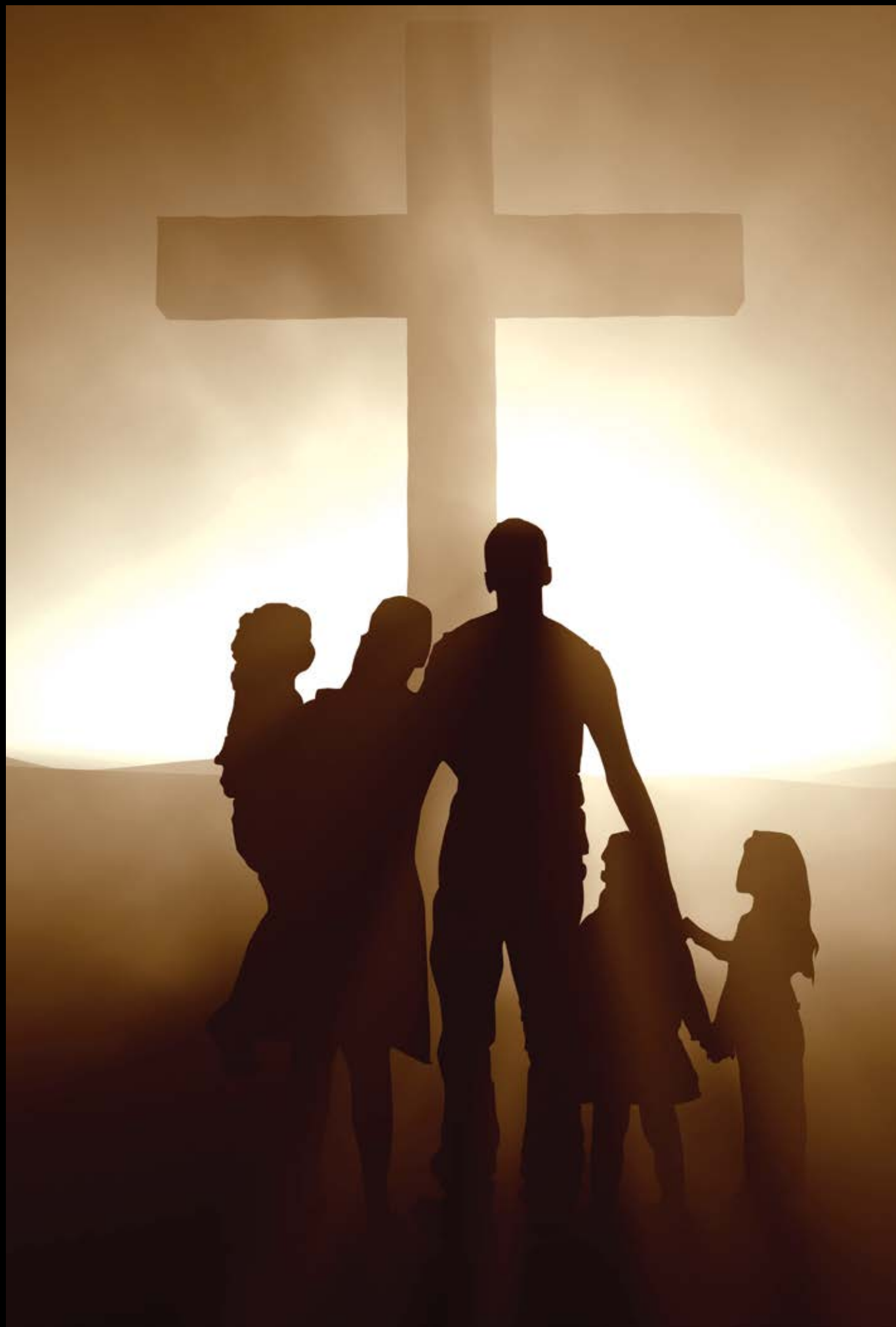




lent







Beloved is where we begin

Week 1: Begin Day 1 of 3

You are the Beloved.

Mark 1:11

When Jesus comes up from the waters of his baptism in the Jordan, Beloved is what greets him. When he turns his river-drenched face toward the wilderness, Beloved is what goes with him. As the baptismal waters evaporate from his skin, Beloved is what settles into his awareness, his bones, his being.

Forty days.

Beloved.

Forty nights.

Beloved.

In the blazing sun.

Beloved.

In the deep darkness.

Beloved.

In the solitude.

Beloved.

In the hunger.

Beloved.

In the thirst.

Beloved.

In the temptation.

Beloved.

When Jesus comes striding back out of the wilderness, his belovedness blazes within him; the desert has seared it into him. Whatever else has passed in these forty days and forty nights, he leaves the wilderness with this gift. He knows who he is and what he is here to do: to be belovedness embodied, and to bear this love into the world.

And for us, called to be the body of Christ: what might such a journey do for us, and in us, and through us? How will we open ourselves to this gift that meets us in the wilderness of Lent, this love that sears itself into us for the life of the world?

We should notice that when Jesus entered the wilderness, he did not go without a blessing; he did not venture into that terrain without hearing himself named Beloved. How could he have survived it otherwise? As we enter our own Lenten landscape, we, too, should not begin this journey without a blessing; we should not miss hearing Beloved sounding in our ear.

It might take time for Beloved to settle into our heart, our bones - forty days, at least - but that is what this season is for. I am glad to begin it with you.

Beloved Is Where We Begin A Blessing for Entering Lent

If you would enter into the wilderness, do not begin without a blessing.

Do not leave without hearing who you are:
Beloved,
named by the one who has traveled this path before you.

Do not go without letting it echo in your ears,

and if you find it is hard to let it into your heart, do not despair. That is what

this journey is for.

I cannot promise this blessing will free you from danger, from fear, from hunger or thirst, from the scorching of sun or the fall of the night.

But I can tell you that on this path there will be help.

I can tell you that on this way there will be rest.

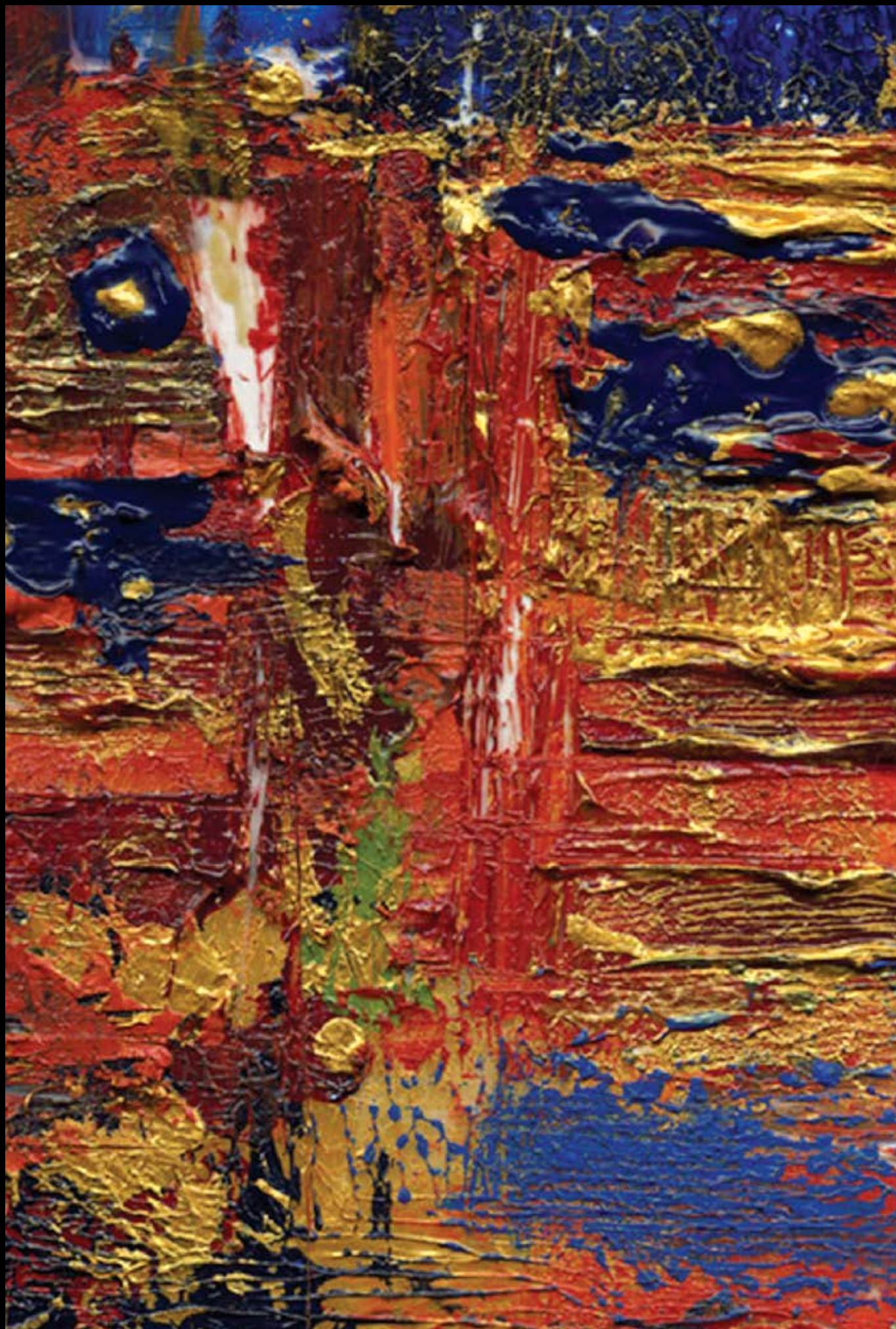
I can tell you that you will know the strange graces that come to our aid only on a road such as this, that fly to meet us bearing comfort and strength, that come alongside us for no other cause than to lean themselves toward our ear and with their curious insistence whisper our name:

Beloved.

Beloved.

Beloved.

For the story of Jesus' baptism and wilderness journey, visit Mark 1:9-15.



Your Earth

Week 1: Begin Day 2 of 3

The Spirit of God breathes everywhere within you, just as in the beginning, filling light place and dark...green earth and dry. God's love grows, fullness upon fullness, where you crumble enough to give what is most dear. Your earth.

Joan Sauro, Whole Earth Meditation

Just off the highway that runs south of Gainesville, in northern Florida, there is a small community that has one stop sign, a general store, and more cattle than people. I grew up there, about a mile from the farm that was started by my great-grandfather and has been in the family for more than a century. I was at the farm just the other night, gathered together with several generations of Richardsons and friends for a celebration in honor of my uncle who recently retired after running the farm for fifty years. It was a night of remembering, of storytelling, of honoring the harvest of time. As the evening was ending, a cousin gave my uncle a jar of dirt from the farm, and I offered a blessing for this man who has tended that dirt, that earth, for so much of his life.

That piece of earth is a place of deep memory for me, a landscape that holds not only my own story but also layers of stories belonging to those who have gone before me and whose stories have become

part of mine. It is where, on a bright spring day nearly five years ago, Gary and I were married. And it is where, on a day this coming spring, we will bury his ashes.

The farm is part of my earth, my inner terrain; my life in and around that land helped shape who I am, and I carry its contours inside me.

The season of Lent calls us into a landscape. Though the imagery of wilderness is dominant in Lent, given Jesus' forty-day sojourn there, this is not the primary territory that this season invites us to enter.

We enter Lent to enter our own earth, to make a pilgrimage into our own terrain. We move into this season to look at our life anew, to consider what has formed us, where we have come from, what we are carrying within us. Lent invites us to look at the layers that inhabit us wherever we go: the intricate strata made up of our stories and memories as well as our imaginings and dreams. This season invites us to notice what in our life feels fallow or empty, where there is growth and greenness, what sources of sustenance lie within us, where we find our inner earth crumbling and giving way to reveal something new.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

As we set out into this Lenten landscape, I am carrying an invitation my first spiritual director often offered me: Notice what you notice.

I want to offer this same invitation to you as we begin.

- If you imagine your inner life as a landscape, what do you notice?
- What do you love about the landscape you carry inside you; where are the places within your story, your memories, your dreams that most draw you and provide the most comfort? What do you notice in those places?
- Is there a place within your landscape that God might be inviting you to enter anew in this season - a memory, a relationship, a layer of difficulty or blessing, a part of your story that the Spirit might be nudging you to visit again? It doesn't need to be earth-shattering; it could be one small moment, one brief experience that, as you look back, you realize altered something in your landscape.
- As you turn your attention toward this, what do you notice? How might God be present there?

BLESSING

In every place
within you
may you know
God is.

Every layer.
Every hollow.
Every memory.
Every dream.

In each space
breathing in you
and blessing
your earth.



Where Angels Love to Tread

Week 1: Begin

Day 3 of 3

And the angels ministered to him.

Mark 1:13

What Jesus learned in that forty-day place, Lent seeks to teach us as well:

In the wilderness, there are angels.

Sometimes we need to ask for the angels. When our life leads us into a challenging terrain, by chance or by choice, this is not always the time to rely on our own devices, to attempt everything by ourselves. Yet it is in these times that the most crucial skills may become the most elusive. When we are pressing hard to find our way and be in control, it can be difficult to stop and seek what will restore us, even when we are aching for sustenance and for rest. This is when we need to learn to ask. This is when we need to begin to discern what could help, and who could help, and where we could turn for that help.

In the wilderness, there are angels.

Sometimes when the angels come, they open our eyes to what is already there. I wonder if, in Jesus' time in the desert, he thought of Hagar, driven into the wilderness not once but twice

by Sarah and Abraham.

In Hagar's second wilderness journey, the water runs out and Hagar's son, Ishmael, is dying. God and an angel come to their aid, opening Hagar's eyes to a well of water that has been there all along. They drink; they live. Their story compels me to wonder, Where do I need to open my eyes? What sustenance is at hand that I have not been able to see?

In the wilderness, there are angels.

Sometimes we need to be the angel. Sometimes we need to be the one who comes to minister to another in the wilderness -- not to fix, not to give advice, not to point the way. Instead, we may simply need to be the one who comes bearing bread, who comes offering drink, who comes with rejoicing or with rest, who comes to sit alongside or to be company in the walking.

In the wilderness, there are angels.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- As we enter the landscape of Lent, what kind of angel do you need? How would it be to ask?
- Where might God be inviting you to open your eyes to see a gift, a blessing, a wellspring that is close at hand?
- How might you be an angel for someone who needs

sustenance in the wilderness and company on the path?

BLESSING

Bread
where there was
no bread.

Water
where all
had been dust.

And we opened
our eyes
and we saw.

And we opened
our hands
and received.

And we opened
our hearts
and were glad

For the angels
who wandered
our way.



Where Memory Begins

Week 2: Memory

Day 1 of 5

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord.

Psalm 22:27

Remember. Throughout the scriptures, we meet this word again and again. More than two hundred times, across both testaments, it appears in some form. Remembering lies at the heart of who we are, not only individually but also together as the people of God.

I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh.

Genesis 9:15

In the scriptures, remembering is a sacred act. It is not casually done; instead, it is an intentional practice that helps us know who we are, where we have come from, and who has made possible our very life and freedom. The sacred texts impress upon us that to remember and be remembered is to belong to God and to one another. To forget or be forgotten is a kind of death.

Do you have eyes, and fail to see?

Do you have ears, and fail to hear?

And do you not remember?

Mark 8:18

Not all memories feel sacred. We carry scars in our memories,

places where remembering brings pain or fear. The dulling of some memories can be a kind of grace, even as the loss of treasured memories can bring anxiety and grief. Yet God is present in all our remembering and wants to inhabit this part of us. God desires to dwell in each layer of our memories, sharpening the ones that bring us delight, healing the ones that cause pain, being present in the gaps, and working with each memory we possess to create new patterns of wholeness.

Moses said to the people, "Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, because the Lord brought you out from there by strength of hand."

Exodus 13:3

Lent invites us to remember.

This season calls us to walk through a landscape of memory, one that bears the footprints not only of Christ but also of all those who walked through the wilderness before him, most especially the people of Israel whom God delivered from captivity. We remember not merely for the sake of remembering but because this is how we learn to recognize the ways God is with us in the present. We remember because this is part of how God draws us into our future.

But I have said these things to

you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them.

John 16:4

As we travel together this week, we will explore the act and the art of remembering. We will hold questions about what it means to remember:

How do we engage in remembering as a practice? What might God be inviting us to remember in this season? Where do we find God working within our memories to make new pathways and new possibilities?

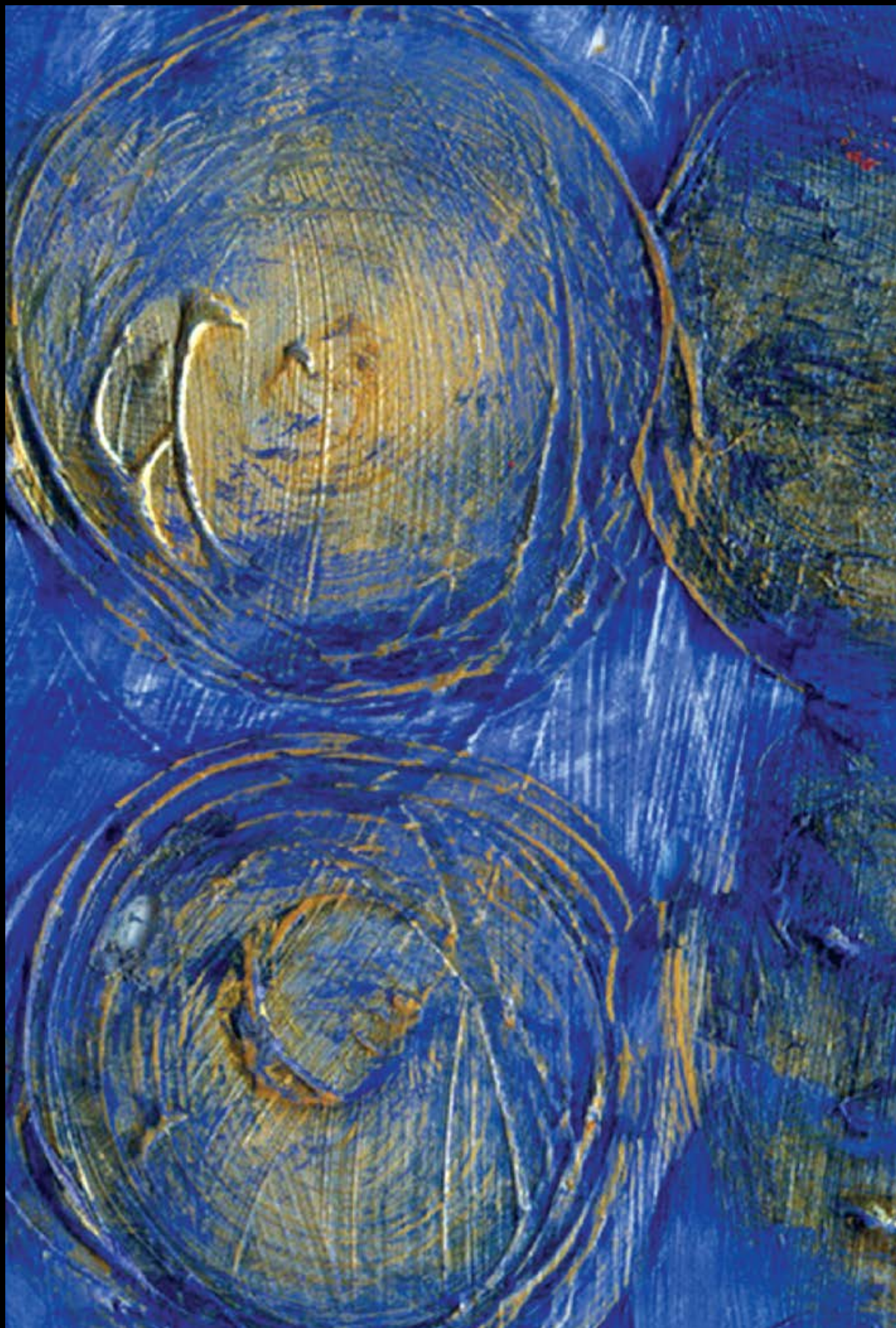
Where does memory live when our memories fail?

How do we remember together as the body of Christ?

I look forward to remembering with you. Blessings as we begin this new week!

BLESSING

In all your remembering may you know the One who remembers you.



Illuminating Memory

Week 2: Memory

Day 2 of 5

**I thank my God every time
I remember you.**
Philippians 1:3

It's not that the grief will lessen, she says to me. But you will learn how to weave Gary's memory into your life in a new way.

On a spring day several months after my husband's death, I am talking in my studio with Brenda. She is a hospice chaplain and my closest friend for more than half my life. Still reeling from Gary's sudden dying, I find it hard to imagine ever being in a more whole place. But when Brenda says these words, I know they are true. Again and again as the year unfolds, my mind and heart turn to her words, remembering them as I remember my beloved.

Remember. In English, its wisdom is made plain; to remember is to re-member. It is to put the pieces back together.

I should know something about this, I have often thought in this past year since Gary's death. I should know something about putting the pieces together. For years my primary medium as a visual artist was paper collage. It was how I became an artist in the first place, enchanted by what can happen in the seemingly simple acts of cutting and tearing and gluing together. I know in my bones what it means to lay one fragment next to another. I know that two pieces brought into relationship always transform each other. I know that God, the consummate recycler, can use everything to create something new: every scrap, every fragment, every

shard we carry -- the pieces we love and cling to as well as the pieces we would prefer to forget or throw away.

Several years ago, my collage work gave way to painting. I put down the paper and scissors, with a hunch they'll return, but still the creative process is a journey of putting together the pieces. This includes the pieces of my own life, shattered by the death of my husband and creative partner. It can be difficult to walk into the studio, because making art always stirs up the jagged pieces and triggers an onslaught of memories. Every brushstroke brings another remembrance of the life we had together, with each remembrance a reminder of what I have lost.

The deluge of memories is both beautiful and overwhelming. Yet in the remembering, the pieces come together. Memories lay themselves alongside each other, form new connections, illuminate one other. They provide light for the path ahead even as they help make that path. The process becomes, as Brenda said on that spring day, a way of incorporating Gary's memory into my life in a new way, piece by piece.

The pieces will never go back the way they were; remembering is not the same as returning. Our remembering will never bear us back to the place we began. Yet particularly when something has shattered -- a relationship, a life, a way of being in the world - the act of remembering, in its pain and in its beauty, becomes a potent practice. Our remembering is a radical act of hope when we become present to the fragments of our story and ask how God might want to put those pieces together to create something new.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- What prompts your memories? Are there particular actions or practices that set your memories in motion?
- What do you notice when you're in the midst of this? Does engaging in these practices affect how you remember - for instance, do they bring a memory to the foreground in a new way, or cause certain memories to cluster together, or invite you to notice relationships and connections between memories?
- How does God live in your remembering? Is there a memory - pleasant or painful - that God might be inviting you simply to hold in prayerful attention as Lent unfolds? How might it be to ask God to piece that memory into a new pattern?

BLESSING

In each piece each fragment
each scrap of your life

may you see
the wholeness you bear.

P.S. For more about art as a way of putting the pieces together, I invite you to visit an article I was invited by the folks at Patheos to contribute to their Public Square this month. You can find the article here: [To Put the Pieces Together](#).

And don't miss our first song from Gary! You'll find it below at Songmaker's Notebook #1.

A Word about Garrison Doles...

Many of you know some of the story of Gary's death just over a year ago, and I am so grateful for the ways you have encompassed our family in your thoughts and prayers. For those of you who are just meeting us, I want to share a brief word to

let you know something of who he was, and what happened.

Gary (who performed as Garrison Doles) was a remarkable full-time performing songwriter who had a ministry called the Song Chapel. In addition to his touring across the United States with the Song Chapel, Gary and I frequently collaborated for retreats and conferences. We loved creating spaces where word, image, song, story, and community came together. Our lives and ministries have been deeply intertwined.

In the summer of 2013, we discovered that Gary had a brain aneurysm. He'd had no symptoms; the aneurysm came to light in the process of checking out something else that proved not to be a problem. We felt wonderfully fortunate that the aneurysm had been discovered and that the treatment options were clear and low-risk.

On November 14, 2013, Gary went into the hospital to correct the aneurysm. During an eleven-hour surgery, a clot appeared. He suffered a massive stroke and was placed in an induced coma. Further complications developed as we kept vigil during the next eighteen days. My husband never regained consciousness. On December 2, just as Advent was beginning, Gary died.

It has been staggering to lose not only my amazing husband but also my remarkable creative partner. In this time of astounding heartbreak, I am grateful for the grace that attends my path. Please know that you are part of that grace, and that your presence is a tremendous gift. I am thankful for your prayers -- for me; for Gary's 21-year-old son, Emile; and for our family. Know that I am carrying you in prayer as well.

I wrote a brief remembrance and blessing for Gary's memorial service. If you haven't already seen this, I would love to share it with you. You can find it here:

Beloved: A Blessing for Garrison Doles

O my dear friends. For those who don't already know, I need to tell you that my beloved husband slipped peacefully from this world on December 2, enfolded in the love and presence of our family and the encompassing of the God who entrusted him to us. I don't need to tell you that I am heartbroken beyond imagining. Please know that the prayers you offered for Gary and all of us provided such solace and sustenance during our vigil with Gary, and will continue to do so as our family finds our way through the coming days. Months. Lifetime.

We held a service to celebrate Gary's life last Friday afternoon. It was heartbreaking and hopeful and wonderfully beautiful. It included much music. Gary's amazing son, Emile, in whom Gary's gift of song lives strong, opened the service by singing Gary's song "Raise This Hour." Gary's also-amazing brothers sang, and Gary's own recordings, including two guitar meditations he created for our Illuminated Advent Retreat, provided the opening and closing music. I can't tell you enough to do the service justice--how honoring it was of Gary and how much solace it provided for me - but I want to share with you some



words I wrote for that day. This is a brief remembrance and a blessing for my remarkable, beloved husband; for those who gathered to remember and grieve and celebrate; and now for you. Our dear friends Peg and Chuck Hoffman, who had so recently shared in our wedding, read these words for me.

REMEMBERING

In the entirety of my life, what I am most proud of is this: that when Gary Doles crossed my path, I recognized him. Every single day, I knew what I had in him. This also means that I know all too keenly, with the precision of a knife's edge, what I have lost, and all too soon.

I think we have all been carrying the sense of how horribly unfair this is. And it is. In the midst of my devastation and desolation, I have also been remembering some of the stories that Gary would tell me about his life. I won't tell you the stories just now, but I will tell you that it is a marvel and a miracle that Gary Doles survived long enough for me to meet him. And for that I give thanks. Along with the heartbreak, I will always carry such deep gratitude for the years we had together, and for the extravagant grace of loving and being loved by him. Still.

After Gary died on Monday, surrounded by the prayers and the presence of our remarkable family, I stayed in the room as his nurse removed everything that had helped to keep him alive during the awful and beautiful vigil that we had kept with him for eighteen days. I watched as she removed the ventilator tube that had kept him breathing, watched as she took out the seemingly innumerable lines that had delivered medications. Finally Gary was shed of

everything that had kept him living, everything that had tethered him until it became clear that nothing would return him to us. I placed my hand against his chest, and commented to the nurse that it felt so strange to feel a heartbeat, and know that it was only my own pulse. She said, "His heart beats in you now."

In me. In us. Thank you for being part of the life of my husband whose heart beat with such strength and continues to echo in us still.

Where Your Song Begins Again

A BLESSING

Beloved,
I could not bear it
if this blessing ended with the
final beat of your heart, if it left
with the last breath that bore
you away from here.

I could not stand
the silence, the stillness
where all had once been song,
had been story, had been the
cadenced liturgy of your life.

So let it be
that this blessing will abide in
the pulse that moves us
from this moment to the next.

Let it be
that you will breathe in us here
bereft but beloved still.

Let it be
that you will make your home
in the chamber of our heart.

where your story
does not cease, where your
words take flesh anew,
where your song begins again.

LENTEN FEATURE: SONGMAKER'S NOTEBOOK #1

Our first Songmaker's Notebook for this retreat features Gary's song "God Is Gonna Bring Me Home." A powerful song about memory and community, this is

not to be missed! Click [here](#) to listen to the song and read Gary's brief reflection on creating it.

So, as it turns out, the single most famous of all time Irish celebrity -- wasn't Irish at all. At least he didn't start out Irish. St. Patrick was born in Britain and when he was but a lad he was captured by a band of marauding Irish hooligans, who then hauled him back to Ireland, where he lived for a number of years as their slave.

So how did he get from slave to famous saint? Well, when he had grown up enough to escape he got his hands on a boat and made his way back to Britain, and once there was able to get his hands on a bit of education. While in the course of his studies he found that he was called to be a minister of the Lord, was Patrick, and just to show what a good sense of humor God has, he found that he was called to minister to the Irish. So he got in a boat and went back across the water and there, as we know, he became one of Ireland's most beloved teachers and preachers and pastors. He found his way by following the calling of the Lord.

The Irish have wonderful prayers, some of them hundreds of years old, that call upon the protection of the Lord from the perils of this world, while I am in this world. The great-granddaddy of them all is a prayer known as Patrick's Breastplate, a breastplate being a piece of armor you wear on the front of your body to protect your vital organs, your heart and your lungs, when you're under mortal attack. This is a powerful prayer of protection.

I was influenced and inspired by Patrick's Breastplate for the middle section of this song, which you will recognize when I sing I arise today by the powerful hand

of the creator of all creation.

The refrain is designed for you to sing along; please do.

Patrick On the Water © Garrison Doles

What if I were called across the ocean
To the land where I had been a slave
Could I be a loving teacher
To the makers of my chains.

O Patrick on the water
Can you see the Irish shore
Can you find your way by following
The calling of the Lord.

refrain (twice)
Wherever you send me
There will I find you
Wherever you lead me
There will I go Into all nations
All situations You will be with me wherever I go.

I arise today By the powerful hand of the creator of all creation I arise today
By the birth and baptism Crucified and arisen
And ever my shield
And ever beside me
And ever before me
And ever behind me
And ever above me
And in every heart
And in every mind
Of everyone who finds me here

Whenever I am called beyond my borders And the limits of my faith Will I give myself into the care Of Jesus' saving grace

O Patrick on the water
Can you see the Irish shore
Can you find your way by following The calling of the Lord.

refrain (twice)
Wherever you send me
There will I find you
Wherever you lead me
There will I go Into all nations
All situations You will be with me wherever I go.



Remembrance and Return

Week 2: Memory

Day 3 of 5

**These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul.**

Psalm 42:4

Several years ago, Gary and I received the news that a beloved friend of ours had been diagnosed with a brain tumor. The doctor measured the rest of Joe's life in months, perhaps weeks. A stained glass artist who devoted his life to finding beautiful ways to capture light, Joe -- making his own path as ever -- found other ways to measure and mark his remaining days. The community he had tended across the years came to support and bless him, making it possible for him to be in places he loved. Friends and family enabled Joe to return, for a time, to his home and studio at the artists' community where he lived, and they helped him put on one final, fantastic exhibition and celebration.

Living on the other side of the country, Gary and I missed being present for this, but we were grateful for the words that arrived from mutual friends across the miles, words that told of how Joe was entering his dying in much the same

way he had entered his living. The tumor impacted his speech and visual recognition, and so we found ourselves especially moved by a note our friend Jennifer sent after a conversation with Joe. She wrote,

Even when he can't control the words that come out, he seems, to me, even more himself than ever. He's almost translucent with grace. And I have been so moved by the "random" words that, at times, come instead of the one he's trying for. It's almost as if the words that he has most often expressed come easily; blessing, blest, grace, friends, church, my voice, your voice. . . He is gentle, brave and mostly concerned with others and how to pass on what's important for him to pass on. I am so moved by his beauty.

Blessing, blest, grace, friends, church, my voice, your voice. I find myself wondering: if I were able to speak only the words that I had used most often in my life, which ones would come to the surface? Which words would I remember best? Or perhaps the question is, which words would remember me best, finding their way to me because I loved them and used them so frequently? What are

the words that would hold who I have been, and prompt those around me to say, "She is more herself than ever"?

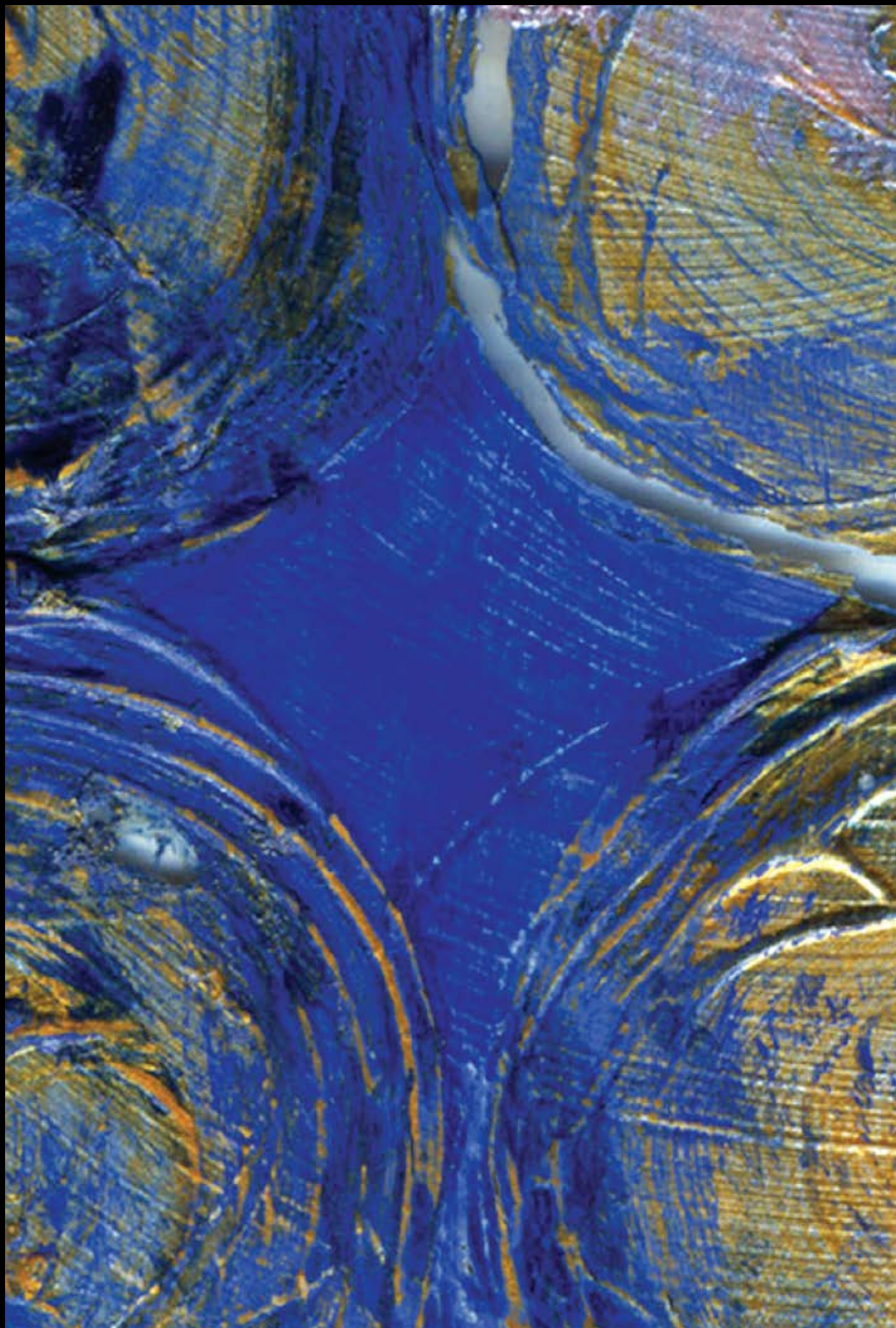
QUESTIONS IN HAND

- How about you? If you could speak only the words you had spoken most often, what would your vocabulary sound like? What words would remember you best, returning easily to your lips and conveying the heart of who you are?
- If you were to make a list of the words most dear to you, most important to you, what words would be on this list? If you sit with this list, what do you notice? What do these words say about who you are?
- How might you weave these words into your life in the days to come; how would you want to use these words, speak these words, embody them and give them life?

BLESSING

May the words you speak
return to you
filled with blessing
and full of grace

to take flesh in you
to remember you
to give you life
and grant you peace.



Remembering Forward

Week 2: Memory

Day 4 of 5

God has remembered God's steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

Psalm 98:3

In a passage in Lewis Carroll's book *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice and the White Queen have this curious exchange:

"The rule [says the White Queen] is, jam tomorrow and jam yesterday - but never jam today."

"It MUST come sometimes to 'jam today,'" Alice objected.

"No, it can't," said the Queen. "It's jam every OTHER day: today isn't any OTHER day, you know."

"I don't understand you," said Alice. "It's dreadfully confusing!"

"That's the effect of living backwards," the Queen said kindly: "it always makes one a little giddy at first"

"Living backwards!" Alice repeated in great astonishment. "I never heard of such a thing!"

"but there's one great advantage in it, that one's memory works both ways."

"I'm sure MINE only works one way," Alice remarked. "I can't remember things before they happen."

"It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards," the Queen remarked.

"What sort of things do YOU remember best?" Alice ventured to ask.

We grow accustomed to thinking

our memory works only in one direction. Memory is how we carry the past with us, how we consider what has gone before. How could it possibly work any other way than backwards?

In the Christian tradition, this different way of remembering is part of who we are. We see this remembering, for instance, in the story of Mary. After saying yes to Gabriel's outrageous invitation, and after receiving Elizabeth's blessing, Mary pours forth a stunning song we have come to know as the Magnificat.

God has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things. God has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of God's mercy. (Luke 1:52-54)

Mary sings about these things as if they have already happened; she sings as if she is remembering them. In Mary's chosen tense, God has already accomplished the restoration and redemption of the world. Mary knows, as we know, that redemption is a work in progress. Yet she has been so transformed that she can sing as though the world has already been made whole.

Mary is remembering forward. In the Christian tradition, we have a word for this kind of remembering. The word is hope.

The hope to which Christ calls us involves more than wishing or wanting or waiting for someone else to do something. Hope asks us to discern what lies beneath our wishes, to discover the longings beneath our longings, to dig down to the place where our yearning and God's yearning are the same. When we find this - when we reach the place where

God's desire and our desire are one -- hope enables us to participate in bringing this desire to fruition and to give it flesh in the world.

This is why Mary can sing about these events as if they have already happened. She carries within her the meeting place of her longing and God's yearning. Her yes to God, to bearing the Christ who is taking flesh within her, is a microcosm of what God is doing in the world. What God has already accomplished within her, God is accomplishing within the world. Will accomplish. And, in God's strange and not-always-linear sense of time, somehow has accomplished.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- In this season, what might it look like for you to remember forward? If you were to imagine yourself on Easter morning, what would you like to be able to say God brought about in your life, in your world, during Lent?
- What did God bring to pass in the days to come? How did you participate with God in the living out of your deepest hopes, those hopes that, like Mary's, were so powerful that they transformed not only you but the world as well?
- To borrow from Alice and the White Queen, what do you remember best about Lent?

BLESSING

May memory and hope live close together in you.

May dreaming give way to discerning and discerning give way to doing,

to living into a world made whole.



Remembering Is What We Do Together

Week 2: Memory

Day 5 of 5

Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you, you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. Isaiah 44:21

I once met a woman who works with a group of people whose memories have been damaged. Living with Alzheimer's disease, traumatic brain injuries, or other conditions that have eroded their ability to remember, the group gathers together to help each other navigate a once-familiar path now made foreign and often fearsome by the gaps and fissures in their memories.

I was fascinated to hear this woman talk about the group and the tools she invites them to use in their work together. Art, photographs, writing, conversation: each word and each image becomes a tangible piece of their life they can hold and share with one another and with those beyond the group. These pieces cannot fill all the holes or mend every gap in the individual memories of the group members. But together, the work of the group helps make a larger kind of memory possible.

Ever since that conversation,

I have found myself wondering, Who are we, if we cannot remember? Where does our memory live, if we cannot recall it on our own? How might our memory become something larger than ourselves, something that we hold with one another?

In the body of Christ, we are called to remember together. One of the places we see this call most clearly is in the sacrament of Communion or Eucharist, when we gather at the table and live out the words that Christ spoke to his friends at their final meal before his death: Do this in remembrance of me (Luke 22:19). At this table of memory, we stand in the thin place where our history and our hope meet in the present. We remember backward, recalling what Christ has done for us; we remember forward, leaning into Christ's longing for what will yet be, and we open ourselves to the now of Christ with us as he offers the sustenance we need for the work of re-mem-bering his broken body in this world.

Gathered at the table and sent into the world, we know ourselves held in the larger story that has been unfolding for millennia. As the people of Christ, this is our body memory. Anamnesis is the Greek word for it. It means we remember

at the table and beyond it. It means we work against forgetting. It means that when we do forget, we are part of a body, a community, that remembers for us. It means we belong to a God who remembers us always.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- How do you experience or desire to experience remembering in community? Who are the people who hold your memories with you?
- Are there ways you experience memory as a sacrament, a place where you know the presence and grace of God at work in your life?
- If you were to pick three memories to entrust to someone to hold these memories with you, which memories would you pick? Which person or people would you ask? How might it be to do this? And how might it be for you to ask someone if they have a memory they would like you to hold for them?

Blessing of Memory

You were born remembering this blessing.

It has never not been with you, weaving itself daily through the threads of each story, each dream, each word you spoke

or received,
everything you hoped,
each person you loved,
all that you lost
with astonishing sorrow,
all that you welcomed
with unimagined joy.

I tell you,
you bear this blessing
in your bones.

But if the day should come
when you can no longer
bring this blessing
to mind,
we will hold it for you.
We will remember it for you.

And when
the time comes,
we will breathe
this blessing to you
at the last
as you are gathered
into the place
where all that
has been lost
finds its way back to you,
where all memory
returns to you,
where you know yourself
unforgotten
and entirely welcomed home.

Lenten Feature **SONGMAKER'S** **NOTEBOOK #2**

One of Gary's most beautiful
and powerful songs is a
remembrance of his great-
grandmother Mahalia Jane,
who spent much of her

childhood as an indentured
bondservant. [Click here](#) to
listen to "Mahalia Jane" and
read Gary's reflection on this
song.

SONGMAKER'S NOTEBOOK

Garrison Doles

Song: "Mahalia Jane"

When I was boy, I loved it
when we would visit my
grandparents. They had ten or
fifteen acres out in the country
and I had no trouble at all
finding plenty of mischief to
get into. In the afternoon, the
other kids and I would come
in from our ramblings and take
refuge in my grandmother's
comfortable screened-in
breezeway, washing down
bologna sandwiches with
lemonade, and playing Chinese
checkers and Parcheesi. We
were ordinarily a fairly rowdy
and obstreperous bunch, but
on those cool shady afternoons
in the breezeway our play was
always uncharacteristically
subdued. I think that, without
really being aware of it, we
were in awe of the tiny figure of
a woman in the rocking chair in
the corner. She had a presence.

Everyone knew her as
Grandmother More, even
the grownups, who were, I
seem to remember, also in
awe of her. She was, in fact,
my great-grandmother, but I
didn't really understand that

clearly until some years later. I
remember feeling that I was, in
some mysterious way, deeply
connected to her and that she
in turn somehow connected
me to something far away
and beyond the reach of my
understanding of the world.

A number of years ago, my
brother Jeff, who has an
interest in genealogy and
who enjoys researching our
family's history, let us all in on
some of the interesting details
of Grandmother More's life,
and I found myself trying to
imagine what it might have
been like for her to live through
the remarkable events of her
girlhood.

She was born Mahalia Jane
Arnold in 1868, just after the
Civil War. When she was a
young girl, her folks (my folks
too, I guess) traded her to a
neighboring farm for a couple
of acres of land and a mule and
some assorted parts for a plow.
She became an indentured
bondservant, which is a kind
of slave. This practice was not
completely unheard of at the
time, and a case might be
made that, given their extreme
poverty, it may even have been
necessary for survival, hers as
well as theirs. But it'll break
your heart just thinking about
it. She lived that way until she
had worked off the debt and
was old enough to leave.

I wrote this song for my great-grandmother, Mahalia Jane, and it's my honor and privilege and a great pleasure to be able to take her along with me and share her story in my concerts all around the country.

Mahalia Jane

© Garrison Doles

Mahalia Jane, that dusty road
Runs off into the shadows of
the grandfather trees
Sit on the step, broken rail
porch
Steam from a jar of sweet
honey tea
Steal a moment's peace
Find a little comfort
Another day is paid.

I know it's hard, this life not
your own
Said here put this on like the
clothes of another
And every hour you toil in
these fields
Another hour gone and never
recovered
Can you steal a moment's
peace
Find a little comfort
Another day is paid.

Are they even aware of what
they've taken from you
Scattered your treasures
among the weeds
To trade you away Never even
know you
Didn't even care to know you
How could they see who in this
world you could be

If you were only free

Mahalia Jane, that dusty road
Turns on a better road in about
a mile
You'll bide your time, settle
these accounts
Leave these fields behind, but
for a little while Can you steal a
moment's peace
Find a little comfort
And another day is paid .

ABOUT THIS WEEK'S ARTWORK



As you might have noticed, the artwork for each reflection this week was taken from a single larger canvas. Working with the canvas and selecting each daily image became a meditation on memory as I pondered how remembering happens and how our perspective on our memories shifts as we contemplate them over time and bring them into relationship with other memories. This meditation on

memory was a kind of lectio divina (sacred reading), which is an ancient practice of praying with the Bible or another sacred text. In lectio, we focus on a very small portion - a verse, a phrase, a word - and linger with this morsel to see how God might use it to nourish us. A piece of art offers its own text that invites us to this kind of sacred reading, this contemplation and lingering. In pondering the pieces - of an image, a text, a story, a memory - how does our sense of the whole begin to shift and deepen?

As the retreat unfolds, I invite you to notice where you find your attention drawn as you engage an image, a scripture reading, a reflection, or a piece of music. Where might the Spirit be inviting you to linger, to focus on one small piece, rather than trying to take in everything at once? What word, what note, what line of a song, what corner of an image might invite you to stop and notice something God is wanting to offer you in that small, welcoming space?



All It Can Say Is Holy

Week 3: Body Day 1 of 5

This blessing takes
one look at you
and all it can say is **holy**.

Holy hands.

Holy face.

Holy feet.

Holy everything in between.

From "Blessing the Body"

Beloved. It is nearly impossible to hear this word without being aware of our body. Our sense of our belovedness is intimately bound together with our experience of our body. When our body has been honored, cherished, and loved; when we have been able to move freely and have felt safe in our bones and at home in our skin, it becomes easier to know ourselves as beloved. When we have not known this in our body -- when we have not felt safe or cherished, or when our body is a place of pain and suffering -- it can be difficult to know ourselves as beloved, and all the more crucial.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

- Psalm 139:13

Although religion has not always been a friend of the body, the scriptures tell a substantially different story. From the very beginning, when Genesis gives us not just one but two accounts of how God created us (in God's own image and likeness, it should be noted), we see God's intimate concern for our bodies.

In the psalmist's praise of the God who intricately knits and weaves our bodies, in the Song of Songs' lavish and unabashed celebration of bodies, in Paul's words about the body as a temple, and in numerous other passages, the scriptures bear witness to the body as a place where we know the presence of the Holy.

And the Word became flesh
and lived among us.

- John 1:14

So keen is God's concern for the body, the scriptures tell us, that God chooses to become flesh in the person of Jesus. In the flesh, in his bodied self, Jesus lives and breathes and moves among us. He knows hunger and weariness, knows touch, knows what it means to take in the world with sight and hearing and every sense. He knows delight; he knows pain and suffering and death. He knows resurrection and shows us that new life does not mean we will shed our body as something burdensome but that, in a mystery beyond our comprehending, we will be transformed and know our body in wholeness and wonder.

For this perishable body must put on imperishability,
and this mortal body must put on immortality.

I Corinthians 15:53

As we move through this week, I want to invite us to inhabit a blessing, and to do this in (at least) a couple of ways. The first way is by receiving a blessing that will unfold throughout

the week. Each reflection this week will begin, as today's did, with a piece from a blessing I wrote called "Blessing the Body"; this piece will repeat at the end of the email as the closing blessing. I pray that this blessing will be a place where you can rest and, in the words of my first spiritual director, simply "notice what you notice" as you consider your body.

This leads to the second part of this week's invitation to inhabit a blessing: I invite you, day by day, to contemplate the blessedness of your body, and to ponder how your body is a blessing that God invites you to inhabit. In its challenge, in its grace, may you know your body as a place where you meet God.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- How is it to be in your body right now; do you experience it primarily as a place of delight or dismay?
- As you notice what's happening in your body, how might this be an invitation into prayer?
- How do you desire to meet God in your body -- the body that God created in God's own image and likeness?

BLESSING

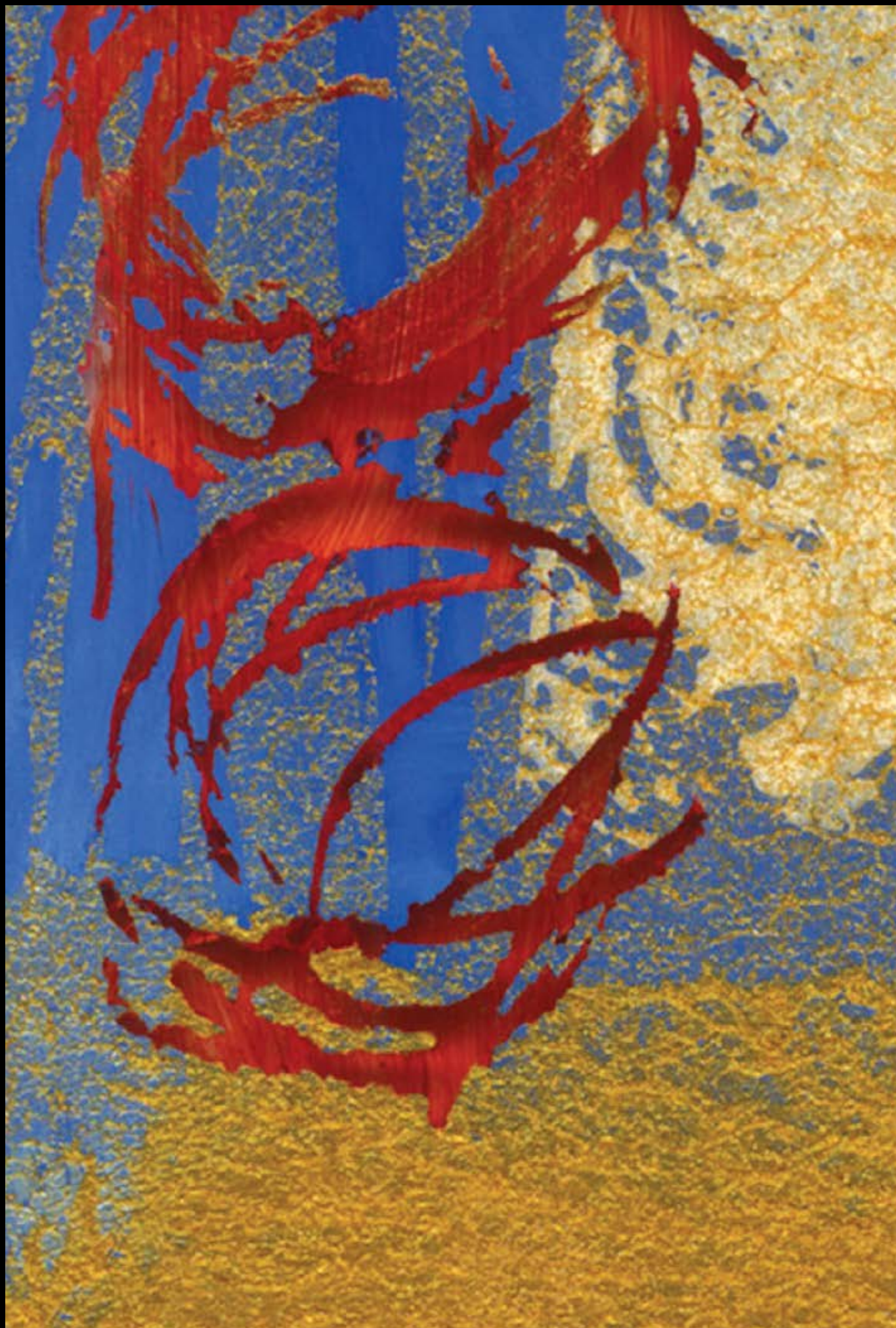
This blessing takes
one look at you
and all it can say is **holy**.

Holy hands.

Holy face.

Holy feet.

Holy everything
in between.



Holy Even In Pain

Week 3: Body Day 2 of 5

Holy even in pain.

Holy even when weary.

In brokenness, holy.

In shame, holy still.

From "Blessing the Body"

I praise you, for I am fearfully
and wonderfully made

- Psalm 139:14

"I understand about being
fearfully made," a friend's
mother said to her one day,
deep into a battle with cancer.

"I am ready to know more
about being wonderfully
made."

We hold a mystifying tension.

Our bodies are wondrous,
resilient, more intricate than
we can fathom, strong beyond
imagining.

Our bodies are fragile,
vulnerable, astonishingly
permeable to pain.

There is no explanation equal
to the presence of pain in
our lives, nothing that will
excuse it, make sense of it, or
reduce it to something whose
purpose we can understand.
Even if there were, it is likely

the explanation would provide
little comfort or satisfaction.

When I was in high school and
in the hospital again because
one of my lungs persisted in
collapsing - the cure for which
was having tetracycline poured
through a tube into my chest
cavity so that the acid would
form scar tissue on my lung -
no theological construct could
have eased or explained away
that searing pain. What did
help was having people by my
bed - my mother on one side,
a nurse on the other - who
stayed with me through the
procedure, letting me grip
their hands (with no small
force) until the pain began to
recede.

And this, of course, is one
of the primary gifts that can
come in pain: that though pain
tends to propel us inward, it
can also, if we let it, draw us
out toward connection. This
connection does not resolve
the pain, it does not justify
it, but when our vulnerability
makes itself known to us with
piercing particularity, it comes
as a grace and a balm to reach
out our hands and find that we
are met.

In the presence of pain, there
is a door. The door does not
depend on whether we are
cured, or on what length of
time the pain lives with us.
The door comes in the form
of choices about where we
will allow God to lead us in
our brokenness, and how we
will let the brokenness open
us to one another and to new
terrain in our lives. In time, we
become the door, discerning
where and how and to whom
we will open in both our
vulnerability and our resilience,
those twin gifts that, as we go
along, become increasingly
indistinguishable.

Compassion is one word
for this opening that can
happen in our brokenness.
Compassion is not the point
or purpose of pain, but, if we
are receptive, it can become
one of pain's enduring gifts.
"Compassion is someone
else's suffering flaring in your
own nerves," writes the poet
Christian Wiman in his book
My Bright Abyss. Compassion
is the ability to perceive the
presence of the sacred that
shimmers through each of
us even - and sometimes

especially - at the point of our greatest fragility. It means looking at one another in our brokenness and being able to say, in wonder, holy still.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- Have you had an experience of brokenness or pain that drew you toward connection and became a meeting-place? What did you find there; what did you take from there?
- How is it for you to hold the tension present in having a body that is resilient and vulnerable, powerful and permeable? When has it come easily to consider your body and say holy? When have you found it difficult? What helps you say holy?
- Where do you notice the presence of God in this tension?

BLESSING

Holy even in pain.
Holy even when weary.
In brokenness, holy.
In shame, holy still.

SONGMAKER'S NOTEBOOK

Garrison Doles

Song: "Draw Us Closer"

If you were a songmaker from a galaxy far away, and decided to make a comprehensive study of popular songs of the planet Earth, the first thing you might notice is that earthlings spend a lot of time singing about lost love, in its many forms--the love that will never be, the love that got away, that love that was betrayed, the love that was not returned. Why does unrequited love seem to be our favorite theme song? I've spent a good bit of time right here in our own galaxy with my feet propped up on my songmaker's workbench and a cup of coffee growing cold, pondering this question.

The simple, obvious answer is that we want love, and we start out thinking that if we just do all the right things that it will eventually come our way in the natural course of events. But love, like truth and beauty, is not as easy to get ahold of as it looks. It's complicated and elusive.

Now, this is a perfectly good explanation for why so much of human culture has been devoted to singing about

yearning and heartbreak and desire, not to mention anger and jealousy and frustration. Because yes, we have a great need to express the powerful range of emotions that our longing hearts get tangled up in, to share our experience, to commiserate. And I don't mean to take anything away from it when I say that it's not the full answer. I think there's another answer buried down deep, down at the very root of our humanness.

For whatever reason and in whatever way, we are separated from God. We are far from home and we long with all our hearts to return. So we sing our longing to anyone who will listen.

Draw Us Closer

© Garrison Doles

Draw us closer, closer, closer
to You

Draw us closer, closer, closer
to You

Draw us closer, closer, closer
to You

Draw us closer, closer, closer
to You

We walk upon this world
So beautiful and terrifying
Clinging to this sweet, sweet

life	Draw us closer, closer, closer
Living in this dying	to You
We are gathered at this stone	Draw us closer, closer, closer
On this day, on this day	to You
Let the gates of heaven be	Draw us closer, closer, closer
open	to You
The walls of heaven fall away	Draw us closer, closer, closer
O be no more divided	to You
From the longing of our hearts	Draw us closer, closer, closer
Let this world lie gently in your	to You
arms	
In your arms.	

Draw us closer, closer, closer
to You
Draw us closer, closer, closer
to You
Draw us closer, closer, closer
to You
Draw us closer, closer, closer
to You

We journey through this life
Mysterious and unforgiving
We are bound to this hard,
hard earth
Dying in this living
Shed our tears upon this stone
On this day, on this day
Let the gates of heaven be
open
The walls of heaven fall away
O be no more divided
From the longing of our hearts
Let this world lie gently in your
arms
In your arms.



Holy In Delight

Week 3: Body

Day 3 of 5

Holy in delight.

Holy in distress.

Holy when being born.

Holy when we lay it down
at the hour of our death.

From "Blessing the Body"

In his book *Walking Words* - an enchanting collection of brief stories inspired by the folklore of Latin America - Eduardo Galeano writes this:

Window on the Body

The Church says: The body is a sin.

Science says: The body is a machine.

Advertising says: The body is a business.

The body says: I am a fiesta.

The body is a sin, a machine, a business. Galeano's brushstrokes are broad, to be sure, but they offer a compelling picture of the messages that others have worked to imprint on us. It can be overwhelming to discern our way among the words, theories, doctrines, rituals, images, and all manner of media that varying institutions and interests have used to convey their understandings of what our bodies are, and what

we should do with them.

In the midst of this, it can come as a splendid surprise to hear the body cry out, with defiant delight, I am a fiesta! A surprise, and yet somehow familiar, because surely it is this kind of body that God intended for us, a body that recognizes itself as a cause for celebration.

This is the body that God created, saying,

Let us make humankind in our image.

This is the body that the psalmist praises God for, singing,

**My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.**

This is the body that the beloved celebrates in the Song of Songs, declaring,

**You are altogether beautiful, my love;
there is no flaw in you.**

This is the body that God put on in Christ and offered to us, proclaiming,

This is my body, which is given for you.

This is the body of each person

whom Christ met with such reverence and love, reaching out to tend and bless, insisting again and again,

Be healed.

This body. This body. Created and inhabited and blessed by the holy.

There is no need to underscore that the body has its burdens, its limits, its wounds. We know this. We know well that our body can be a place of peril, that it can betray us and be betrayed, that it asks for care and trust that can be difficult to give.

And still God looks at our beloved body and says, It is very good.

And still the body says, I am a fiesta!

And you? What does your body say? What might your body want you to know? How is it for you to listen? What celebration is your body deserving of, in need of, in search of?

BLESSING

Holy in delight.

Holy in distress.

Holy when being born.

Holy when we lay it down
at the hour of our death.



See What This Blessing Sees (Shining Like the Sun)

Week 3: Body Day 4 of 5

So, friend,
open your eyes
(holy eyes).
For one moment
see what this blessing sees,
this blessing that knows
how you have been formed
and knit together
in wonder and
in love.

From "Blessing the Body"

What if we could see each
other the way God does?

What if we could see ourselves
the way God does?

What if we opened our eyes?

In the book of Genesis, we
learn quickly that our seeing
has consequences. After Eve
and Adam eat the fruit from the
tree of the knowledge of good
and evil, the first thing they do
is look at each other.

The second thing they do is
cover themselves up.

Then the eyes of both were
opened,
and they knew that they were
naked;
and they sewed fig leaves

together
and made loincloths for
themselves.
Genesis 3:7

The way this story has often
been interpreted, Adam and
Eve's seeing leads to their
shame. But what if it wasn't
shame that drove them to dress
themselves? What if it was
beauty? What if they clothed
themselves not because they
were embarrassed by their
bodies but because they were
dazzled? What if fully opening
their eyes to each other was
more than they could bear?

When we see clearly, and are
clearly seen, it is a miracle
and a marvel. It is also difficult
to sustain this kind of seeing
for long, because the truth
is that even with its pain, its
brokenness, and its terrors,
the world that God wrought
is astounding. Small wonder
that we sometimes work to
modulate the intensity and
insulate ourselves from its
impact - not simply because
the world is often so fearsome
to look at, but because it's so
wondrous. It stuns. It is too
much to take in.

So we sometimes choose to
hide. When God comes looking
for Adam and Eve, Adam says
to God, I heard the sound of
you in the garden, and I was
afraid, because I was naked;
and I hid myself (Genesis 3:10).

And us? How do we hide? How
do we shelter ourselves from
seeing, from being seen?

The Trappist monk Thomas
Merton once wrote, There is no
way of telling people that they
are all walking around shining
like the sun.

That might be true. But today I
am here to try. I am here to tell
you:

You are shining like the sun.

For a moment, at least, may we
see.

BLESSING

So, friend,
open your eyes
(holy eyes).

For one moment
see what this blessing sees,
this blessing that knows
how you have been formed
and knit together
in wonder and
in love.



In Reverence

Week 3: Body Day 5 of 5

Welcome this blessing
that folds its hands in prayer
when it meets you;
receive this blessing
that wants to kneel
in reverence before you:
you who are temple, sanctuary,
home for God in this world.
From "Blessing the Body"

They said, "This temple has
been under construction
for forty-six years, and will you
raise it up in three days?"
But he was speaking of the
temple of his body.
John 2:20-21

Prayer and praise.
Celebration and lamentation.
Blessing and benediction;
psalm, song, sacrifice;
gathering and sending
and gathering again.

The temple was where it all
happened. Everything central
to the worshiping life of the
people of Israel took place
here, at its heart. This was
where God made a home,
where the body gathered itself

together in memory and hope,
and where the community
knew the Holy One as both
immanent and transcendent.

Into the midst of this, Jesus
comes and says, I am this.
What the temple has done, he
now claims to do in his own
flesh, his own being. It is a
stunning claim, following on a
shocking act: he has just driven
the moneychangers from the
temple. Now he offers himself
as a sacred space, the new
meeting-place of God and
humanity. Jesus carries the
temple in his bones. Within the
space of his body that will die,
that will rise, that he will offer
to us, a living liturgy unfolds.

Years later, Jesus' words will
echo in Paul's first letter to the
church at Corinth. Do you not
know, the apostle will ask them
- and us -- that you are God's
temple and that God's Spirit
dwells in you? (1 Corinthians
3:16). What has happened in
the sacred space of the temple,
we now carry within us: prayer
and praise; celebration and
lamentation; blessing and
benediction; psalm, song,
sacrifice; God making a home

in us.

You are God's temple. God
calls us to be a living liturgy,
a sacred space. God calls us
to do this, to be this, not only
in the sacred space of our
personal, individual bodies, but
also in our corporate body. In
the gathering together of our
bodied selves in worship, in
the sending out to be the body
of Christ, we become a living
sanctuary for the life of the
world.

AN INVITATION

As we close this week of
reflecting on the body, I want
to extend an invitation to you.
It unfolds like this:

Question

If you were to choose a word
to claim as a blessing for your
bodied self - for all of who you
are in this world, body and soul
- what would that word be? As
you consider your bodied self,
what word would you want
God to inscribe upon you?

Write

I invite you to write that word
on your palm as a reminder and
a blessing.

Post

For those who are participating in the online forum, I invite you, if you feel comfortable doing so, to take a picture of the word on your hand and post your photo in the Week 3 Forum Discussion.

To post a photo: Go to the Week 3 discussion (the link is in the "Week 3 Forum Discussion" section below) and, in the comment box, click the image icon (second from the left) to upload your photo. If you haven't yet joined the optional forum, you're welcome to do so if you would like; be sure to click the "Join the Beloved Online Forum" link to become a member, before clicking the link for the Week 3 discussion.

Important technical note for iPad/iPhone users:



Please be aware that you will not be able to post a photo within the Week 3 discussion

from an iPad or iPhone; this is a quirk of the Ning site. If you have access to a computer, thanks for using it so that you can post your photo within the Week 3 discussion. If you do not have access to a computer, you can post a photo from your iPad or iPhone by going to the Photos section of the forum and posting the photo there; just be aware that if you do this, it won't appear in the Week 3 discussion. Visitors to the forum, please be sure to check the Photos section for any photos not posted to the discussion!

Think of this as a bit of living liturgy, a blessing that we are creating and offering together as a body. I look forward to seeing what unfolds!

BLESSING

Welcome this blessing
that folds its hands in prayer
when it meets you;
receive this blessing
that wants to kneel in reverence
before you:

you who are temple, sanctuary,
home for God in this world.

O my friends, please do not

miss Gary's "Songmaker's Notebook" today! This is the first time we've shared this wondrous song in an online retreat. I do not want you to miss the blessing of hearing Gary sing to you that you are made in the image of God.

SONGMAKER'S NOTEBOOK

Garrison Doles

Song:

"You Are the Image of God"

You Are the Image of God

© Garrison Doles

This old world wants to wrap
itself around you

Make you dance to whatever
tune it calls

Till the house of your fondest
desires

Starts feeling like prison walls
So you want to break out into
the open

And you're looking all around
for the key

This longing down deep inside
you

Oh how you want to be free
Let me remind you what every
little child knows

You are the image of God
You are made in the image of
God

Bound to be a striking
resemblance

You are the image of God

You are the image of God

You are made in the image of
God

And I can see a striking
resemblance

You are the image of God

Here is the glory

Here is the grace

Written on your heart

Shining in your face

Transforming

Day by day

This old world just wants to
strike you blind

So you'll be lost and alone

Chase you around the
wilderness

How you gonna find your way
home

I see you looking all around for
the answers

Just to heal you and help you
to see

And there's a longing down
deep inside of you

Oh how you want to be free

Let me remind you what every
little child knows

You are the image of God

You are made in the image of
God

Bound to be a striking
resemblance

You are the image of God

You are the image of God

You are made in the image of
God

And I can see a striking
resemblance

You are the image of God



Gesture of Grace

Week 4: Grace

Day 1 of 5

There is grace.

In our beginning,
there is grace.

In our remembering,
there is grace.

In our body,
there is grace.

There is grace.
(Thank God.)

There is what I think of as Grace-with-a-capital-G: Big Grace, Grace as a theological concept, Grace as a doctrine that has been discussed and debated for centuries, Grace that lies at the heart of who God is and what God does for us.

Then there is what I think of as grace-with-a-small-g. No less a marvel than Big Grace, this is the grace that meets us in the details of our life, in the dailiness of it, showing up in moments of connection and beauty that come to greet us. This is grace that asks us to keep our eyes open lest we miss it: the friend who calls at the right time, the word that arrives when we most need it, a moment that stops us in our tracks with unlooked-for loveliness or delight, a gesture of forgiveness or help

or blessing that can shift the course of a day - or a life. This is grace that flows out from Big Grace and bears witness to it, taking the form of small but crucial acts that manifest the presence of the sacred and give us a glimpse of God's face.

This week (let's call it Grace Week), it is this grace, this daily grace, that I am inviting us to explore. Though this grace has a small g and might appear to come in small ways, it is a crucial part of how we know ourselves as beloved and extend this love to others. This is grace that often lives in the plural, as graces that we rest in, that restore us, that enable us to respond in love to a world that so often feels graceless.

The landscape of Lent, rugged though it may be, is drenched with this kind of grace: the grace that shows up like angels in the wilderness, bearing what is most needed. In this week, may we awake to this grace. May we welcome it, may we rest in it, may we meet it with delight.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- What images, words, stories, memories come to mind when you hear the word grace? How does grace weave itself through the dailiness of your life?

- How is it for you to receive the graces that come - the moments of connection, beauty, comfort, and help that find their way to you, without your having to orchestrate or work for them?

- Where might you have the opportunity to offer a moment of grace this week?

BLESSING

Say grace,
and watch it come
as if it had only
been waiting
for you
to finally ask.

Say grace,
and see how
it arrives,
instantly at home
and lovely
in the circle
of its completeness.

Say grace,
and let it
give you back
to yourself,
settled at last
in your own skin,
your radiant face unhidden
and turned to meet
the shimmering,
beckoning world.



Where Grace Draws a Line

Week 4: Grace

Day 2 of 5

One day, while visiting another city, I went with a friend to an art museum to see an exhibit we wanted to check out. The exhibit turned out to be lackluster at best, but then we turned a corner and found ourselves in a room with an exhibit we hadn't known was there. It featured the work of Ben Shahn, a 20th Century Social Realist painter, photographer, printmaker, and book illustrator whose work arose from a deep commitment to seeing, engaging, and responding to the world around him.

Only dimly familiar with Ben Shahn at the time, I found myself enchanted as I slowly took in the prints, posters, watercolors, and books that filled the museum gallery. Shahn's line work was remarkable, capturing joy, suffering, injustice, contemplation, and hope with a spare style that stuns with its clarity and seeming simplicity. I stood for some time in front

of a print of Shahn's drawing of Gandhi, in which he used a bare minimum of strokes to convey the essence of his subject, enveloped in his simple shawl. At the time, I had just recently begun to work in charcoal, and seeing Shahn's work solidified what had begun to emerge in my drawings: a desire to use the fewest number of lines needed to convey the heart of a story.

It has been more than a decade since my friend and I turned a corner and found ourselves in that room of wonders, and it lingers still with me as an occasion of grace. It came as a grace not only by arriving as an unlooked-for gift, as grace so often does, but also because, like grace, it carried a quality of epiphany, of revelation. It invited us to see what appeared in front of us, cleared of the clutter and distractions that so often crowd our field of vision.

This is part of how grace makes its way to us. It draws a line toward us, sometimes literally: the line of a drawing,

the line of a book, the line of a poem, the line of a song. It is important to note that its lines are not always pretty. The forms that grace takes - and that God takes, for that matter - are often not pretty. Yet somehow, often with curious simplicity, grace arrests our attention and asks us to receive; and not only to receive, but also to respond. Seeing Shahn's work, I wanted to carry what I saw into my own work and life, filtering those lines through my experience and vision, and tracing those lines from my studio back into the world.

Turn a corner, and suddenly it is there: grace. Go looking for one thing, and up it pops instead. Grace slips in among the details of daily life, in all the noise and press and chaos of it, and asks us to take notice. Manifesting through words, through art, through all manner of creative expression that ultimately flows from the heart of God, grace gives us the tools and the ability to respond not only to what we find beautiful but also to

work with the stuff of life that is awful, that is painful, that makes no sense. Grace does not make life make sense, but it can ground us in the midst of it, giving us a place to stand -- or dance, or paint, or sing.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- When has grace stopped you in your tracks - not necessarily because it was so big or complicated, but precisely because it wasn't? How has grace met you with its simplicity, inviting you to offer your attention?
- When have you experienced grace as a surprise, showing up as you were searching for something else?
- While knowing that grace often comes without our looking for it, do you have any practices that help you open to grace, and notice it when it arrives?

BLESSING

This day
may you follow the line
that grace traces
around your heart
around your life

drawing you deeper
into the heart
of God.

SONG MAKER'S

NOTEBOOK

Garrison Doles

Song:

"O There Is a Shelter"

In the twelfth chapter of Revelation we come upon the woman who is clothed with the sun, and she's wrangling with an enormous red dragon. It's quite a scene and it would make a fabulous action movie. The dragon tries to devour her child, and then goes on to stalk her all across the twelfth chapter. It just keeps coming after her, until finally she is given wings of a great eagle and is able to fly away to a place of safety, a place of refuge, a place where she can stay as long as necessary, where she can stay for time and times and half a time.

Of course, we all know this dragon. We know its stench and its snarl. We've seen it lurking in the shadows waiting for the worst possible moment to pounce. We've all

felt its presence, whether we talk about it or not. Its trail rampages across every chapter of our history books, stalking and terrorizing humanity, wicked and fetid and darker than death. It's as much a part of this world as we are, and there is nowhere in this world to hide from it.

But we are eternal souls, you and I, and are given the power, by the mercy and grace of God, to take refuge in the eternal, where time and space are not measured, and where the dragon fears to go.

O There Is A Shelter

© Garrison Doles

Time and times and half a time
Out of the reach of this
struggling world
Time and times and half a time
You have prepared a place

O there is a shelter
O there is a shelter
O there is a safe and
sheltered place
O there is a shelter
O there is a shelter
Give me wings to fly into your
grace

Dragon is waiting, besieging
my life
Standing there staring at me
How will I face down this scary
old dragon?
How will I ever get free?
You have draped me in stars of
the firmament
You have clothed me in light of
the sun
You have called me to sit at
your table
You have made me your
favorite one

Take me away from this trouble
That hunts me like a hungry
beast
I cannot bear it
I cannot bear it
The way that thing
Is looking at me

Trying to be a good soldier
Keeping my head down
Keeping my nose clean
Always trying to do my part in
this struggle
I'm out of depth here
I'm over my head here
Looking for you to rescue me
Rescue me

Time and times and half a time
Out of the reach of this
struggling world

Time and times and half a time
You have prepared a place
O there is a shelter
O there is a shelter
O there is a safe and sheltered
place
O there is a shelter
O there is a shelter
Give me wings to fly into your
grace



Wing of Grace

Week 4: Grace

Day 3 of 5

By the Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend, Gary had been in the hospital for two and a half weeks. His initial surgery, during which he experienced the blood clot and massive stroke, had been followed by an induced coma and two further surgeries. At the point where he should have begun to wake up, further complications set in. As Thanksgiving weekend unfolded, it was an awful sensation to hope so hard and feel it eroding at the same time.

Late Sunday afternoon, Gary's nurses asked me to step out for a bit while they took care of a particularly involved procedure. I had been there for nearly every procedure, every test, seeing the interior of my husband's body in ways I had never anticipated. But this time, I walked down the hall to the waiting room, which was blessedly empty. I pulled a chair in front of the floor-to-ceiling window, occasionally flipping through the magazine on my lap but mostly looking out the window at the expanse of green beyond. In those days of keeping vigil, the view from the hospital was one of the graces.

Soon after I sat down, Bob called. A longtime friend and senior pastor of the church where Gary and I had been leading our contemplative Wellspring Service for more than a decade, Bob asked if it would be a good time to come by. He arrived a few minutes later, bearing chocolate covered pretzels and pulling up a chair beside me.

I couldn't tell you much

of what Bob and I talked about; I remember little of our conversation. What I do remember is sitting with him in front of that window, watching the sky together as the late afternoon gave way to dusk and then to dark.

The nurses finished the procedure, Bob and I finished our conversation, and I settled back into the chair beside Gary's bed.

An hour later, Jesse walked in. One of the primary nurses who had cared for Gary, Jesse wasn't working with Gary that night, but he had regularly checked on us, and he was the one who chose to come when it was time to tell me the news: they didn't think Gary would survive the night. His organs were beginning to fail. It was time to call our family, who had been with us so often throughout the vigil.

When I look back on those last hours with Gary, there are many moments of grace that shimmer among the astounding heartbreak: the family members who drove through the darkness to be with us that final night, the friend who came and stayed with me until after our family began to arrive, the care and skill of the staff members who tried everything they knew to do, and those who enfolded us in prayer from where they were.

Of all the graces that came in those hours, one that shimmers clearly for me is the one that showed up just before all that, when Bob walked into the waiting room, pulled up a chair beside me, and sat with me as the sky went dark. It stands out for me as an oasis, a perfectly

timed moment that helped make it possible to enter into the moments that would soon follow.

We do not always begin to see the full grace of a moment until we are past it. We might sense it at the time, we might intuit it, but so often, it does not clearly reveal itself to us until other events have followed. It's as if it needs a particular light that time will bring or perhaps it's that when a certain darkness falls, we begin to see the full light of the grace that slipped in before the dark finished falling.

However such a grace happens, the fact that we can look back and recognize it, can see the light of it, comes as a grace in itself.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- How do you experience this in your own life? Is there a moment that might be inviting you to look at it more closely now, so that God can reveal the grace that shone through it?
- What gift did that grace bring to you, that you hardly knew you needed at the time?
- Might the light of that grace offer some illumination you need now, in this particular moment?

BLESSING

Now
may the light of grace
find you here
now
may it come to illumine
your path
now
may it offer
its comfort, its hope
now
may it give you
its healing and rest.



Gathering Graces

Week 4: Grace

Day 4 of 5

Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4.16

Do you know about asking for graces? My friend Christianne Squires asked me one day. I had lately become more intentional about praying for help as I continued to find my way in the wake of Gary's dying. Early on, I could hardly begin to imagine what would possibly help, let alone ask for it. As I began to discern some things that offered a measure of help, I discerned also that it was important to pray about it to ask God for the specific sustenance I needed as I began to make a new life in my grief.

So when Christianne said, Do you know about asking for graces? My heart came to attention. I had some sense of what she meant but was curious to know more.

Simply put, a grace is something we can ask for from God, a distinct gift that will be of help as we move through our daily lives toward greater wholeness. In a beautiful resource that's about to be published, Christianne describes it like this: "A grace is

a gift given by God's own hand - independent of our ability to muster it ourselves - often given in a moment of need."

Asking for a grace is much like prayer; it is, in fact, a kind of prayer, and the distinction can seem subtle. In another conversation, Christianne talked about how, where prayer involves "sharing one's heart with God," asking for a grace invites a quality of intention on our part - that we become aware of what we need, and that we step out and seek it. When we ask for a grace, we ask that "a specific gift that is usually of God's very nature be imparted to us," as Christianne put it.

My experience is that oftentimes asking for a grace does not so much involve praying for God to change a situation - though this is often an appropriate and crucial prayer - but rather that God would provide me with something specific - wisdom, insight, a particular emotion or disposition or way of being that enables me to enter into that situation in the way that God would have me enter into it.

I believe God is always working to help us, to provide what we need, especially when our life has come apart. I do not think that God waits for us to ask before coming to our aid. Paul gets at this wonderfully when he describes God as the one

"who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20). I do think that when we ask, when we practice the art of intention and bring this into our life of prayer, it makes us more open to recognizing and receiving that help - that grace - when it comes, including those times when it visits us in a form we didn't ask for, and had not even imagined we needed.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- What do you need? What gift would be helpful right now as you grow in wholeness and love?
- How would it be for you to ask for what you need as a grace from God?
- Where does intentionality enter into your life with God? How do you practice - or how do you feel drawn to practice - the art of intention, actively discerning where God is calling you, and what you need to live into that call?

BLESSING

May you know the graces you need.
May you have the courage to ask.
May you see them gathering about you.
May they attend you each step of the way.



Grace in the Dark

Week 4: Grace

Day 5 of 5

In 1941, a young Jewish woman named Etty Hillesum began to keep a journal. Hitler's armies had invaded her homeland of the Netherlands nine months earlier. As the Nazi forces gained a stranglehold over nearly every aspect of her life and the life of her community, Etty continued to write, filling a series of eight exercise books over the span of nineteen months. If I have one duty in these times, she wrote, it is to bear witness.

Etty bore witness not only to what was happening in the world around her but also in the world within her - the one place the Nazis could not invade. Amid the mounting terrors, Etty documented and reflected on the dailiness of her life. She wrote of the complexities of her relationships with family and friends, her work as a Russian tutor, her passionate appetite for reading (among her favorites were the works of the poet Rilke as well as the Gospels). She wrote of her longings and her prayers.

In a time when writing and attending to one's inner life might have been considered a luxury, Etty understood it as absolutely crucial. She knew that her interior world was not separate from the world around her. Etty saw the worst evidence of what can happen when we refuse to look into our own shadows, and she reflected on how our shadows, unexamined and unchecked, can spill out in hatred and violence.

Etty wrote with a sense of her own frailty -- her diaries describe occasions of anxiety, illness, and depression - as well as a keen understanding of the brokenness around her. For all this, Etty displayed a stubborn willingness to enter the darkness and its mysteries. In the midst of the horrors the dark held, it was there she also found the presence and grace of God.

One spring morning she wrote, I went to bed early last night and from my bed I stared out through the large open window. And it was once more as if life with all its mysteries was close to me, as if I could touch it. I had the feeling

that I was resting against the naked breast of life, and could feel her gentle and regular heartbeat. I felt safe and protected. And I thought: how strange. It is wartime. There are concentration camps. I can say of so many of the houses I pass: here the son has been thrown into prison, there the father has been taken hostage, and an 18-year-old boy in that house over there has been sentenced to death. And these streets and houses are all so close to my own. I know how very nervous people are, I know about the mounting human suffering. I know the persecution and oppression and despotism and the impotent fury and the terrible sadism. I know it all.

And yet - at unguarded moments, when left to myself, I suddenly lie against the naked breast of life and her arms round me are so gentle and so protective and my own heartbeat is difficult to describe: so slow and so regular and so soft, almost muffled, but so constant as if it would never stop.

That is also my attitude to life and I believe that neither war nor any other senseless human atrocity will ever be able to

change it.

In 1942, Etty was sent to the labor camp at Westerbork. On September 7, 1943, she was put on a train to Auschwitz, along with her mother, father, and one of her two brothers.

None of them returned.

Etty flung a postcard from the train as they left Westerbork; a farmer found it and put it in the mail. On the postcard Etty had written, We left the camp singing.

Etty Hillesum possessed an astonishing capacity for grace: for recognizing it, for receiving it, and for offering it. In a landscape of horrors, she did not treat grace as a luxury but as an essential quality necessary to life. She understood grace as something not only to be received, as on the night that she experienced the heartbeat of life, but as something that impels us to pass it along to those around us.

This is the nature of grace, both in its small-g and capital-G aspects. We cannot manufacture grace; we cannot contrive or control it. It is a sheer gift of God, one

that is able to find its way into the most miserable of circumstances. Yet inherent in grace is an inability to stand still or stay contained. It wants to spill out from us, to reach through us and connect us with those around us, making us bearers of grace in this world.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

As we close this Grace Week - with prayers that the graces will continue - I ask simply this: What response do Etty's words prompt in you? How does her penchant for noticing and responding to grace in her life invite you to do so in yours?

BECAUSE GRACE

A Blessing

Because it does not wait for daylight.

Because it does not sit in idleness until peace arrives.

Because it does not depend on ease or plenty.

Because it does not give way to fear.

Because trouble cannot harm it.

Because darkness

cannot hide it.

Because terror cannot kill it.

Because hatred cannot halt it.

Because grace.

As we close this week, I want to offer you a song of Gary's as a blessing and a grace. "This Bittersweet Life," which is from one of the CDs that was close to completion at the time of Gary's death, offers an achingly beautiful benediction on this Grace Week we have shared. Please do not miss receiving this gift! Blessings on your weekend.

When it comes to blessings I'm a millionaire. I'm not kidding; you may think you can imagine how blessed I am to be married to Jan Richardson but whatever you come up with isn't even close. I'm also blessed by my wonderful son. And every last member of my extended family is a joy and a pleasure to know. I'm healthy and somehow, miraculously, the bills get paid every month. I live in the most free and prosperous country that is or has ever been, and I am well aware that compared to all of the people who live or

have ever lived on this planet
I live like a king. Certainly,
I've had plenty of pain and
struggle, and sure to have
plenty more, but even so I'm
profoundly grateful for the
many blessings of my life.

In one hand I hold all of this
gratitude. In the other hand I
hold all of my longings. I hold
them both - gratitude and
longings - at the same time.
It isn't that they balance. One
doesn't offset the other. One
doesn't ebb as the other swells.

So often when we acknowledge
our longings, when we speak
of them and allow them
their place, in the midst of
so much to be grateful for,
it can feel like ingratitude or
even greediness. How can
I want more when I have so
much? Why can't I ever just be
satisfied? Don't I appreciate all
that I already have?

Being blessed, being grateful,
doesn't make the longings go
away, nor should it. And my
longing doesn't take anything
away from my gratitude.

Gratitude and longing exist
together, making up the
complex bittersweet wine of
my life.

It will break your heart
All along the way
Measure out your tears
Pay the price
A broken heart
Is not too much to pay
For savoring the wine
This bittersweet life

This Bittersweet Life

© Garrison Doles

Tenderly
These beloved here around you
Gather them
In your embrace

Faithfully
Though the storm surround you
Stand your ground
Lift up your face

It'll break your heart
All along the way
Measure out your tears

Pay the price
A broken heart
Is not too much to pay
For savoring the wine
This bittersweet life

Joyfully
Let laughter wash right through
you
Give yourself

Into its care
Gratefully
Every hour given to you
Offer as a blessing and a prayer

It'll break your heart

All along the way
Measure out your tears
Pay the price
A broken heart
Is not too much to pay
For savoring the wine
This bittersweet life
Drink deeply the wine
This bittersweet life



Time's Grace

Week 5: Time

Day 1 of 5

Years ago, I decided I wanted to be someone in whom time moved differently. I didn't have any illusions, of course, about being able to escape the demands of chronology; I have as many -- or as few -- hours in a day as everyone else. But I longed to be less hurried by time, to slip out from under the press and weight of it. I wanted to experience time as spacious, to know time's grace as I moved through it. I wanted to echo the words of Doctor Who in the episode where he says, Time is not the boss of me.

It is true that time - linear time, chronological time, the time by which we mark the minutes and years - will have its way with us. There will be days where time feels not merely like the boss of us but like a bully, too, leaving us breathless with worry and fear that we will not have enough time, that time is going too fast, that it is slipping through our hands, and perhaps even pummeling us.

Yet time is God's gift to us. In the midst of the perplexities and frustrations that time often brings, there are - to borrow from last week's theme - tremendous graces that God has given us in order to tread a path through time's labyrinth. While these graces cannot give us more time, they can help us

move through time - and time move in us - with a sense of the sacred that permeates each moment.

We see many of these graces with particular clarity in the traditions, practices, and stories that come to us from Celtic Christianity - from the Church as it developed in Ireland and its neighboring countries. In our own time, far removed from the years in which Christianity was taking root and flowering in Celtic lands, it can sometimes be tempting to romanticize or distort these traditions and practices that have shaped the Celtic faith. Yet part of what so speaks to us from Celtic streams of faith is precisely its sense of time: an ability to live well in time, and to recognize, receive, and respond to the graces it holds.

Many of the practices that come to us from Celtic traditions emphasize rhythm and pattern, in which cycles of time move in circles within circles. In her book *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, Esther de Waal describes this as "the daily pattern of the coming of light and the fall of darkness; the movement of the seasons of the year; the relationship of death and new life and rebirth, time and time again."

We will look at these patterns in our own lives as this week unfolds, contemplating how

we experience - or long to experience - the presence of the sacred in the rhythms and cycles of time. I am eager to see what God will bring us in this time together!

In each day, in each moment, may you know the gift and the grace of time.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- As you think about the pattern that time is taking in your life right now, what image comes to mind? If you were to draw (or collage, or paint, or...) how time feels to you, what would this look like? Or if you were to think about it as a rhythm, what would it sound like?
- How do you practice time? Do you have particular ways that you enter and end each day, and mark certain times of the year?
- Is there one thing you would like to change about how you experience time? What would it look like to work on this, and what grace might you ask for in doing so? Is there an aspect of time that you experience as a gift?

BLESSING

In this moment
may time
move in you
with grace
and circle you round
with joy.



I Arise Today (Saint Patrick's Prayer)

Week 4: Time

Day 2 of 5

At the gates of time, blessing waits
to usher toward us the grace
we need.

John O'Donohue

It is hardly possible to enter into the landscape of Celtic spirituality without an awareness of the blessings and prayers that infuse it. These blessings and prayers help keep the rhythm of the Celtic spirit, like a persistent heartbeat on which life depends. There are blessings for work, celebration, and common objects. There are blessings for places, animals, and the tasks of domestic life. There are blessings for healing and for travel.

Many of the Celtic blessings have to do with time.

Momentous passages such as childbirth and death are attended by blessings, as are the ordinary moments of the day, including morning and evening, waking and sleeping. In these blessings, we see how the threshold is a key image in the Celtic spiritual landscape -- the places where crossings occur, in time no less than in the physical terrain. The

turning of a day, the turning of a season, the turning of a year: each moment and each threshold becomes an occasion for honoring the presence of God, who dwells beyond time but also inhabits time and makes it holy.

Thresholds can be places of peril, for they involve entering into the unknown. So Celtic blessings often include a request for encompassing and protection from danger. This takes particularly beautiful form in a kind of Celtic blessing called a lorica. The word lorica means breastplate, which is a piece of armor designed to protect one's heart and other vital organs. As a prayer, a lorica is designed to call upon the protection of God as we move through this world.

The most well-known lorica is the one attributed to Saint Patrick, the beloved saint who, though not born in Ireland, became forever bound to it. According to legend, Patrick and his companions were traveling to Tara one day to see the High King of Ireland. Along the way, the king's men attempted to ambush them. Patrick sang a prayer - a lorica - and he and his companions took on the appearance of deer, thereby eluding

their attackers. The prayer became known as "Patrick's Breastplate" or "Deer's Cry." Although this lorica most likely originated more than two hundred years after Saint Patrick, it endures as one of the most beautiful prayers of the Christian tradition, and it conveys something of the spirit of Patrick that continues to permeate Ireland and the world beyond.

Gary wove a portion of "Patrick's Breastplate" into his song "Patrick on the Water," a particularly beautiful song that became one of his signature pieces. Here's how, in the song, Gary tells this part of Patrick's prayer:

I arise today
By the powerful hand
Of the creator of all creation
I arise today
By the birth and baptism
Crucified and arisen
And ever my shield

And ever beside me
And ever before me
And ever behind me
And ever above me
And in every heart
And in every mind
Of everyone who finds me here

After Gary's death, I began saying these words as part of my morning prayers. This

continues to be a powerful way to arise into each day and honor the crossing from darkness into light. Patrick's prayer helps to focus my intentions for the hours ahead and to open me to the presence of Christ, on whose grace and strength I depend as I navigate this path.

Although a blessing will not ensure our protection from every hazard a day might hold, Patrick's prayer brings a potent reminder that in all things, Christ goes with us - beside, before, behind, above. Time may indeed move differently in us when we remember that Christ imbues each moment, inviting us to see and enter into the possibilities it holds.

On this Saint Patrick's Day, may time move well for you, and may you know the deep graces it holds. Blessings to you!

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- Do you have particular ways you seek the presence and protection of God as you cross the thresholds that your days hold? If you do, how does this help you notice God in the rhythm of your days? If you don't, how might it be for you to incorporate this in some way, in some part of your day - for instance, as you begin it?

- Do you have any Saint Patrick's Day traditions or plans? How might this be a day of celebrating time as a gift?

- What blessing might you ask or offer for this day, this moment?

BLESSING

May you arise
into each day
with the power
of God

May you enter
each moment
with the encompassing
of Christ

May you move
from threshold
to threshold
with the grace
of the Spirit

And may time
open to you
in beauty,
in peace.

Today's Songmaker's Notebook is an integral part of our reflection for this Saint Patrick's Day. Gary's piece about creating the song includes some of Saint Patrick's story; for instance, did you know that Patrick wasn't originally from Ireland? Please don't miss this; a blessing waits for you there!

So, as it turns out, the single

most famous of all time Irish celebrity -- wasn't Irish at all. At least he didn't start out Irish. St. Patrick was born in Britain and when he was but a lad he was captured by a band of marauding Irish hooligans, who then hauled him back to Ireland, where he lived for a number of years as their slave.

So how did he get from slave to famous saint? Well, when he had grown up enough to escape he got his hands on a boat and made his way back to Britain, and once there was able to get his hands on a bit of education. While in the course of his studies he found that he was called to be a minister of the Lord, was Patrick, and just to show what a good sense of humor God has, he found that he was called to minister to the Irish. So he got in a boat and went back across the water and there, as we know, he became one of Ireland's most beloved teachers and preachers and pastors. He found his way by following the calling of the Lord.

The Irish have wonderful prayers, some of them hundreds of years old, that call upon the protection of the Lord from the perils of this world, while I am in this world. The great-granddaddy of them all

is a prayer known as Patrick's Breastplate, a breastplate being a piece of armor you wear on the front of your body to protect your vital organs, your heart and your lungs, when you're under mortal attack. This is a powerful prayer of protection.

I was influenced and inspired by Patrick's Breastplate for the middle section of this song, which you will recognize when I sing I arise today by the powerful hand of the creator of all creation.

The refrain is designed for you to sing along; please do.

Patrick On the Water

© Garrison Doles

What if I were called across the ocean

To the land where I had been a slave

Could I be a loving teacher
To the makers of my chains

O Patrick on the water
Can you see the Irish shore
Can you find your way by following

The calling of the Lord

refrain (twice)

Wherever you send me

There will I find you

Wherever you lead me

There will I go

Into all nations

All situations

You will be with me wherever

I go

I arise today

By the powerful hand

Of the creator of all creation

I arise today

By the birth and baptism

Crucified and arisen

And ever my shield

And ever beside me

And ever before me

And ever behind me

And ever above me

And in every heart

And in every mind

Of everyone who finds me here

Whenever I am called beyond
my borders

And the limits of my faith

Will I give myself into the care

Of Jesus' saving grace

O Patrick on the water
Can you see the Irish shore

Can you find your way by
following

The calling of the Lord

refrain (twice)

Wherever you send me

There will I find you

Wherever you lead me

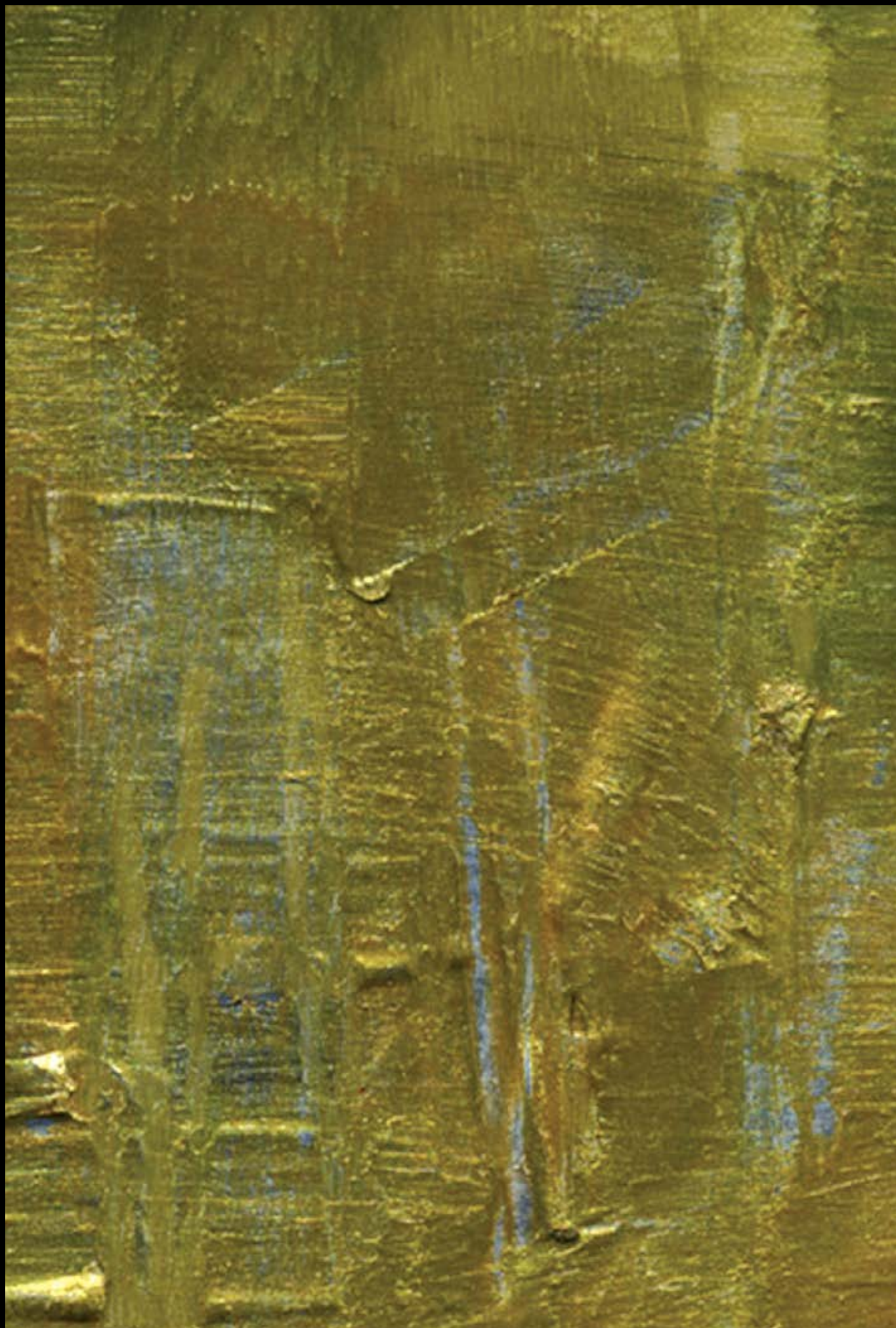
There will I go

Into all nations

All situations

You will be with me wherever

I go



A Thin Place In Time

Week 4: Time

Day 3 of 5

When a blessing is invoked, a window opens in eternal time.

John O'Donohue,
To Bless the Space Between Us

I am taken by the Celtic idea that in the landscape, there are thin places. A thin place is its own kind of threshold, a space where the veil between worlds becomes permeable and heaven and earth meet. Such places can take all manner of forms: holy wells, ruins, stone circles, ancient chapels, as well as architecture not fashioned by human hands: forests, fields, seacoasts, and other spaces where the lay of the land prompts an awareness of the sacred, a sense that this place is haunted by something holy.

Thin places do not confine themselves to the physical landscape. They can appear also in the terrain of time, in the turning of the wheel of the year. In the ancient Celtic calendar, the days at the quarter-turns of the year were recognized as occasions for celebration, with the primary one, the festival of Samhain, falling around November 1. At such times, it was thought that the gates to the otherworld swung open. The festivities often included practices designed to attract and entice the spirits, or - depending on

the spirit - to ward them off.

Within Christianity, some of our liturgical practices have their roots in Celtic traditions. November 1, for instance, became All Saints Day, a time for remembering the beloved dead and celebrating the belief that in the body of Christ, death does not release us from being in community with one another. The days before and after All Saints - All Hallows Eve, or Halloween, on October 31 and All Souls Day on November 2 - also absorbed some of the earlier Celtic beliefs and practices.

For many years I have loved the days of Halloween, All Saints, and All Souls, drawn for some reason to this trinity of days that became a thin place in the turning of my year. I learned it was important to pay attention to what occurred in those days - that they held something I needed to notice and receive. It came as a fitting piece of synchronicity that Gary and I began dating on Halloween, and that such a threshold time should mark the beginning of what we soon realized would be a life together.

Although particular days such as November 1 became recognized as thin places in the year, any moment holds the possibility of becoming a space where heaven and earth meet. A seemingly chance encounter that causes us to open our

eyes to sacredness staring us in the face; a mundane task that suddenly gives way to an awareness of the grace permeating it; a shift in the light - or in us - that turns a familiar spot into a holy space: every moment holds a window onto eternity, waiting to open.

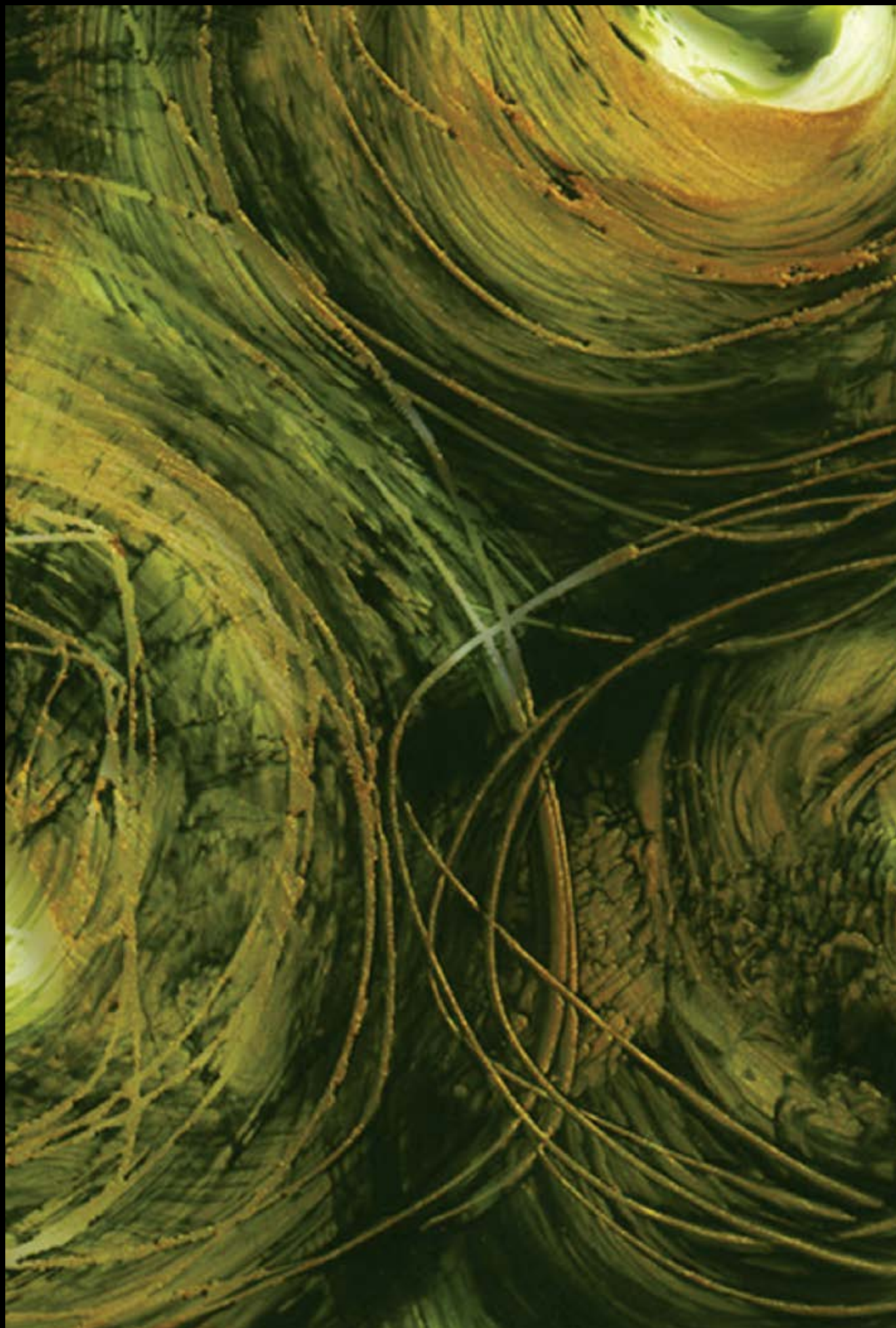
Sometimes, as John O'Donohue says, all it takes is a blessing.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- Are there any particular days in the year that have become thin places in time for you? How did they become thin? Do you have practices or traditions that attend these days, or does this change from year to year?
- What have these "thin days" invited you to notice? What gifts have they offered to you?
- Are there practices, habits, and ways of being that help you stay open to the presence of God that inhabits each moment? What helps the veil become thin - not just beyond you, but within you?

BLESSING

That the holy
will haunt you.
That the terrain of your days
will give way to God.
Each moment. Each step.
Each circling and turning.
Every breath an opening
tearing the veil.



Pattern and Path

Week 4: Time

Day 4 of 5

The ancient Greeks talked about two kinds of time. There is *chronos*: chronological time, time we can measure and mark, time that moves in a linear sequence from one moment to the next. Then there is *kairos*. *Kairos* is time in its fullness: time out of time, time beyond time, time that cannot be reckoned. In the New Testament, *kairos* is the appointed time, the time fulfilled; it is when God takes action, and we know the kingdom in our midst. *Kairos* is what happens in thin places, when we lose a sense of the passing of *chronos* and have a glimpse of eternity.

When it comes to time, it can be tempting to prize *kairos* over *chronos*. We might find ourselves comparing them like we do those biblical sisters: *kairos* is Mary lingering rapt in Jesus' presence while *chronos* is Martha laboring in the kitchen, solid and dependable but not quite as praiseworthy as *kairos*, not quite as special.

The truth is, without Martha, everyone would have gone hungry. Likewise with *chronos*. For all its challenges, it is stunning to consider what depends on *chronos*, and what we would lose without it. Days and seasons, birth and growth, ripening and rhythm and pattern: all this depends on the passage of chronological time. Consider the themes we've explored these past weeks together: without *chronos*, there is no beginning. No memory. No experience of how our bodies grow and change over time. No ordinary moments into which grace can enter.

Contemplating the gifts of *chronos*, I have found myself thinking about the remarkable manuscripts created in Ireland and the British Isles in the early centuries after Christianity arrived there. In beautiful gospel-books such as the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels, we find pages drenched with patterns, shimmering with the intricate Celtic interlace and knotwork

that twines and spirals across the parchment. For the monks who created these books, laboring for months and sometimes years to complete a single manuscript, their work was an act of devotion and a spiritual practice. Their artistry was deeply rooted in the patterns of monastic life, with its rhythm of prayer that spiraled through each day - the Liturgy of the Hours that made of chronology something sacred. Or, rather, did not make it sacred, but honored the holiness already present within it, as a place where God dwells.

It is true that I do not quite understand the purpose of chronology. I struggle with the press of it, the limits and constraints and heartbreak of it. Yet I know in my bones how God infuses *chronos* with blessing, and I sense God has some purpose in giving us the experience of moving through seasons and cycles and learning the rhythms and patterns on which our bodies and souls depend. Precisely what that purpose is, is a mystery. I am learning, though, that when we open ourselves to the presence of God who blesses *chronos*, when we allow God to draw us into life-giving rhythms, when we move through our hours and days with an eye toward the holiness that makes its home in every minute, then our lives become something like the pages from those Celtic gospel-books whose shimmering patterns arose from the sacred round of daily life and gave praise to the God who is no stranger to this moment.

God enters into this moment - and this one, and this - not simply to give us a glimpse of eternity, but also to assure us that eternity is already at hand. The eternal infuses and illuminates our lives with each heartbeat and every breath, twining all our *chronos* and *kairos* together, spiraling us ever deeper into the heart of God.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- Where do you find the gifts of *chronos*? How do you experience chronological time as a blessing?
- What does a life-giving rhythm look like for you? If you are able to live in this rhythm right now,

how is this for you? If it is difficult for you to do this right now, how might this be a starting place for prayer? Is there one small step you could take? What grace might you need to ask for in order to take this step?

- If you think of your life - or simply this moment - as a page from an illuminated Celtic gospel-book, what kind of pattern do you see? Where do you notice grace within the pattern of the page? Where do you notice the presence of struggle? What kind of pattern would you like God to create as the page continues to take shape?

BLESSING

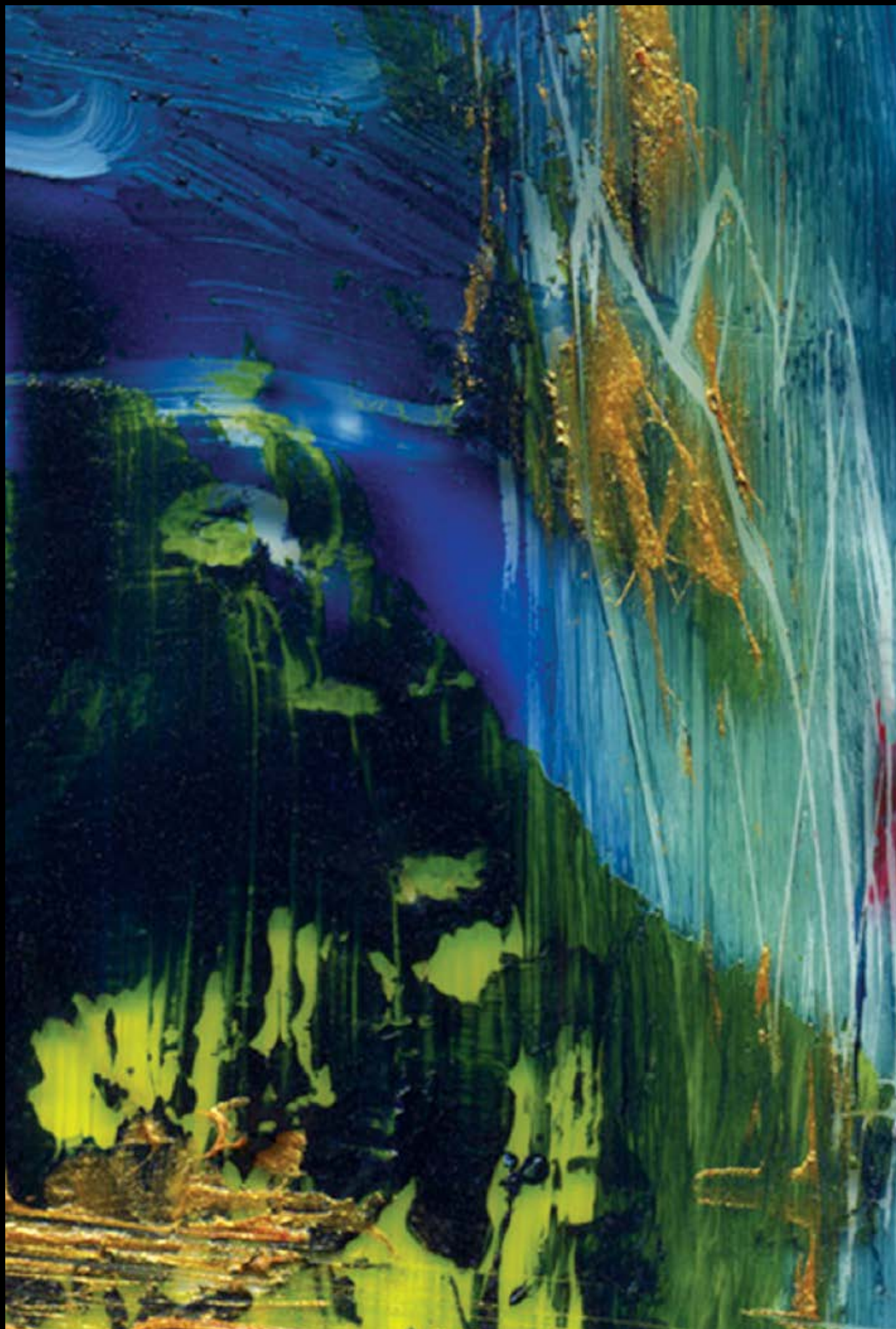
In the pattern of your life in the path of your days in the pages that hold each moment and hour may you know the hand of God tracing a blessing luminous with grace in every single line.

RETREAT TIP

Enter a thin place in the pages of a book

One of the remarkable gifts of living in the digital age (in addition to the obvious and tremendous gift of getting to spend Lent with you in this way!) is that we have access to medieval manuscripts such as the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Book of Kells in a way that most of human history has never experienced. Created more than a millennium ago, each of these manuscripts is available for viewing online. For a visual feast, be sure to click on the books' hyperlinks that are included in today's reflection. The Book of Kells link will take you to the Trinity College Dublin website, and the Lindisfarne Gospels link will take you to the British Library website.

You can scroll through each manuscript page by page and also zoom in to see their stunning, spiraling details. Because the manuscripts are available in their entirety, be aware the sites might take a few moments to load. Pour yourself a cup of tea and savor this opportunity to enter these books that are a thin place in themselves!



Wandering in Time

Week 4: Time

Day 5 of 5

The story is told of a trio of monks who, in the ninth century, set out from Ireland in a rudderless boat called a coracle. They had no oars or provisions. The monks drifted on the waters for a week before hitting land again, this time on the north coast of Cornwall. They were brought before the king, who asked them why they were traveling in such a fashion. The monks replied, "We stole away because we wanted for the love of God to be on pilgrimage, we cared not where."

This kind of journey was characteristic of the early Irish monks. Peregrinatio is the word for it, giving rise to our English word peregrination. Peregrinatio became a spiritual practice for the monks, a way of removing themselves from their familiar, habitual terrain in order to meet God on the road - or upon the waters, where they chose quite literally to let the Spirit blow them where it would. Many monks undertook perpetual peregrinatio, spending their lives in voluntary exile as a sign of their utter devotion to Christ and their desire to find their home in him alone.

Though peregrinatio is a form of pilgrimage, it is often distinguished by being less structured than a pilgrimage. A person engaged in peregrinatio might have no itinerary. There is a wandering, meandering quality to this kind of journey, though it is not aimless, nor is it driven by mere wanderlust. Peregrinatio recognizes that while God is always and everywhere present to us, there are times when we are called to meet God by going, and asking God to guide our steps.

In peregrinatio, moving through the terrain is also a way of moving through time. The rhythm of traveling, of movement, of putting one foot in front of the other, becomes a way to enter deeply and mindfully into the *chronos* we reflected on yesterday. Journeying from place to place invites us to depend on God for provision moment by moment, and it calls our attention anew to the details of daily life. At the same time, when we remove ourselves from our familiar landscape and intentionally seek the unsheltering that happens in peregrinatio, we find ourselves in some ways freed from the usual demands on our time, quickened to the presence of *kairos* that weaves through our path and intertwines itself with

chronos.

Last fall I set out on my own peregrinatio. I had, by grace, made it through the winter, spring, and summer following Gary's death. As autumn approached, I knew it was time for leaving, and for a longer stretch than the trips I had taken earlier in the year. Like the Irish monks of our opening story, I did not much care where I went; I just knew I needed to go, and to give myself to the road. I planned some of the places I would travel and the people I would be with - Toronto to see my sister and her husband, North Carolina and Virginia to visit friends - but I did not know my whole itinerary, or just how long I would be gone.

In the weeks leading up to my departure, I searched for a recording of a song that Gary had written some years earlier. The song had been much on my heart as I prepared for the trip with both trepidation and hope, and I found myself yearning to hear it again. Thanks to his brother Greg, a tremendously gifted sound engineer and singer/songwriter himself, we have wondrous recordings of so many of Gary's songs. But this one had never been formally recorded, and my only hope

lay in the possibility that it had been recorded in one of his many live performances. I went through boxes and bins of miscellaneous audio and video recordings, having to listen and watch in small doses because it was so difficult. All my searching did not turn up the song, and I began to despair I would ever hear it again.

As I set out on my road trip, I spent the first night with my parents, who live a couple of hours north of me. The next morning, bound for Asheville, I grabbed a handful of CDs I had left with them for safekeeping several months earlier. On my way out of town, I put one of the CDs in the player. Within a few minutes I found myself listening to the opening notes of the song I had been looking for and had thought I would never find. It had finally found me, just as I set out on the road I needed to take. I heard Gary begin to sing:

The most important day
Of anybody's life
Becomes a memory of a
memory
That fades away
Why have you brought me
here?
I only have to leave this life
Always forgetting
And letting go
Of another day

Tears came with those first lines, and I ached that the leaving happened far sooner than Gary could have foreseen when he wrote the song. Yet I listened in wonder, too, at how these words written years earlier had spiraled back around as a gift at the time I most needed them. As I made my way down the road, Gary's words and music flowed into the tears to become a baptism and blessing for the peregrinatio I was beginning. In my car-turned-coracle, I heard Gary go on to sing,

And I will dry these tears from
my eyes
'Cause I will always believe in
my heart
That you will teach me
The art of time
Now and forever
Beginning and the end
Eternally

The song is called "The Art of Time," and I want to share it with you as we close this week. Gary wrote the song as part of a one-man show called KATZ that he created and performed at the Orlando Fringe Festival. The recording that found its way to me, and which you'll find in today's Songmaker's Notebook, is from a concert Gary did soon after the Fringe. In your listening, you will perhaps understand why I

needed to hear this song that strikes such notes of heartbreak and hope. As I continue to learn the art of time in a new way, it goes with me still as a remarkable gift of grace.

I pray that in this song you will find a blessing for your own journey, and also an invitation to enter into time -- the chronos of it and the kairos of it -- as a practice and a sacred art. May God, who has a fondness for those who wander, encompass you, protect you, and guide each step of your path.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- Have you ever set out on a peregrinatio, short or long, near or far? What propelled you to go?
- What did you find along the way - or what found you? What was time like for you as you traveled?
- Have you had the experience of something from the past spiraling back around to become a gift you needed in the present? How did it find you again, and what gift did this bring?
- How do you keep your heart open to God's invitation to practice peregrinatio? If you're not called to make a big pilgrimage right now, or if it's something you're not

able to do, how might it be to
undertake a tiny peregrinatio
- to set out for a day or even
an hour with no agenda, no
itinerary, and simply seek to go
where the Spirit takes you -- for
the love of God?

BLESSING

May every road
you travel
draw you deeper
into the heart
of God

May each moment
of the path
open you to
eternity

May God be
your guard
and your guide
in the way
that you go

And may time
turn well for you
and spiral you
always home.

Our next reflection will be sent
on Monday morning, when
we begin Week 6: Approach.
As always, please feel free to
stop by the forum, where our
fellow pilgrims are continuing
to create a wondrous space - a
sanctuary - in word and image.
Blessings on your weekend!

Lenten Feature
SONGMAKER'S
NOTEBOOK #8

Song: "The Art of Time"

The Art of Time

© Garrison Doles

The most important day
Of anybody's life
Becomes a memory of a
memory
That fades away
Why have you brought me
here?

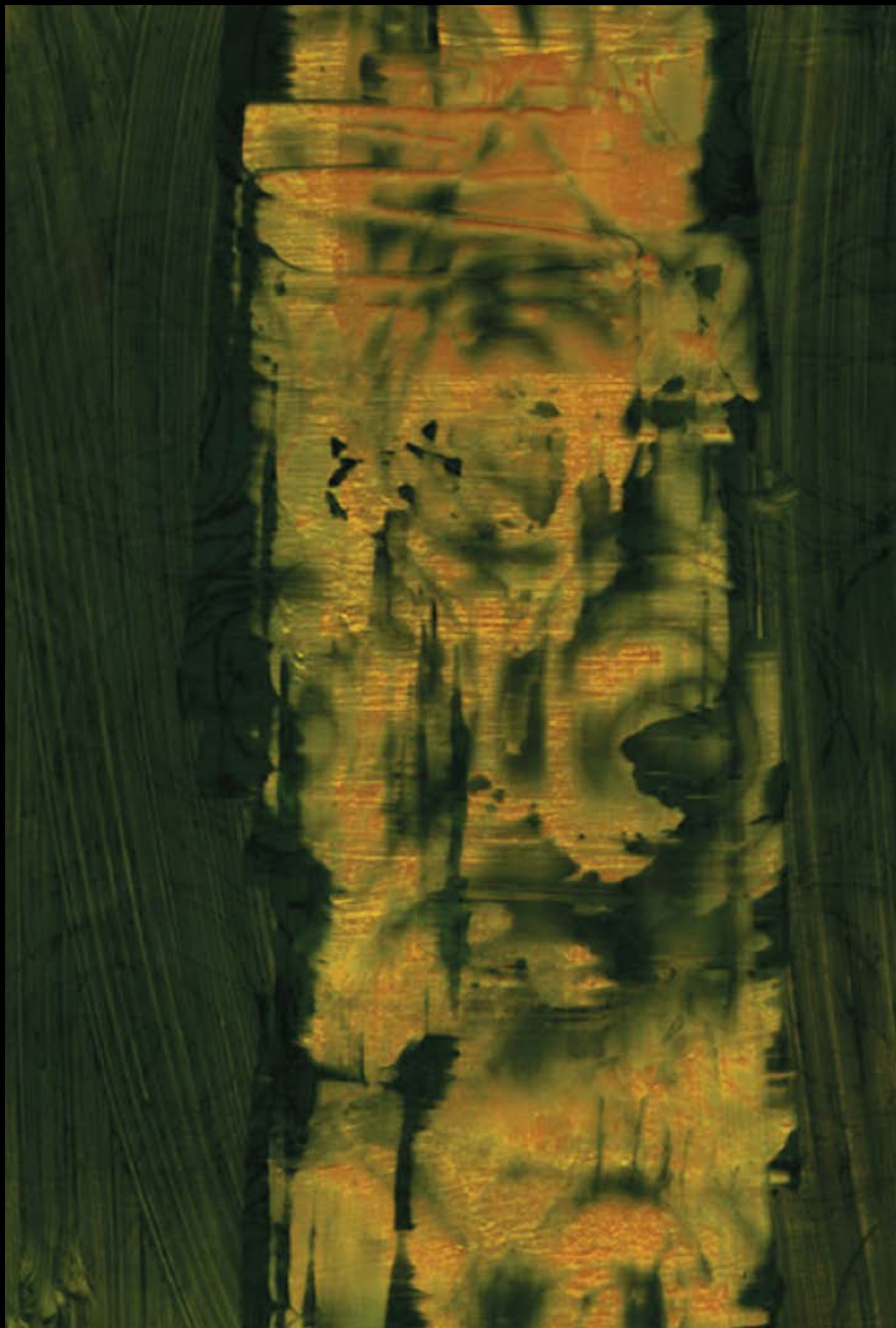
I only have to leave this life
Always forgetting
And letting go
Of another day

The stars are in the heavens
For a billion years
And even their light
Will one day fail
All the stars in the heavens
Fragile as our tears
Are diamonds of the evening
sky
And I will dry these tears from
my eyes
'Cause I will always believe in
my heart
That you will teach me
The art of time

Now and forever
Beginning and the end
Eternally

The most important ones
That ever walked this world
Are temporary, contemporary,
And then on their way
What do you want from me?
O you know I have to love this
life
How will I shed it

And not regret it
And just walk away
The stars are in the heavens
For a billion years
And even their light
Will one day fail
All the stars in the heavens
Fragile as our tears
Are diamonds of the evening
sky
And I will dry these tears from
my eyes
'Cause I will always believe in
my heart
That you will teach me
I will always believe in my heart
That you will teach me
I will always believe in my heart
That you will teach me
The art of time
The art of time



The Mystery of Approach

Week 6: Approach Day 1 of 5

Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes
in the name of the Lord!

Mark 11:9

In his book *Anam Cara*, John O'Donohue has a section that he titled "The Mystery of Approach." In it, he writes,

For years I have had an idea for a short story about a world where you would approach only one person in the course of your life. Naturally, one would have to subtract biological considerations from this assumption in order to draw this imaginary world. You would have to practice years of silence before the mystery of presence in the Other, then you could begin to approach.

As we enter this week that ends with Palm Sunday, I am carrying O'Donohue's idea with me. If we could approach only one other person in our lifetime, how would we prepare? What would we choose to do with our days? What questions would we ask ourselves? What rhythms would we enter into as we anticipated our time of approach? After the years of silence and mystery, what would we finally say in the moment of our meeting? What would we offer in the crossing of that threshold?

What would it mean to live this way?

Perhaps these very questions are part of what propelled Jesus into the wilderness, back at the beginning. When he came up from the waters of the Jordan, one would have thought he was ready to start his public ministry. Baptized, blessed, and named beloved: what more could he want in order to get under

way? And yet he turned his face toward the wilderness, needing a season of what it had to offer. Could it be it was this? Was he preparing himself in silence for the mystery of each approach that lay ahead?

Whatever it was that Jesus received in the wilderness, when he leaves, he is ready at last to begin his public ministry. As the gospels unfold, we see how with each encounter, it is as if Jesus has been preparing all his life for this:

In the blessing of a child.
In the seeing and knowing of a woman at a well. In the healing of a man with leprosy, a woman with a ceaseless flow of blood, a child of a persistent Canaanite mother, a child of a faithful father, a woman with seven demons.

The list goes on. The miracle is not that Jesus meets so many people, providing all with what they most need; the miracle is that he meets and provides for each one. With every person he encounters, Jesus treats them not simply as if they were the only one receiving his attention and care. In each moment, each person is in fact the only one who has Jesus' attention:

Each woman, beloved.
Each man, beloved.
Each child, beloved.

For each one alone he would have come. For each one Jesus would have taken flesh, would have spent years in preparation and prayer, would have entered the wilderness, would have finally left its terrain in order to do what he came to do - simply so that he could approach this one, and this one, and this one alone.

For each one he would have done what he does now, as

he nears the other end of his journey: he turns his face toward Jerusalem. Takes the path into the city. Moves with intention and awareness down the road he has chosen, the road from which he will not turn back.

And us? Each one of us, for whom he has come: what if we lived our life with this kind of intention? What if we looked for our path with such discernment and deliberation? What road does Christ call us to walk? How do we prepare ourselves to meet him when he approaches us and enters through the gate of our life?

During this week that draws us toward Palm Sunday, we will be carrying these questions and others that join us along the way. I look forward to seeing where the road leads us. Blessings to you in the walking.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- At this point in our Lenten journey, what is most present to you on your path?
- Whatever this is, how would you like to approach it and engage it with intention and discernment?
- How might Christ be seeking to meet you and minister to you in this?

BLESSING

That the way toward Christ will be clear for you.

That the way toward you will be clear for Christ.

That you will approach one another with gladness.

That you will meet each other with joy.

For the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, see Mark 11:1-11.



Sometimes the Road Is a River

Week 6: Approach

Day 2 of 5

I am perpetually fascinated by how we find our way through this world. I often think about life as geography and cartography: how do we trace a map through the mystery? What tools for navigation do we bring to such a strange terrain? How do we choose and chart our path?

We do not, of course, always get to choose. Lately, as I think about where I am now, I have been pondering the pivotal turns, imagining them laid out on a map in my mind's eye. Looking back, I can see from here the turns that occurred by my own design, as well as others -- so many of them -- that were a result of serendipity, seeming chance, terrible misfortune, or graced synchronicity.

It helps to be intentional about discernment -- to learn and use the pathfinding tools that have been passed down to us across the generations: prayer, seeking wise counsel, going on pilgrimage, and so many other practices that have been left to us by those who walked

ahead of us. Yet there are times when no practice, no method of discernment, no amount of prayer will fix what has gone before, or make clear the path that lies ahead.

I am fond of a story from the life of Saint Francis of Assisi. One day, the tale goes, Francis and Brother Masseo are on a journey and come to a crossroads. It is not apparent which route they should take. Saint Francis tells Brother Masseo to stand at the center of the crossroads and spin himself around. When Masseo finally falls down, Francis and his dizzy brother set off in the direction in which Masseo had landed.

Saint Francis was a man possessed of formidable powers of discernment. I take a measure of comfort that even he realized when he had come up against the limits of his knowing. Francis understood that it matters what road we choose. Yet he understood also that when the way is not clear, we can trust that Christ knows how to find us on any road, knows how to meet us in every turning, knows the path by which to approach us.

What do we do when we reach the end of our known road, the edge of our map? What happens then?

Sometimes we need to look at a different map.

Sometimes we need to turn the map around.

Or look at it from the underside.

Or throw it away.

Sometimes the road we need to take is not a road.

Sometimes the road is a river.

Sometimes a bridge.

Sometimes it is a ladder,
a longing,
a leap.

Sometimes we have to make the road ourselves.

Sometimes we find the way not by looking.

Sometimes the way opens within us.

Sometimes we need simply to stretch wide our arms and begin turning and turning letting ourselves follow the direction in which we fall.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- When you come to the end of your known road, what do you do? When it is time to take a step, what helps you find your way?
- Has there been a time in your life when, for all your discernment, it was not clear which way you should go? How was that for you? Looking back, do you have a sense of how God was present in this?
- How might God be inviting you to re-imagine and envision anew what your path looks like? What if God is inviting you to step toward something that doesn't seem like a road at all?

BLESSING

When you come
to the end
of the road,
the spiraling turn,
the bend beyond which
you cannot see,
may your first practice be
to breathe.

May your second practice be
to breathe again.

Keep at this.
Watch.
Wait.

See what road appears

that you did not think
a road,
what path is found
by patience,
what map is made
by taking up
the third practice:

to keep breathing,
stubborn in the rhythm
of intake and release
by which you will
fill your yearning lungs
not for the waiting road
but for your leap
by which the road
will come.

Lenten Feature SONGMAKER'S NOTEBOOK #9

Song: "Let Me Out of This Boat"

The audio player might take a few seconds to appear.
Click the left arrow to play.

Before I wrote this song, if you had said something to me about the story in Matthew where Peter tries to walk on the water, I might have remarked something like "Oh yeah, that's where Jesus gets after him for not having enough faith." For centuries preachers have been using this story to chide their flocks for their lack of faith. How could they resist? It

seems tailor-made. Jesus said "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" And because this story has been so useful for making a point that so many have so often wanted to make, it just seems to have become the official version.

An important part of my songmaking process when dealing with a familiar passage like this one is to try and strip away as much of the gunk and waxy buildup that has collected on its surface as I can. I want to try to get past my own preconceived ideas of what this thing is about and let it tell me what it's about in its own words. I know there are treasures there if I can just manage to take off my blinders and see them. I want to put aside what I think I'll find so I can be open to finding what I find.

Here's what I found - Peter got out of the boat.

How can this be a story about Peter not having enough faith? Peter got out of the boat and by the sheer force of his faith walked across the surface of the water toward Jesus. When he had a moment of doubt and started to go under, Jesus

rushed over and grabbed
him by the scruff of the neck
and hauled him up. Peter
demonstrated extraordinary
faith and when he got in
trouble Jesus bailed him out.
That's the story.

Let Me Out of This Boat

© Garrison Doles

Let me out of this boat I'm
gonna walk out across that
water
I see Jesus is coming I'm gonna
meet him half way
I'm only a man and I can't even
swim
I'm gonna walk out across that
water with my Lord

Let me out of this boat I want
to set my faith in motion
I will not be bound by the limits
I have known
Everything is changed and you
might think it's strange
But I'm gonna walk out across
that water with my Lord

Courage
Do not be afraid
And every step along the way
Jesus says come on Peter
Courage
O ye of little faith
Can't you just step out on
those waves
I'm here to save you
You're gonna make it

You've got your own miracle
going on

In the watches of the night
When you're trying to make
your way to me

Doubts will overtake you

I know the night is dark

But I will always find you

Before you slip beneath the
waves

Come on Peter lift your head
up

Reach your hand out
It is I

Let me out of this boat I'm
gonna walk out across that
water

Jesus is calling and that's
enough for me

I don't know how but I'm going
right now

I'm gonna walk out across that
water

With my Lord



Here Be Dragons

Week 6: Approach

Day 3 of 5

In the Middle Ages, when a cartographer was making a map and came to the edge of the known world, he would write this in the blank space that lay beyond:

Here be dragons.

This wonderfully evocative phrase was the mapmaker's way of describing the unknown and indicating that beyond the familiar terrain was the possibility of chaos and danger.

Even as the prospect of present-day dragons - whatever form they take - can stir our anxiety and fear, it helps to remember that in some cultures, the dragon has positive and benevolent connotations. In China, for instance, it is a symbol of good fortune, auspicious powers, and strength: good qualities to carry with us and to ask for when we press into unknown lands. As we pray for protection from contrary and chaotic forces that seek to work against us in our new territory, we might also consider whether there could be some friendly dragons to welcome us into that terrain, and ask for God to send the help we will need to navigate our path. We do not have to read very far into the Bible before we begin to see that God has a penchant for calling us to move beyond our known realms. When we follow God's call into those realms, we should be mindful of the possible dangers and become intentional about asking for God's protection. I think again

of Saint Patrick's prayer that we spent time with last week, and the beauty with which it calls upon Christ to enfold and encompass us.

Entering unfamiliar landscapes can sometimes feel terribly lonely because there is always an element of exploration that no one can undertake for us. Nobody can forge the path that is ours, no one can discover it or walk it for us, or tell us precisely where or how it will go. That's the bad news, but it's the good news, too, because it means that when we finally arrive at the land that is ours, it belongs to us - and we belong to it - in a way that could never happen otherwise.

Still, I have come to appreciate anew that when the way seems most lonely and perilous, there is help waiting at hand. We travel in the company of unseen forces that love to ally themselves with those who wander, those who explore, those who dare to look for new pathways. This company includes those who know us and love us in this life and have tangible help to offer us, as well as those who are part of what the Christian tradition calls the cloud of witnesses or communion of saints: those who have gone on before us and who, though they have not walked precisely the road we now travel, have learned a thing or two about entering realms that lie far beyond the familiar.

For all the uncertainty, there are wonders, too, in the uncharted worlds, and treasures to be discovered. Whatever waits to meet us when we move beyond

the edge of our map or the end of our known road, we will always find an invitation to open ourselves to the presence of God, who is well able to create from chaos and make a way where there seems to be no way. And even if a dragon should saunter into our path, breathing fire or offering an unexpected wink, we can trust that we go in the keeping of the One who is greater than all dragons and will help us find our way.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- What sort of forces are you encountering on your path these days? Do the "dragons" seem fearsome or friendly?
- As you encounter them, what do you need? How would it be for you to ask?
- Who are your traveling companions? In this realm and among the communion of saints, who helps and inspires you to keep pressing into new terrain?

BLESSING

On this road
and every road
in this realm
and each realm
may help
find its way
to you
may grace
travel alongside you
may delight
walk in
your company
and may
the communion
of the saints
bless you
and bring you
peace.



Between Heaven and Earth

Week 6: Approach

Day 4 of 5

And [Jacob] dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.
Genesis 28:12

Sometimes there is no time for discernment. Sometimes there is no time to plot and plan our path, no time to contemplate the possibilities, no time to seek wise counsel or ponder or pray. Sometimes there is no time even to stop and spin, as in our Saint Francis story on Tuesday, and see which way we fall.

Sometimes we are propelled from the life we have known, driven far from our familiar terrain by a call, by circumstances, or by the consequences of our own mistakes. What path becomes possible then?

A man named Jacob learned what road can open to us when our less wise choices have launched us beyond our known world. When we find him in Genesis 28, he is on the run from his brother, Esau, who is in a murderous mood after Jacob, by trickery, takes the blessing due the barely-older brother.

Hustled out of town by their mother, Jacob flees from Beersheba, his home. Hours pass. His run slows to a walk, and as evening comes, he stops. He is in the wilderness, he is alone, he has left everything behind, and though he is bound for a place of safety, he little knows what his life will be like there.

Jacob is a man seriously betwixt. He has arrived at a big, fat threshold. And here he finally makes perhaps his first wise decision: he rests. Picking

up a stone, he places it beneath his head for a pillow. Somehow he manages to sleep. In his sleep, Jacob dreams, and in his dreaming, he has a vision. Jacob sees a ladder stretched between earth and heaven, with angels (angels in the wilderness, again!) ascending and descending on the ladder. He hears the voice of God speaking to him, making promises about what God will do in his life, and how God will be with him. God says to

Jacob,
Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

Jacob wakes from his sleeping. Looks around. Remembers. Exclaims, Surely the Lord is in this place - and I did not know it! How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

Far past the edge of his known world, Jacob has found himself in a thin place. In the dark, in the wilderness, heaven and earth meet in the dreaming of a man who finally stopped long enough to let God catch up to him, and who was willing to have his eyes and his heart opened.

What Jacob receives in that thin place is not a map but something much better: a vision, a promise, and the assurance of God's presence with him. From this point, Jacob will travel a road that has begun anew with a ladder and a dream. His path has become more vast than he had ever imagined: it is encompassed by heaven, and he is held by the God who goes with him.

QUESTIONS IN HAND

- Has there been a time when you landed suddenly and unexpectedly in a place where

you never imagined you would be? Did you come to perceive the presence of God there, either at the time or as you look back now on that time? How did God provide for you in that place?

- When you are making decisions about your path, what attention do you give to insights that come from beneath or beyond your consciousness: dreams, the creative process, intuition, etc.? Do you have tools for discernment that open you to ways of knowing that complement your gifts for reasoning and thinking through things?

- Once again we see angels appearing to someone in a between-place in the wilderness. At this point in your Lenten path, what sort of angels are you needing? What or whom do you need to visit you and minister to you as Holy Week draws near?

BLESSING

When you come
to the place between.

When you have left
what you held most dear.

When you are traveling
toward the life you know not.

When you arrive
at the hardest ground.

May it become
for you a place to rest.

May it become
for you a place to dream.

May the pain
that has pressed itself
into you give way to vision,
to knowing.

May the morning make of it
an altar, a path, a place to
begin again.

For the story of Jacob's dream,
see Genesis 28:10-22.



The Wrestling Is Where the Blessing Begins

Week 6: Approach

Day 5 of 5

Jacob was left alone;
and a man wrestled with him
until daybreak.

Genesis 32:24

On another night, in another
between-place, Jacob learns
that sometimes when the angel
meets us in the wilderness, it
makes us work for a blessing.
And perhaps this is one of
the ways the angels choose
to minister to us, knowing
that there are times when a
good struggle comes as one
of those strange comforts of
the wilderness. Sometimes we
need not to rest but to wrestle,
to be stretched to our limits,
to reach deep into the reserves
we didn't know we had.

We are not certain, of course,
just who it is that goes toe-
to-toe with Jacob in the
night as he is on his way, with
trepidation, to seek Esau years
and lifetimes after fleeing in
fear. The text is fuzzy - likely
with intention - on whether
the visitor who approaches
Jacob in the dark is a man
or God. The visual tradition
settled somewhere in between,
frequently depicting Jacob

wrestling an angel.

As I worked on the art for
today, I began to find my
imagination drawn not to the
figures locked in their fierce
struggle; what drew me instead
was the ground. I imagined
the tracks and traces left by
their feet, the imprint of their
bodies on the earth, the map
made by their wrestling. I
imagined those lines beginning
to form the blessing that Jacob
receives, twining into the
letters of the new name he will
bear with him, limping, when
morning comes.

On your path, where have you
encountered a struggle that
brought not only a wound but
also a blessing? When has an
experience of wrestling with
God helped you know who
you are, and which way to go?
If you were to write a blessing
whose lines have their roots in
a time of struggle, what would
that blessing be?

Jacob's Blessing

If this blessing were easy,
anyone could claim it.
As it is,
I am here to tell you
it will take some work.

This is the blessing

that visits you
in the struggling
in the wrestling
in the striving.

This is the blessing
that comes
after you have left
everything behind,
after you have stepped out,
after you have crossed
into that realm
beyond every landmark
you have known.

This is the blessing
that takes all night
to find.

It's not that this blessing
is so difficult,
as if it were not filled
with grace
or with the stubborn love
that shimmers in every line.

It's simply that
it requires you
to want it,
to ask for it,
to place yourself
in its path.

It demands that you
stand to meet it
when it arrives,
that you stretch yourself
in ways you didn't know
you could move,
that you agree
to not give up.

So when this blessing comes,
borne in the hands
of the difficult angel
who has chosen you,
do not let go.
Give yourself
into its grip.

It will wound you
but I tell you
there will come a day
when what felt to you
like limping
was something more
like dancing
as you moved into
the cadence
of your new
and blessed name.

For the story of Jacob wrestling
in the night, see Genesis 32:22-31.

The next retreat email will be sent Monday morning, when we enter Week 7: Beloved. You will receive an email reflection every day between this Monday and the Monday after Easter. I look forward to sharing Holy Week and Easter with you! Blessings on your weekend.

Lenten Feature

SONGMAKER'S

NOTEBOOK #10

Friends, please do not miss today's Songmaker's Notebook,

which features Gary's song "I Will Not Let Go." Inspired by the story of Jacob's wrestling, the song beautifully captures the blessing that can be found in our struggling. [Click here to listen.](#)

Song: "I Will Not Let Go"

The audio player might take a few seconds to appear.

[Click the arrow to play.](#)

When the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel came around in the lectionary a couple of years ago and Jan and I had chosen it as the text for our Wellspring worship service, I thought, well okay that's an evocative text, I can write a song about that. I didn't really expect any surprises, but once I got this familiar passage into my songmaker's workshop and started to look it over, all bets were off. Of course I had been aware of what an important piece of the Genesis saga this story is, but I hadn't fully considered just how pivotal it is to the entire Judeo-Christian religious philosophy.

We are the people who wrestle with God. Who struggle and engage and interact with God. We're not puppets or pets or

slaves. We're not automatons or purely instinctual beings who merely react to environmental stimuli. We have free will and self-awareness. And we have souls.

You and I are free to be foolish and stupid and even evil if we want to. We're free to turn away from God and wander off into pointless and barren and hopeless oblivion, if that's what we want to do. Certainly there's a terrible price to pay, being separated from God, but some of us will go anyway.

What do you want from me, God? Why do you let me get into so much trouble? You know what I'm supposed to do, why don't you just make me do it, and save us all a lot of trouble and frustration and heartache? Why have you given me this ability to choose between doing right and doing wrong? Why have you given me this ability to not choose you?

Is it because you want to have a real relationship with me? Is it because you love me and you want me to love you too?

I will not let go until you bless me.

I Will Not Let Go

© Garrison Doles

I am Jacob by the river
You can send your angel round
If I'm gonna be a person
Gonna have to stand my
ground

I'm standing my ground
You have made me in your
image
But I'm all tangled in this world
So I have to grab ahold of you
I want to be yours
I want to be yours

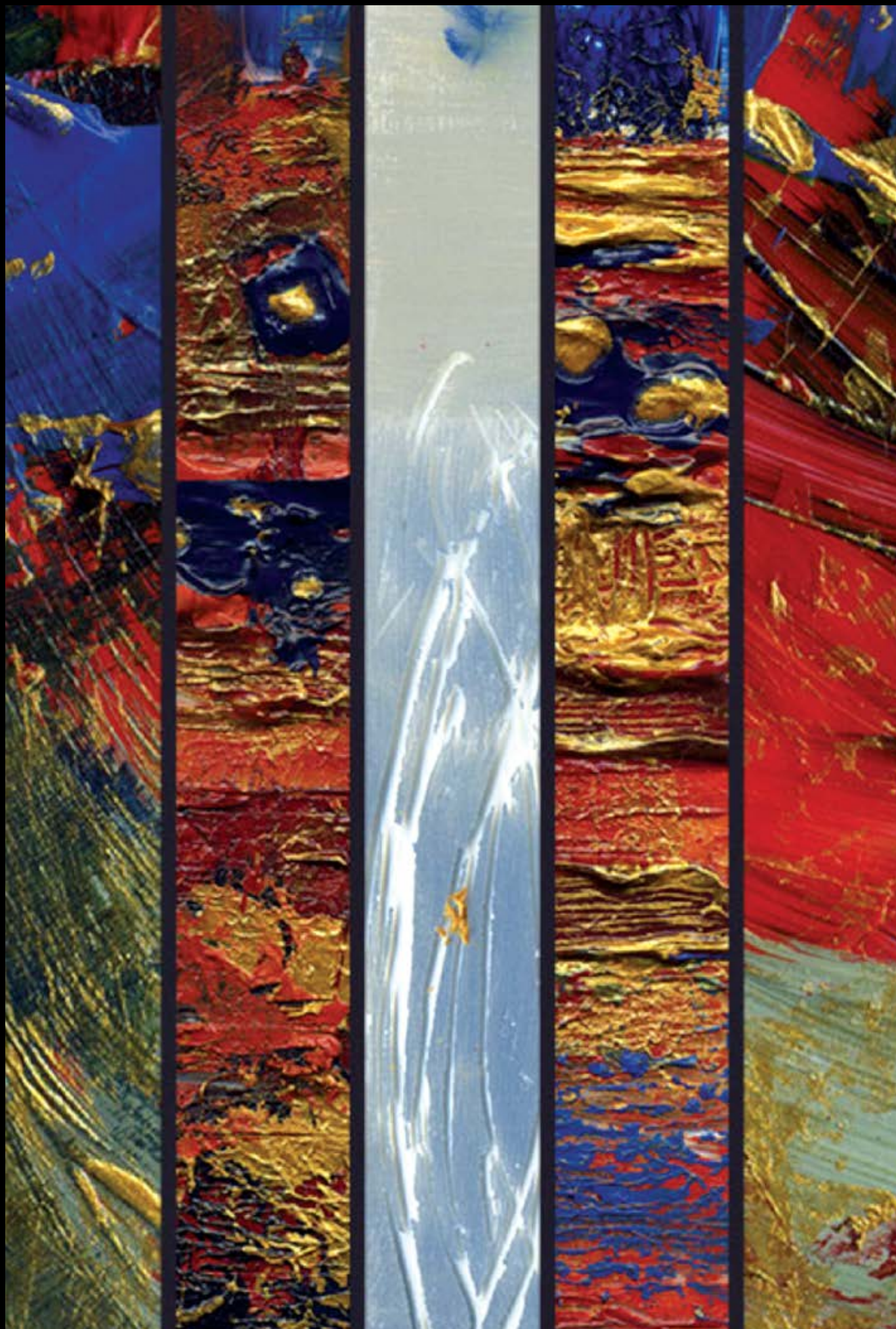
I will not let go
I will not let go
Until you bless me
Bless my life
Until you bless me
Bless my life

Lay your hand upon my brow
Will you lay your hand upon my
brow
My destiny is up to you
Will you bless me now

I am Jacob by the river
I've got this angel on my hands
If I'm ever gonna face you
Gonna have to make my stand
I'm making my stand

I am just as you have made me
I do not belong to this world
I'm just trying to grab ahold
of you
I want to be yours
I want to be yours

I will not let go
I will not let go
Until you bless me
Bless my life
Until you bless me
Bless my life.



Beloved Gallery from Week 1: Begin

Week 7: Beloved Day 1 of 7 (Monday in Holy Week)

Always, we begin again.

Attributed to Saint Benedict

Beloved friends, we have traveled far with one another on our Lenten path! Or perhaps it might be more fitting to say that we have traveled deep with one another. Laura Swan, in her book *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*, writes, "The desert journey is one inch long and many miles deep." And so it has been for us. Week by week, we have journeyed with themes designed to draw us deeper into this season:

Begin

Memory

Body

Grace

Time

Approach

Now we enter the week called Holy. This is a time for gathering up the gifts of the season and inhabiting our final weekly theme: Beloved. As we move through these days together, the reflections will invite you to clear a space simply to remember where we have traveled, to linger with the gifts of each week, and to ponder how God might be calling you to move forward from here.

From today through Saturday, we will revisit each of the six themes we have explored on our Lenten path. In addition to a gallery image that offers

a glimpse of the artwork created for you for that week, the reflections will also include several questions and a blessing. As you receive each question, I encourage you not to reach for an immediate answer but to sit with it, to carry it with you, to let it do its work in you, knowing the answer might take time to reveal itself. As always, I invite you to choose the questions that fit for you and to listen for other questions that surface for you, knowing that for each of us, our particular landscape will offer its own questions that are custom-made for us.

Today we remember our first theme, Begin.

We remember how at the start of our journey together, we entered into the wilderness with the just-baptized Jesus, the word spoken over him - Beloved - reverberating in our ears, our heart.

We remember how entering Lent invites us to enter into our own landscape, our earth, where God inhabits every layer.

We remember that in the wilderness, there are angels who come to meet us and minister to us.

As we remember these things, we remember also how beginning lies at the heart of who God is. In the beginning, God created, Genesis tells us in its opening line.

To begin, to do a new thing, to restore, to persist in creating

again and again: this is in God's very nature. It is embedded also in us, in who we are as those created by God. Even so, beginning can be difficult; it can be its own wilderness, for it typically requires an ending, a letting go. Renewal requires release. Yet the angels of the wilderness remind us there are distinct graces that attend each beginning, and that when God calls us to set out on a new path, we will not go without being given what we most need.

As we remember our first Beloved week together, I ask you:

- Was there a beginning you made during this season?
- What did you notice as you made this beginning? What did it require you to let go of, and how was this for you? What gift did this beginning hold for you?
- Where are you with this beginning now? What are you noticing about it at this point in your path? Has it helped you know yourself more clearly as Beloved?

BLESSING

In your beginning
in each beginning
in every beginning
in beginning again

may there be peace
may there be clarity
may there be joy

and may the God
who makes all things new
guide your way.



Beloved Gallery from Week 2: Memory

Week 7: Beloved Day 2 of 7 (Tuesday in Holy Week)

Memory is a kind of poetry.
Thomas Moore

Gary and I had studios on opposite sides of our home. We frequently called down the hall to one another and were back and forth between the studios many times a day, looking over work together, running questions by each other, collaborating on a project, or just sitting in dreaming conversation.

After he died, I could not bear to paint in my studio. I had pressed across a thousand painful thresholds after his death, but I balked at the prospect of sitting at my drafting table and not being able to call out, Sweetheart, can you swing by the studio when you have a chance? Anytime I needed to paint, I would pack up my supplies and go visit my parents, where they welcomed me to turn their large kitchen table into a temporary studio (and fed me, to boot).

Earlier this year, as I prepared for our Beloved retreat, I began to move into Gary's studio. It holds a big, beautiful table that

he designed and built for the space. Though I knew it would be a difficult new beginning, I could imagine finding comfort in painting at that table he had made, and being in the space he had infused with his presence, his extraordinary gifts, his memory.

Beginning to inhabit his studio has meant living with Gary's memory -- and mine -- in a new way. This is both painful and graced. As I have worked at his table, tears have flowed into the paintings: tears of sorrow for the life we have lost, but also tears of joy and gratitude for the life we had, the conversations that unfolded in that space, and for the ways that Gary's memory continues to inspire and sustain my creative work.

All the paintings for this Beloved retreat were created as I began to settle into Gary's studio. They bear witness to how our memory is a place where our keenest pain and deepest joy intertwine so deeply. The paintings testify to how God is continually working in the midst of our memories, engaging the pain and joy and everything else to create something new.

In the second week of our

Beloved retreat, we explored the theme of memory. Today, as we look back on that part of our journey, we remember:

- That remembering is a sacred act, and that Lent invites us to travel through a landscape inhabited by the memory and presence of those who walked before us.

- That to remember means to re-member, to put the pieces back together; that this is God's work in us, and allowing God to create something new from the pieces is an act of radical hope.

- That our memories are built in large measure by the words we most often choose to speak, the gestures we most often enact, the actions we most often take.

- That God asks us not only to remember backward in recollection but also to remember forward in hope.

- That in the body of Christ, we are called to remember together as a way of becoming a more whole body.

As we walk with Christ into this Holy Week, we join with him in remembering who God has created and called us to be. Spiraling back around the theme of memory this day, I ask

you:

- How is God inviting you to inhabit and attend your memory right now?
- What memories are most drawing your attention? What do you notice in this? How might this be a starting place for prayer?
- How might God want to engage your memories - the delightful ones as well as the difficult ones - to create something new?

BLESSING

That your memory
will be a holy place:
a sanctuary
where God abides,

leaning in to hear
your laughter
and your lament,

gathering up
your tears
of sorrowing
and rejoicing,
singing to you
in comfort
and in challenge,

working always
to create
again and
anew.

Lenten Feature
SONGMAKER'S

NOTEBOOK #11

Gary's song "Remain in Me" calls us to the table with Jesus and his disciples as he tells them the final things he wants to make sure they - and we - remember. [Click here to listen.](#)

Remain in me

Remain in me

Be the beat of my heart in this world

Remain in me

Remain in me

Be the breath of my life in the dying of this world

SONGMAKER'S NOTEBOOK

Song: "Remain in Me"

Inspired by John 15

We are God's vineyard and Jesus is the vine. Surely one of the most evocative metaphors to be found in the gospels. And from a songwriter's perspective, so rich with imagery that the task becomes how to choose and prioritize and arrange the possibilities. I'm pretty sure I could write a few more songs from this passage, and one of these days I hope to return to it.

Remain in me. In some versions it's abide in me. Either way Jesus is saying hang on to me, stay connected to me, I am your source for everything alive, and joyful, and eternal,

and without this connection you're just not going to make it.

And don't forget, the thing that connects us is love, God's love, my love, your love, so be sure to share it with those around you, so that they can be connected too.

Remain In Me

© Garrison Doles

Refrain

Remain in me

Remain in me

Be the beat of my heart in this world

Remain in me

Remain in me

Be the breath of my life in the dying of this world

I am the vine that grows into this world

From heaven up above

This lost and broken paradise

I am the vine right here in this world

I bring the love of God

To the living of your life

All of this joy

All of this joy

Hang on, hang on

I am the vine

Hang on, hang on

I am the vine

Refrain

Remain in me

Remain in me

Be the beat of my heart in this
world

Remain in me

Remain in me

Be the breath of my life in the
dying of this world

I am the vine that grows among
the rocks

Finds the light of day

In this cracked and thorny
paradise

I am the vine right here among
the rocks

I bring the love of God

To the living of your life

All of this joy

All of this joy

Hang on, hang on

I am the vine

Hang on, hang on

I am the vine

Every branch upon this vine is
burgeoning with fruit

Come and be a part of this,
there is a place for you

Of everything I say to you, of
everything I do

Don't you know you have got
to love each other

Love each other just as I have
loved you

Refrain

Remain in me

Remain in me

Be the beat of my heart in this
world

Remain in me

Remain in me

Be the breath of my life in the
dying of this world

I am the vine that grows into
this world

From heaven up above

This lost and broken paradise

I am the vine right here in this
world

I bring the love of God

To the living of your life

All of this joy

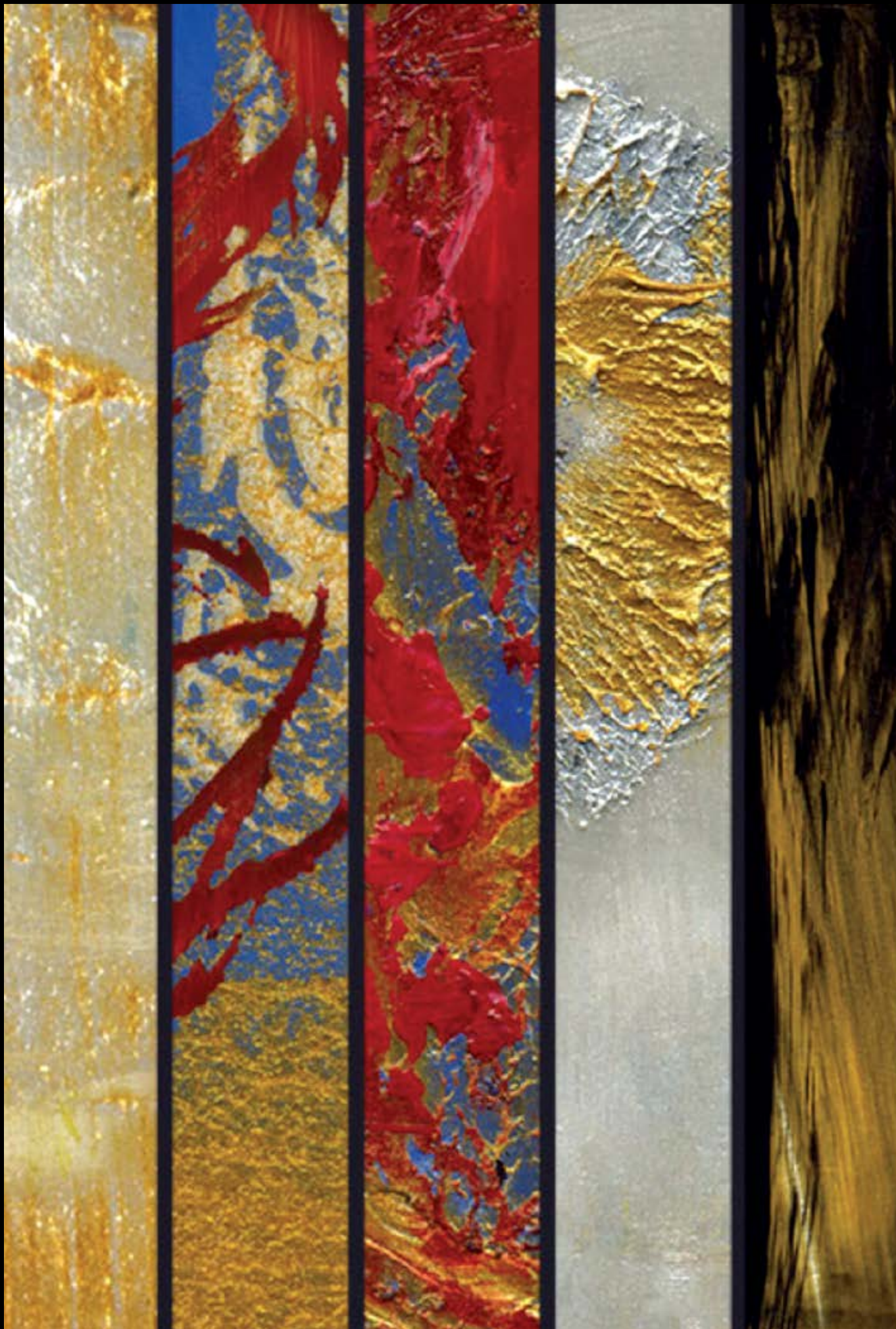
All of this joy

Hang on, hang on

I am the vine

Hang on, hang on

I am the vine.



Beloved Gallery from Week 3: Body

Week 7: Beloved

Day 3 of 7

(Wednesday in Holy Week)

Love's mysteries in souls do grow,
But yet the body is his book.
John Donne, from "The Ecstasy"

A book. A map. A temple.
A house. A landscape.

There are endless ways to describe the body, to consider it, to capture the contours and characteristics of this flesh and bone that we inhabit. So many of the metaphors for the body suggest, as the poet John Donne knew, that we can read the body: that it is a text that does not always depend on words but carries its own testimony.

The body is a story, a poem, a psalm. It is a lament, a litany, a liturgy. It is a sacred text even when it does not feel holy. In every fiber it bears the blessing of the one who created it and calls it good, who inhabits it, who so loves the body that he came and lived in one of his own: Word made flesh, his body bound together with ours.

As we remember the Body theme we explored in Week 3, how might it be for us to do some lectio divina with the sacred text of our body? (For those who aren't familiar with lectio, this is an ancient form of prayer that involves slowly contemplating a small portion of scripture - sometimes just a verse or a few words - to see what sustenance and invitation God has for us in it.) If you have practiced lectio, you likely know that we can use it not only with the Bible but also with other texts, including the text of our own life - our story, our lived experience. This includes our experience of inhabiting a body that has its own story to tell.

What text does your body hold? How might it be to choose a part of your body to read, to pray with, to listen to?

What story might your hand tell, or your eye, your ear, your spine? What pain might need to be heard, what story attended to, what page of delight or dismay asks for prayer? How does God inhabit that part of you? What invitation might God be offering you in your body?

As we recall our journey in Week 3, we remember:

- That God created us, body and soul, in God's own image, with the intention that our body be a blessing and a means for knowing we are beloved.

- That the pain we experience in our bodies is an inexplicable mystery that also holds a door; if we allow it, pain can draw us outward through the door toward compassion and connection.

- That our body says, in the words of Eduardo Galeano, I am a fiesta!

- That God invites us to see ourselves and one another as part of the creation God has fashioned and called good, so that our seeing invites us not toward shame but toward celebration.

- That God creates and calls us to be a sacred space, a sanctuary - in our individual body, in our corporate body, in the body of creation.

- That you are, in the words of Thomas Merton, shining like the sun.

As we walk with Christ in Holy Week, we remember the gift of his body in the Incarnation, the exquisite attention he lavished on the bodies around him, his willingness to give his body for us, and his call to us to be his body in this world. Remembering all this, I invite you to do some lectio with your body and reflect on these questions from the reflection, or others that surface for you:

- What text does your body hold? How might it be for you to choose a part of your body to

read, to pray with, to listen to? What story might your hand tell, or your eye, your ear, your spine?

- What pain might need to be heard, what story attended to, what page of delight or dismay asks for prayer?

- How does God inhabit that part of you?

- What invitation might God be offering you in your body?

- And then, having contemplated these things, how is it for you simply to sit in silence and give thanks for the complicated and wondrous gift of your body?

BLESSING

That your body will be blessed in every line

beloved in every breath a living liturgy of celebration and hope

a sanctuary where you know yourself home.

P.S. Please read on for a word about the rest of our week together . . .

A Word as We Approach Easter

As we travel through Holy Week, I want to remind you that our retreat continues through Monday, April 6. You'll receive an email every day through the end of the retreat. From now through this Saturday, we will continue to look back at the terrain we have crossed together, gathering up the gifts of this season and looking to the path ahead. (If you haven't yet read the Day 1 email for this week, please be sure to give it a look, as it explains what we're up to this week.)

We will celebrate Easter together with an email reflection on Sunday, and the retreat will conclude on Monday with a special closing email. Our online forum will remain open for a couple of weeks after Easter (through April 19), so know you're welcome to linger there as we enter the Easter season!



Beloved Gallery from Week 4: Grace

Week 7: Beloved

Day 4 of 7

(Holy Thursday)

When the hour came,
he took his place at the table,
and the apostles with him.
Luke 22:14

Holy Thursday, and it is time to come to the table. Everything will be gathered together here in this place where the hunger of our body and the hunger of our soul meet and are welcomed. Each theme we have been revisiting will be present in exquisite fullness here:

At the table this night,
on the edge of the ending,
there will be
a beginning.

At the table this night
there will be
memory.

At the table this night
there will be
a body given,
received.

At the table this night
there will be
such grace.

In the washing of feet: grace.
In the breaking of bread: grace.

In the basin, the towel,
the loaf, the cup: grace.

In each word
and every gesture: grace.

Here at this table, as we enter into Holy/Maundy Thursday and spiral back around our Grace theme for Week 4, we

remember:

- That the small-g graces flow out from Big Grace and come to meet us in the midst of our daily life, helping us know we are beloved and inspiring us to respond in love to an often graceless world.

- That grace does not make life make sense, but it draws a generous, surprising line toward us, giving us a place to stand - or dance, or paint, or sing.

- That we do not always see grace fully in the moment it visits, but nonetheless it loves to come and sit beside us when we need it most.

- That we can ask for the graces we need from the God who always desires to help us.

- That grace comes as sheer gift, even (and especially) in the most difficult places, asking us to turn inward and receive it, and to turn outward and bear it into the world.

- That grace sings as it enters the dark - leaving the labor camp, like Etty, or leaving the table, like Jesus and his disciples.

In this Holy Week, as we linger with Christ at the table before he enters the darkness of Gethsemane, we remember the grace, large and small, that he extended to each person he met in his ministry. We remember how, in his hands, everyday things revealed the grace of God that infuses

creation and intimates the kingdom in our midst: seeds, mud, sparrows, lilies, leaven.

We remember at the table this night
how grace was said,
how grace was enacted,
how grace came to rest in the bread
(my body, given for you)
and the cup
(my blood, poured out for you).
Remembering all this, I ask you:

- How has grace visited you in this season to reveal to you how beloved you are? How is it meeting you this week?

- When have you found grace at a table? How has the grace of Christ met you in the breaking of bread, the sharing of a cup?

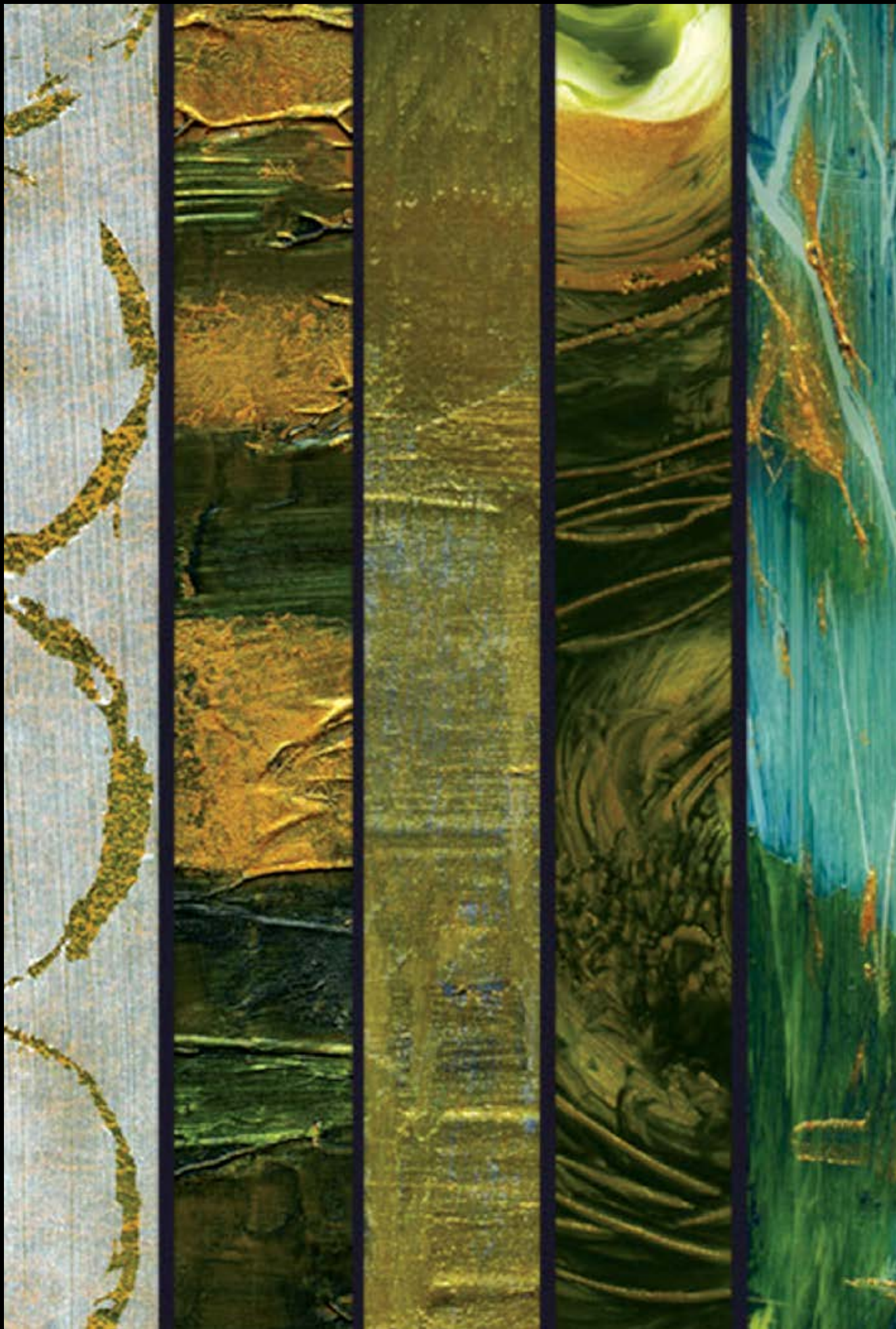
- What graces might you need to ask for as Good Friday and Easter draw near?

BLESSING

Grace in the bread.
Grace in the cup.
Grace at the table.
Grace in us.

(Thank God.)

P.S. Gary's song "Remain in Me," featured in the Songmaker's Notebook on Tuesday, is based on John 15, where we find some of Jesus' final words to his disciples at the Last Supper. The song weaves beautifully with our reflection today. If you haven't heard it yet, this is a perfect time to listen. You can find the song [here](#).



Beloved Gallery from Week 5: Time

Week 7: Beloved

Day 5 of 7

(Holy Thursday)

Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

Matthew 27:50-52

In the birth of Jesus, kairos came, completely entering into our chronos in a way that had never happened before. Christ clothed himself in chronos. Chose it. Inhabited it. Lived in it fully. Felt its effects in his flesh. Bore its blessings and its burdens. Moved to its rhythms and traced its patterns.

Now, at the ending of his life, he inhabits the cross, where kairos and chronos meet in a horrifying intersection. We see with grim clarity the consequences of Christ's decision to enter into our time. This day, he bears the full burden of his choice to dwell in chronos.

Chronos cannot long abide such a gift, to be inhabited so

completely by divine kairos. The place of their meeting, their joining, their intersection, now becomes a place of utter rending. The breaking open of Jesus' flesh is mirrored all around him. The tearing of the temple veil, the splitting of the rocks, the shaking of the earth, the opening of the tombs: all is torn asunder, ruptured, unable to contain the kairos that had come to dwell with us.

It is finished. Jesus breathes his last. Chronos has seemingly conquered him even as it has run out for him. Heaven stands in appalled darkness, and his companions wander bewildered from the cross, their hearts torn open in helpless grief.

We, too, feel the rending, our own hearts broken this day. In our own flesh, in our own being, we know the challenge of holding both kairos and chronos within us. We will likely never suffer the consequences of its intersection in such violent measure as Jesus did. Yet they meet in us, too; they cross and sometimes collide in us, and we hold this tension, aware of the enormous pain and tremendous blessings it brings.

Yet on this day, as we join

heaven and earth in stunned silence, we carry a knowing in our bones and in our aching heart. We know that because we belong to Christ, who came in kairos to enter fully into our chronos, he will help us learn how to carry kairos and chronos together. He will help us abide and inhabit the cross they form within us. The one who carried the burden of their intersection will free us into the blessing of their meeting.

But that is a story for another day. Today, on this Good Friday, as we spiral back around our Week 5 theme of Time, we simply remember:

- That time is God's gift to us, and though time can sometimes be a burden, God also weaves graces through time that help us navigate its labyrinth.
- That time continually invites us across thresholds - the turning of a day, the turning of a season, the turning of a year - and it is important to ask for protection and blessing as we cross these thresholds.
- That there are thin places in time, spaces where the veil becomes permeable and heaven and earth meet in

recognized holy days as well as in ordinary moments.

- That even as chronos comes with challenges, God blesses it and works within it - like a heartbeat, like breathing - to draw us into life-giving rhythms and patterns.

- That God invites us to practice time as an art - to enter into it with reverence, intention, prayer, and imagination.

We remember also, with gratefulness, the gifts that Celtic traditions continue to offer us - including blessings, peregrinatio, and thin places - that help us recognize and practice the art of time.

This day, as we remember all these things and stand with Christ in the place where time has been torn open, I ask you:

- How are you inhabiting time right now? How is it inhabiting you? Where do you feel the burden of it; where you notice and receive the blessing of it?
- How is it for you to live in the place where these two kinds of time - kairos and chronos - intersect? What helps you hold the tension of this - the cross their meeting makes?
- In Christ's living and dying,

what do you notice about time? How did he inhabit time in a way that inspires, blesses, and frees you to receive and inhabit God's gift of time?

BLESSING

This day
let all stand still
in silence,
in sorrow.

Sun and moon
be still.

Earth
be still.

Still the waters.

Still the wind.

Let the ground
gape in stunned
lamentation.

Let it weep
as it receives
what it thinks

it will not
give up.

Let it groan
as it gathers
the one
who was thought
forever stilled.

Time
be still.

Watch
and wait.
Still.

Feature for Good Friday SONGMAKER'S

NOTEBOOK #12

Song: "This Crown of Thorns"

Part of the magic of poetry resides in its power to express the inexpressible. To say what isn't easy to put into words. To get at that elusive idea or image that seems to be right on the fingertips, and somehow just out of reach. And the poet's work, or in this case, the songmaker's, involves finding a way to slip quietly into the presence of that idea without disturbing its penumbra of subtlety and nuance. The simple fact is that, as wonderfully versatile a medium as language is, there is much within the human heart that just cannot be articulated with words, so that often we find that our deepest understanding outstrips our means of expression.

When I sat down to write this song about the crucifixion I couldn't help but be aware of the millions of words that have been spoken and written on this subject, probably more words than any other single subject. And I was also aware that none of the words I had ever heard or read went very far towards expressing my own

personal grasp of this most
complex piece of what is surely
the most complex relationship
we have in our lives.

I think of the lines of this
song as being like a delicate
latticework that lies on the
surface of something deep
within my heart, and affords a
view.

This Crown Of Thorns

© Garrison Doles

This crown of thorns
Upon your head
All the power of the universe
In humble sacrifice

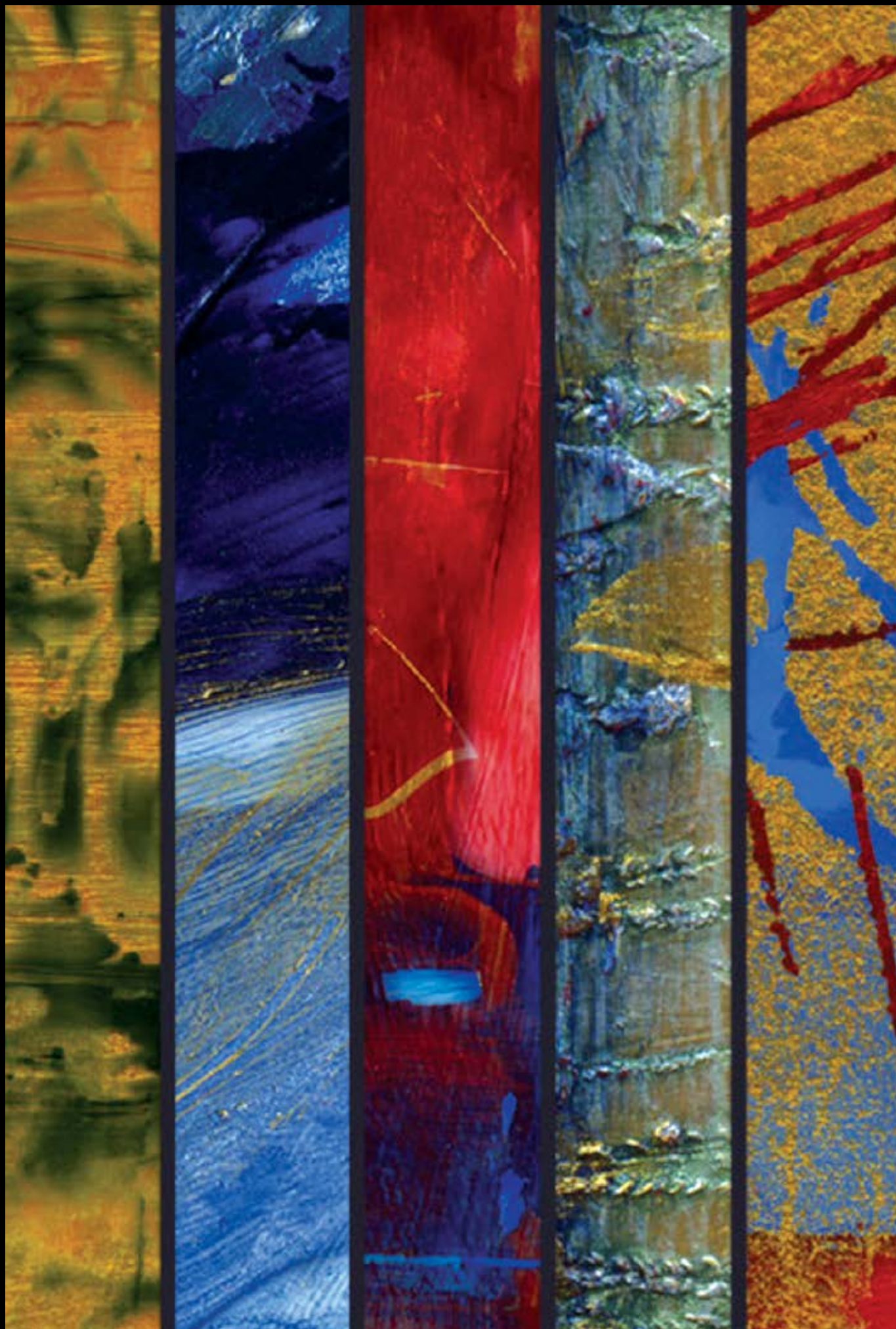
Your earthly form
Upon this holy cross
The least measure of your love
For me

Here am I in my fallen world
It's the only world I know
And knowing who I am
You bring heaven's mercy
To me

This crown of thorns
That I have placed upon your
head
All the power that creates the
universe
Gentle beneath my hand

Your broken form
That I have placed upon this
cross
Submitting to this earthly pain
Out of love for me

Here am I in my fallen world
The only world I know
And knowing who I am
Even knowing who I am
Especially knowing who I am
You bring heaven's mercy
To me.



Beloved Gallery from Week 6: Approach

Week 7: Beloved

Day 6 of 7

(Holy Saturday)

So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

Matthew 27:59-61

All his life he had been making his way toward us, living into the mystery of approach, as John O'Donohue puts it. Christ had crossed an unimaginable distance to be with us in the first place, entering into our world in the flesh and undertaking a pilgrimage through this human life. With such intention he had reached out to us: bridging every chasm, meeting us with reverence, welcoming each of us as if we were the only one who had crossed his path.

Christ had been in nearly perpetual motion, always moving ever closer to us. So how has it come to this, that we stand, with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, in stunned stillness outside a tomb where Joseph has laid him? How is it that the earth, which quaked yesterday in rock-splitting outrage and rended itself in grief, can now so readily hold his body enclosed within it? After his astounding approach, how will we abide his utter absence?

In the years to come, some will tell us that even in the grave, Jesus could not remain still; that he descended to the dead to bear the good news and

release the captives there. Yet to our eyes, as we stand with the Marys outside the tomb this day, there seems only an unnatural silence, an appalling stillness in which we can find no place to settle. Soon we will leave, retreating from the one who had approached us with unimagined love and grace. As we walk away from his body that has seemingly spent itself of chronos and kairos alike, we will work simply to keep breathing, bewildered that we can still draw breath; we will marvel that our heart can still keep beating when it is so broken.

On this Holy Saturday, we spiral back around our Week 6 theme of Approach. In the stillness, in the silence, we remember:

- That by going into the wilderness, Christ gave exquisite care to preparing himself for those whom he would encounter in his ministry, and he invites us to consider how we meet others with reverence and care.

- That when we reach the end of our known road or the edge of our map, there is an invitation: to use our map differently or throw it away; to look for a road that might not appear to be a road; or simply to spin and follow the direction in which we fall.

- That although we might encounter dragons - friendly or fearsome - when we enter unknown realms, there is always help at hand, and unseen forces who love to ally themselves with those who wander.

- That when we find ourselves, like Jacob, in an unexpected threshold place, God can turn it into a thin place where we

receive sustenance, presence, and vision for the path ahead.

- That sometimes, in those threshold places, what we most need is not to rest but to wrestle with the divine, and not let go until we receive a blessing and a new name.

This day, as we wait in the silence and stillness of Jesus' absence, I ask you:

- How is it for you to wait in the place where you are today?
- In this time between, what are you noticing?
- How might it be for you to let your prayer this day consist of paying attention to your breathing and the beating of your heart?

A Blessing for Holy Saturday

Let it be that on this day we will expect no more of ourselves than to keep breathing with the bewildered cadence of lungs that will not give up the ghost.

Let it be we will expect little but the beating of our heart, stubborn in its repeating rhythm that will not cease to sound.

Let it be that we will still ourselves enough to hear what may yet come to echo: as if in the breath, another breathing; as if in the heartbeat, another heart.

Let it be we will not try to fathom what comes to meet us in the stillness, but simply open to the approach of a mystery we hardly dared to dream.



Risen

Week 7: Beloved

Day 7 of 7

(Easter Sunday)

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it...

The angel said to the women ...“He is not here; for he has been raised.”

Matthew 28:1-2, 5-6

Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

John 20:16

The temple veil, the rocks, the earth, the tombs of the saints, Jesus’ own body: in the terrible rending of Good Friday, we saw how this world could not forever bear the intersection of *chronos* and *kairos* that came in the person of Christ.

Now, on this strange and wondrous Sunday, we witness a different kind of rending, one that brings not death but life. The *kairos* that propelled Jesus into this world, the *kairos* that came into this world with him, cannot be contained in the tomb. Jesus’ tomb can stand to hold him for only so long before it, too, gives way and breaks open. Once again the earth quakes, this time not in rupture but in release as the angel rolls away the stone: the stone that had been laid across the place of death, the stone

that had been laid across the hearts of his friends.

It is hardly to be believed, that the rending that happened just two days ago could be - not reversed, for there is no going back, no forgetting that horror - but overcome. Invalidated. And indeed, when Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene in John’s version of the Easter story, she cannot recognize him at first. Perhaps it is because of her tears or the early morning hour, but the truth is that for all the promises Jesus made in his lifetime, nothing really could have prepared Mary Magdalene to see him standing before her, calling her name.

Jesus bears the wounds of his rending even in his resurrection. When she leaves the garden, Mary Magdalene will bear a rending, too, born of having to choose between trying to cling to Jesus and the life she has known as his follower and friend, or living into his call to go and tell what she has seen. We are here this day because she chooses to go. But crossing the threshold out of the garden comes with a cost, and a wound that she will carry in her heart.

For Mary, the wound becomes a threshold, a door, an entry into her new life. This day, we stand at the same door. Will we attempt to hold onto the Jesus we have known and to linger where it seems safe, or will we go in the direction he sends us,

entering into a new knowing of him even when it seems we are leaving him?

There is a word that Christ gives us as a key for the door we stand before on this Easter day, a word that frees us to cross this threshold. As it was for the Magdalene, that word is our own name. As he did with Mary, Jesus speaks our name this day. As he calls our name, it echoes with the other name, the deeper name, that Christ gives as if to us alone:

Beloved.

Receiving and living into being named Beloved may require a kind of resurrection for us, too. This resurrection calls us to leave our graveclothes behind and to emerge from whatever has kept us entombed and inhabiting less than the life Christ desires for us.

What would it mean for you to hear Christ call your name this day, and to hear Beloved ringing in his voice? What would this ask you to let go? What life would this invite you to welcome with your arms and heart open wide?

O my beloved friends, it is Easter Day! Christ is risen, and we stand with him at the threshold.

May we go forward to begin anew.

May we go forward with memory.

May we go forward as his body.

May we go forward in grace.
May we go forward in the
fullness of time.
May we go forward to
approach this world with
reverence.
May we go forward knowing
ourselves Beloved.

May we bear this love.
May we proclaim this love.
May we live this love
now and always.

Christ is risen.
Christ is risen indeed!

Easter Sunday Feature SONGMAKER'S NOTEBOOK #13

In this final Songmaker's
Notebook for our retreat, Gary
offers his beautifully haunting
song "Mary Magdalena."

Here we are, at the end of
the story where we find Jesus'
followers stumbling around
dazed and numb and unable
to understand. How could this
be? How could the story end
this way? It just didn't make
any sense at all. It didn't add
up. How could all of the hope
go out of the world? This isn't
the way it was supposed to
happen. This isn't the way it
was supposed to end.

And she stood outside of
the tomb, peering into the
shadows, desolate and only just
holding back her sobs. Is there
someone in there? Who are
they and what are they doing
in his tomb? And where in this
world is his body? Why can't
anyone tell her where his body

is? All she wanted to do was to
find his broken and damaged
body so she could tend to it, so
that she could see that it was
properly cared for. If she could
please only just do that one
thing. But no one seemed to
know where it was.

Shaking her head, she turned
to wander off into the lonely,
uncaring world. But there was
this fellow, she didn't seem to
know who he was, he must be
a gardener or something, and
he called to her. She turned
back to him, wondering what
he might want, wondering
what she could do for him, not
wanting to talk to anybody,
so sad and bereaved and
hopeless.

And he said her name. And in
that moment when he said her
name, she recognized him. And
in that moment she understood
that this was not the end, this
was the beginning.

Mary Magdalena

© Garrison Doles

Mary Magdalena weeping and
forlorn
They took my Lord away
I don't know where they've laid
him
Mary Magdalena stand outside
the tomb
Peer into the lonely shadows
Are there angels
Angels
Waiting where his body had
lain
And is no more

Mary Magdalena tears upon

the sand
Who are you looking for
Mary Magdalena turning to
reply
Tell me where he is I will attend
him
Only a gardener
A gardener
Waiting where his body had
lain
And is no more

She cried where is my Lord
And he said Mary
O where is my Lord
And he just said Mary
O where, where is my Lord
And Jesus said Mary and
suddenly
O Rabbi now I can see that you
are always here
With me

Mary Magdalena precious are
your tears
Precious is the longing of your
heart
Mary Magdalena first upon this
morn
Go and tell my brothers you
have found me
There was Jesus
Jesus
Waiting where his body had
lain
And is no more
And is no more



Easter Monday Closing Reflection

O my beloved friends! It tugs at my heart to arrive at this point in our path together. Please know that it has been such a gift to journey through this season with you.

Before our retreat began, I prayed for you. Throughout our pilgrimage together, I have prayed for you. As we go from this place, I will continue to pray for you. Part of my prayer has been that God would bless and be at work in the space between us, creating thin places in our midst. Thank you for the ways you helped to open up some thin places for one another and for me these past seven weeks.

As we go, I have a gift for you. I have designed a video that intertwines the artwork I created for this year's Beloved retreat with Gary's gorgeous Easter song "I Am With You Always." The song is a thin place in itself; please don't miss listening and receiving this gift. To play the video, click the "play" button on the video frame above. This will take you to the video's page on the Vimeo website.

I invite you to linger at the online forum. It will remain open for two more weeks, and,

as always, you are welcome to stop by anytime. (More on this below, along with several other things I want you to know).

I thank you. I bless you. And I pray that as we enter this season of resurrection, the risen Christ will go with you and grace your path. May you know yourself beloved.

This is not the end
The end is not in sight
I will arise
By the morning light
I am with you always
I am with you always
Always
Garrison Doles

From "I Am With You Always"
This is not the end
The end is not in sight
I will arise
By the morning light
I am with you always
I am with you always
Always
Garrison Doles
From "I Am With You Always"

My beloved friends, you have continued to be so much on my heart and in my prayers in these Easter days. Thank you again for joining in the Lenten retreat and for the gift of your companionship through the season. I am grateful.

I wanted to remind you that our online forum is scheduled

to close tonight. I'll leave it up for one more bonus day, so that it will be open through midnight tomorrow (Tuesday), Eastern U.S. Time. Please feel free to stop by and soak up the beautiful space that's been created through the words and images shared by many in our community. Clicking this link will take you to the home page for the forum, where you'll find a list of all the weekly discussions: Beloved Forum. (If you haven't previously joined the forum, please don't click that link but instead scroll down to the next section of this email, where you'll find a link that says "Join the Beloved Lenten Retreat Forum.") To see the beautiful images that forum participants offered in the photos gallery, click "Photos" in the site menu.

If you haven't seen the video that I created as a gift for you at the end of the retreat, I hope you'll take a look as a way of revisiting and remembering the path we shared. The video intertwines all of the retreat artwork with Gary's gorgeous song for Easter Sunday, "I Am With You Always."

I am sending so many blessings to you in this season of resurrection. May Christ encompass, guide, and grace you on the path ahead.

