

Refresh

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A person is walking away from the viewer on a wide, sandy beach. The person is silhouetted against the bright, golden light of a sunset or sunrise. They are carrying a bag or a hat in their right hand. The beach is wet, and the person's reflection is clearly visible in the shallow water. In the background, there is a dense line of evergreen trees, and beyond that, a range of mountains under a hazy, golden sky.

Silence



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SGM Contacts www.sgm.org.nz

Admin:

Joanne Garton, 36 Buller Crescent, Manurewa, Auckland 2102; 09 2675957 sgm@clear.net.nz

Workgroup Convenor:

Mike Wright, Chaplain@op.ac.nz

Spiritual Directors' Formation Programme Acting Coordinator:

Andrew Pritchard, 25 Rongomau Lane, Raumati South 5032,(04) 9046764;
sgmtp@xtra.co.nz

Desktop Publishing and Printing:

Advocate Print, Rotorua

Refresh Editor:

Diane Gilliam-Weeks, 32 Kauri Street, Eastbourne, Hutt City; 0274978374; dianegw@actrix.co.nz

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The silence of prayer

adapted from John Mainⁱ

Language is so weak in explaining the fullness of the mystery. That's why the absolute silence of contemplation is so supremely important...

We stay in that awesome silence open to the eternal silence of God.

In contemplation, through practice and daily experience, we discover that silence is the natural ambience for all of us. We're created for this and our being flourishes and expands in that eternal silence.

'Silence' as a word, however, already falsifies the experience and perhaps deters many people. Why? Because it suggests some negative experience, the deprivation of sound or language. People fear the silence of contemplation and meditation is regressive. But experience and tradition teach us that the silence of prayer isn't a pre-linguistic condition, but a post-linguistic state in which language has completed its task of pointing us through and beyond itself and the whole realm of consciousness.

The eternal silence isn't deprived of anything. Nor does it deprive us of anything. It is the silence of love, of unqualified and unconditional acceptance. We rest there with God who invites us to be there, who loves us to be there and who has created us to be there.

Now there was a great wind,
so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces
before the Lord,
but the Lord was not in the wind;
and after the wind an earthquake,
but the Lord was not in the earthquake;
and after the earthquake a fire,
but the Lord was not in the fire;
and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said,

'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

1 Kings 19:11-13

ⁱ Paraphrased by the editor from John Main's *Silence and stillness in every season*. P 126.
See book review on page 43. 1 Kings added [Ed.]



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Thirsting for Silence

by Andrew Dunn

We live in an age of acute loneliness for many individuals. Apart from the penetrating grace and love of God, there's very little else that reaches deeply into the core of that loneliness with lasting effect. The contemplative knows that aloneness in God is deep and satisfying and builds upon the richness of prayer and revelling in intimacy with Grace. The loneliness of the human heart simply can't be satisfied with human relationships, love and the securities we seek on a human level. Nor with electronic devices and media connection. It takes much more than that to satisfy the soul, and that is what silence and solitude foster and nourish.

'Silence is the sacrament of the age to come,' wrote Isaac, Bishop of Nineveh, in the 8th century. So, what if silence is the richest language of eternity? My heart sings in affirmation of the notion that before the presence of the Lord upon the throne, the deepest worship will not be the cacophony of sound, but the richness of silent adoration and presence! 'Be still and know that I am God' takes on deepest reality then.

Margaret, my long-time companion in exploring these things, has been reviewing her journals from a decade and more ago and has unearthed some lovely snippets. 'Silence reminds me to take my soul with me where ever I go'. 'Don't talk unless you can improve on the silence!' 'Solitude is the seed bed of the soul.' My deepest self, my whole being needs silence to flourish and grow and that's a daily task as life goes on.

Now there's some food for thought and enjoyment in an indulgent way! And remember,

*When the world tells us
we are what we do with our
activity, acumen or achievement
let us learn*

WE ARE WHAT WE DO WITH OUR SILENCE.ⁱ

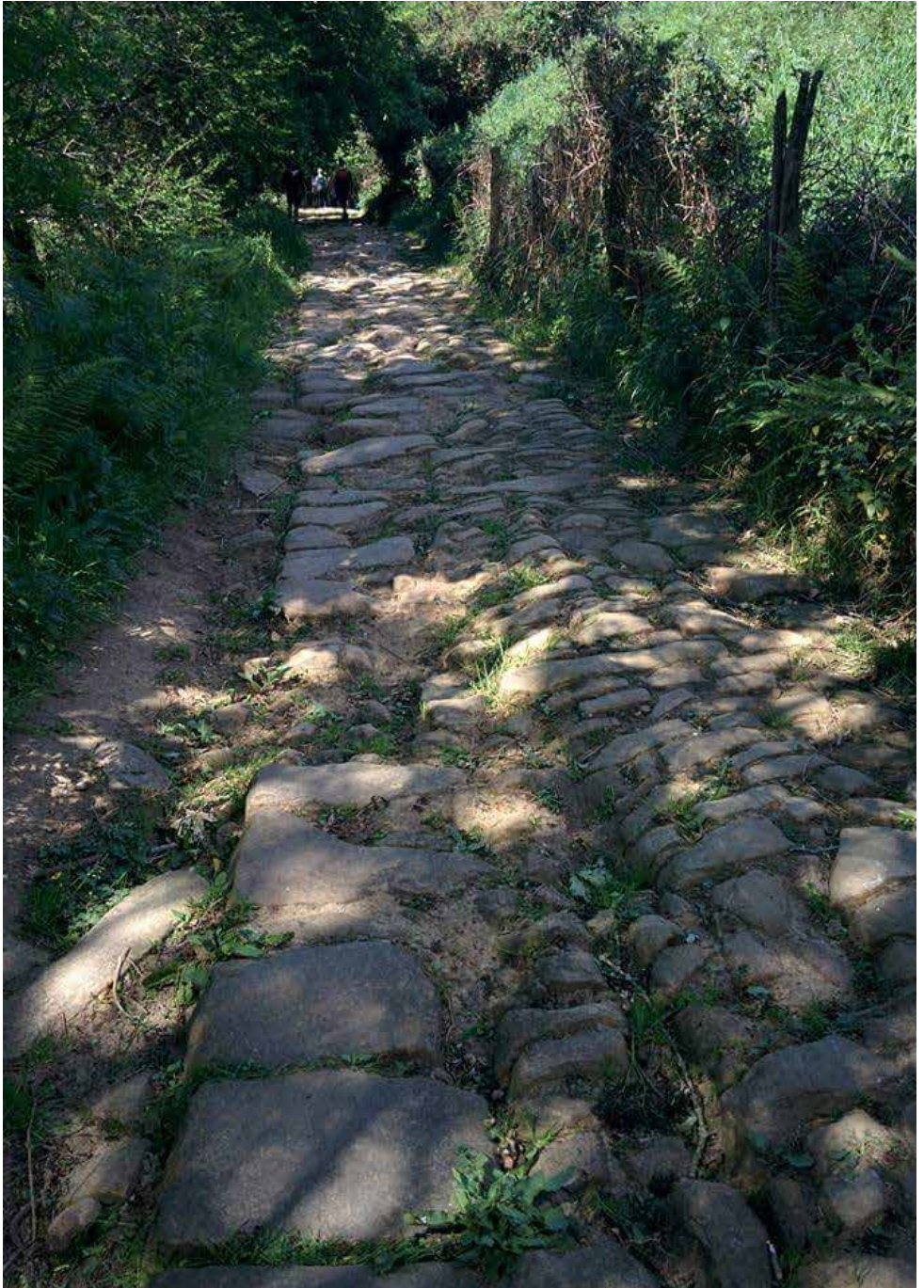
**Silence is in the fundamental
fabric of the universe in all its
grandeur and limitlessness.**

We are no longer surprised when people arriving here at Oasis for the first time express delight at how marked the silence is. It's certainly one of the features Margaret and I enjoy – and we do what we can to develop and conserve it.

Oasis' tracks lead down deeper into bush-clad gullies where no traffic noise can penetrate. The birds and the sighing of the wind in the trees are the main voices. People come thirsting for silence and the friendly spaciousness it creates.

While many find silence welcoming and comfortable, it's no surprise that others find it threatening. Of the crackling silence of Antarctica, Scott's ship's captain, Edward Evans, wrote, 'A man could go mad down here' – and he nearly did. Others like Scott's friend and expedition scientist, Edward Wilson, wrote beautifully and lyrically about the silence.

ⁱ *Pattern of our Days* - Ed. Kathy Galloway. Wild Goose Pub. 1997. 110



© Digby Wilkinson

A TV film maker recently told me his encounters with the silence around McMurdo Sound were 'religious experiences'. He was surprised silence could do something noticeable and profound in his life – something spiritual. It was like entering new territory never before explored. He enjoyed it and speaks wistfully of it. With Robert Sardello, the film-maker discovered, 'If we drop into quietness for just a moment, we feel the presence of Silence as an invitation'.ⁱⁱ

Indeed, silence is much more than the absence of sound. Silence was here before sound. Silence is in the fundamental fabric of the universe in all its grandeur and limitlessness. It is foundational to God's good creation and is everywhere present. As such, it's woven into creation's DNA and our own. To step into silence is to feel the presence and invitation of something primordial and enriching. 'Silence works to create a sense of unity with and embrace of the richness of life here and the vastness of the universe...'ⁱⁱⁱ

Yet with the thirst for profound silence and its growthful solitude comes a sense of caution. Why? There can be a *yes* and *no* in our embrace of silence. For all sorts of reasons, we want it and yet we don't.

Why? Because for most of us, along with the amazing sense of the presence of the holy, of pure agape love, the searching and penetrating eye of Grace, also come encounters with self and with painful memories. Not least the voices from our busy lives: 'don't waste time', 'be productive', 'don't just sit there, do something'!

...the true self as a shy deer
that does not like to come
out of the woods to be
looked at...

Yet, Merton reminds us that, 'Hurry ruins saints as well as artists...and when the madness is upon them, they argue their very haste is a species of integrity.' The contemplative knows that time in building solitude is vital.

And then there's our shyness before God. In a recent Easter meditation, Laurence Freeman recalls, 'Merton talked about the true self as a shy deer that doesn't like to come out of the woods to be looked at.' It usually takes time and practice to become comfortable with the exposures of silence and the intimacy that develops. Indeed, it's like learning a new language – it takes time to build confidence and fluency.

There can be tinges of fear sparked by the loss of comfortable noise. Fear of what might arise from the depths of our beings without the din we're used to – sounds we rely on to support or protect us in the deeper moments.

There might be fear of emptiness or the loss of structure; or anxiety we might be getting into something we won't be able to control. For those who've made control paramount in every situation and engagement, relationship and discovery, loss of it is a frightening possibility. Some personalities need that sense of control more than others and fear its loss more acutely.

ⁱⁱ Robert Sardello, *Silence - The Mystery of Wholeness*. 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

Silence challenges the ego, that deep power-centre which so often drives us unwittingly, unrecognised, unnamed. The ego may fight back when sensing its power being replaced by the freedom of a more active relationship with God's creative and redeeming presence and love.

While for the novice, deepening silence and expanding solitude can be accompanied by fear of where it may lead, I find this fear can return in later years as well. Yet with practice, silence and the growing spaciousness of inner solitude become enticing, even addictive – and very fruitful for our praying and our being in God, in Christ, in the Spirit, in the expansive love of the Trinity.

Embracing silence bends us to humbly accept a listening pose, a receptive heart, a stilled-from-racing-planning-scheming-doing-weighing-controlling stance.

I'm reminded of Barry and Connolly's chapter on resistance to the movements of God.^{iv} Their 'movement and counter-movement' explanation of resistance and reluctance in the spiritual life is simple and clear. The constant invitation of God to draw nearer (the movement) is met by the heart's reaction (the counter movement) to move sideways to safer ground – to activities which may normally be good and necessary – but not at this time.

Still, I find the temptation to move to safe ground is a positive sign of the depth we're being invited into – so let us stand our ground.

Finally, a footnote from Andrew Dunn for wordsmiths of the faith.

In a recent lecture on *Theology and Meditation: 7th century Greek writers on prayer*, Rowan Williams proposes, 'silence isn't a denial of words and speech, but rather the recognition that whereas some kinds of silence come from not having enough to say, there are other kinds of silence which come from having too much to say. (14.3.16. on Soundcloud).

So at times like that it's better to say nothing! To be at a loss for words is not weakness or failure, but strength and insight, a wise corrective indeed. It reminds me of the story of Thomas Aquinas who wrote millions of words in his *Summa Theologica*, but after a profound mystical experience of God later in life, could write no more!

Depth in God does that!

^{iv} *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*. 1982. 8ff

Naked Spirituality

by Andrew Pritchard

Yes, I know Brian McLaren has written a book with this title. No, I haven't read it yet.

Some three years ago, unbidden but clear and insistent, the thought became conscious 'go and talk with the hermit'. Now and again I listened to the thought.

After some months I related the thought to a small group of men – spiritual friends – who share life stories together at a deep level. As we talked some questions emerged like: Why? What do you want to ask?

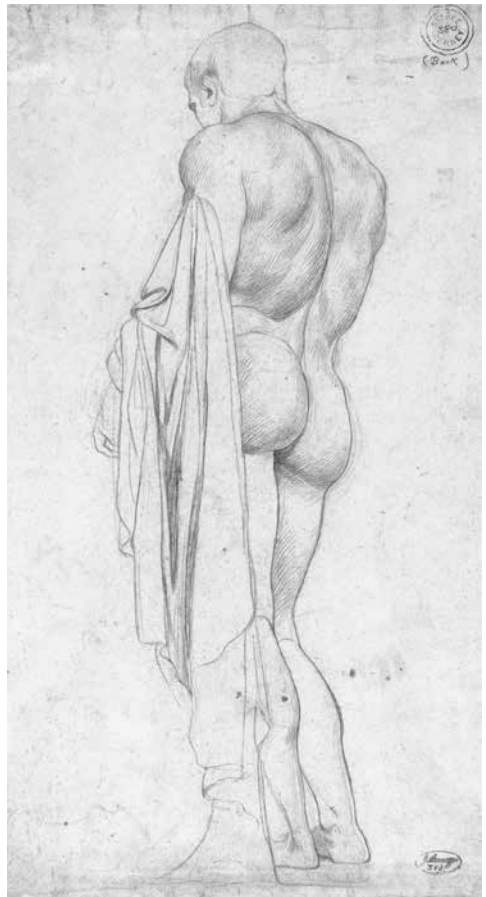
These questions were inconvenient because I didn't know the answers – but also helpful. They prompted me to reflect more deeply on what I was searching for – the thing that 'go and talk with the hermit' might help me find.

The next time we four men met I was able to say, 'It seems to me hermits and solitaries are deeply, deeply spiritual people. People who for years have grown and been nurtured in Christian community, usually monastic community. People who are then impelled to deeper silence and greater solitude without the structure of communal prayer and work. I want to know what nurtures a deep, intimate, spiritual life when all the exterior supports are stripped away. I want to know what the naked core of Christian spirituality is and well – it seems to me that hermits and solitaries might know about that more than most.' And so began my journey

Insights gleaned

I made my first attempt to speak with a hermit during my annual retreat. I was surprised to learn the hermit had visitors coming during that week and wouldn't be available. So, ten months later I sent a letter to the hermit saying I'd be coming on retreat a particular week, would like to talk with him and would that be ok?

Good move! I got a prompt and lovely letter back saying that I was welcome to



call in for a chat. Insight number one. Hermits don't lead empty lives without clocks, calendars and appointments!

Toward the end of a very open and helpful chat, hermit number one told me that actually there was someone he thought would be better able to answer my questions: hermit number two! Hermit number two lives in North Wales, but was born in New Zealand and as 'chance' would have it in a month's time he'd be holidaying half an hour from where I live.

More than 'chance' was at work!

So, I emailed hermit number two, who also agreed to meet with me – and he sent me a link to a radio interview he'd done with BBC3 in Wales! Insight number two. Hermits – though living in solitude often in physically remote places – sometimes travel, sometimes connect with others using computer and internet and sometimes even speak publically through the media!

Enough of my quest to 'go and talk to the hermit'. I went to speak with two.

So what did I learn about naked spirituality, core spiritual practices and disciplines that nurture a Christian life when external supports are stripped away?

Here's what I discovered their practices to be:

- a regular rhythm of prayer in words and silent meditation, several times through the day.
- daily reflection on Scripture (*Lectio Divina*).
- Eucharist.
- physical work that sustains the life of the hermit and maintains and beautifies the environment in which the hermit lives.

But, wait a minute! Aren't these disciplines anyone can practise, that many people are, in fact, already practising?

Yes!

And herein, I think, is the challenging treasure I was sent to find in the hermits' fields – a treasure of questions!

- How faithfully am I committed to my spiritual practices?
- How deeply am I listening?
- How openly am I giving myself to God who meets me there?
- How responsive am I to what God asks me to be and to do?

Hermits and solitaries are doing this at a deep and intimate level. Thank you hermits one and two – you inspire me to come deeper too.

The Work of Silence

by Sheila Pritchard

Since I was very young, I sought out places to enjoy silence and solitude. Early memories are of childhood summers roaming alone in the beauty of Ponui Island and sitting in 'the glade' with sunlight filtering through the trees. Back at home, I could often be found perched up a tree or curled up with a book in an alcove in my bedroom!

These memories remind me of something I heard Richard Rohr relate. Speaking to a group of monks he challenged them, 'Most of you aren't really contemplatives, you're just introverts!'

Well I confess! I am an introvert. There's no doubt about that. But that doesn't stop me seeking silence for deeper reasons than mere personality preference. I'm sure it's possible to be an introvert *and* a contemplative!

Silence and solitude have been like a steadying thread guiding my way through all the decades and challenges of life. My first two days of complete silence (in an early SGM retreat) opened a tantalizing new door. A few years later, I had the opportunity to make a 30 day Ignatian retreat at St Beuno's in North Wales. The experience remains a highlight of my life.

Now, several decades on, silence is a regular part of my everyday life – both in a deliberately prayerful way and in a general preference for how I spend my time.

But in case you get the wrong idea, I'm not a monk or a hermit! I enjoy people, interaction, my privileged ministry as spiritual director, being part of a community choir, reading novels, going on holiday, going to movies, watching Downton Abbey...etc!

Silence is the portal, the access point to the 'deep mind' kind of knowing that seems mostly like unknowing.

So why have I titled this article 'the work of silence' – when clearly for me, silence is a gift, a pleasure and a preference? Well, it's about a book.

These days I try hard not to buy more books! But when I saw *Silence: A User's Guide*, there was no internal argument – especially when the author was Maggie Ross. She'd spoken deeply into my life in an earlier book on solitude. Ross is an Anglican solitary living in Oxford, England. Her mentor for 'nearly four decades' is Rowan Williams, well known as the previous Archbishop of Canterbury.

'The work of silence', Ross writes, is the discipline of 'shifting the centre from which we draw our energy – away from the bombardment of the self-conscious mind – to the wellspring that arises in the deep mind.'ⁱ

These few words deserve careful unpacking!

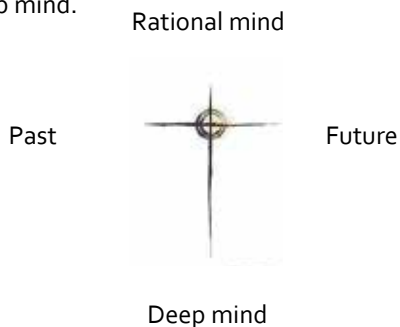
ⁱ Maggie Ross, *Silence: A User's Guide* (Cascade Books, 2014) 2.

Most of us are familiar with conversations about false-self/true-self. Maybe we've heard comparisons between egoic consciousness and Christ consciousness. We may also have some general knowledge about the functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain. All these touch on the same territory Maggie Ross expounds. But for me, *Silence: A User's Guide* offers the deepest, most integrated discussion I've discovered so far.

Ross lays out the value (and the limits) of the self-conscious (rational) mind. And it's not about denigrating our ability to be self-conscious or shutting down the essential human function of the ego. The rational mind is, after all, essential for logical thinking, linear planning and objectivity. But, if this is *all* we know – and the *only* resource we access – Ross suggests 'this leaves us half witted'!

The 'deep mind' is harder to describe because it lies *beyond* rational explanation. I hesitate to summarise Ross in my own words! (She's a precise and incisive writer who doesn't suffer fools gladly. I could easily qualify as a fool!) So a quote may help: 'Life really does hang in the balance in every moment. It hovers horizontally between the past, which can't be changed, and the future, refulgent with potential but fraught with our projections. It's poised vertically between self-conscious rationality which is the source of those projections, and **deep silence where we touch reality directly**. We need to recover the ability to live at the intersection: in the present moment, **energized by the upwelling from deep silence, where, in Christian terms, our shared nature with God becomes manifest.**'ⁱⁱ (Bold mine!)

I don't very often make the sign of the Cross. But this quote has me making it with new meaning. It's a breath-taking possibility to contemplate living in the present moment – that knife-edge between past and future – while simultaneously living at the merging of the rational mind and the deep mind.



So, back to the *work* of silence and what it means for those of us who seek to live at the heart of that 'sign of the cross'. Silence is the portal, the access point to the 'deep mind' kind of knowing that seems mostly like unknowing. It's not about dramatic experiences or gaining profound ideas or even about 'hearing God'. All these are the desires of the self-conscious mind – and very often the ego! On the other hand, deep silence is

ⁱⁱ Ibid, 14 ff.

a practice and commitment to surrender all our 'knowing', all our clinging and all our attachment to outcomes. 'The paradox of intention is at work. The person does the praxis of attentive receptivity to nothing in particular.'ⁱⁱⁱ

What I found particularly helpful in Ross's book, is her insight into how the self-conscious mind and the deep mind are *designed* to flow into each other. The liminal space of that intersection facilitates the 'fullness of life' for which human incarnation is intended. Most of the time we're very lop-sided! We're much more attached to our self-conscious mind than our deep mind. That's why we need so desperately to 'shift the centre from which we draw our energy' in order to balance the flow.

How we do this is indeed the work of silence.

In spite of the title, *Silence: A User's Guide* isn't really a 'how-to' manual. For helpful guidance in the prayerful practice of deep silence, I'd recommend Cynthia Bourgeault's *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*^{iv} and David Frenette's, *The Path of Centering Prayer*^v. Both suggest a commitment to the daily practice of intentional silence is essential. For many of us this discipline is not only the starting point, but the mainstay – for life.

Why? Because – progressively, almost imperceptibly – we develop the capacity to let deep silence infiltrate the very 'marrow of our bones'. It becomes more and more natural to *live* from that integration at the heart of the 'cross'.

I don't claim to have proved this from experience – but then words like 'experience' and 'proved' aren't the right language anyway! That's all part of the invitation and challenge of this 'work'. Paradox abounds: I'm drawn to the work of silence with a 'knowing' that's intangible. I come with a *desire* that is also a *discipline*. I attempt to write about something that can't adequately be expressed in words.

That's just how it is.

Do I recommend Ross's book?

Yes, if you simply can't wait to get your hands on it.

No, if what I've said here doesn't connect for you. There's a right time for a book like hers. To read it any other time will be hard work.

In his forward to the book, Rowan Williams writes *Silence: A User's Guide*, 'is the work of one of the most independent and ruthlessly realistic religious writers of our time...a distillation of many years of labour and reflection, drawing on enormous resources of close scholarly reading, consistently penetrating and demanding, yet opening a door of vital understanding. At a time when easy and rather cosy 'spiritualities' abound, this is a quiet, firm recall – quite simply – to truth and life: the truth and life that is "Christ in you, the hope of glory".'

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, 69.

^{iv} Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* (Cowley Publications, 2004)

^v David Frenette, *The Path of Centering Prayer: Deepening your experience of God* (Sounds True, 2012)

Silence rewards extroverts too

by Susan Gill

Silence is very challenging for extroverts. Perhaps it is for everyone. But for those like me who talk a lot, those who like companions on the road, the discipline of silence can seem even more daunting.

For me silence has always been particularly challenging. And yet I felt drawn to this spiritual discipline. I'd read and heard about it and even experienced short periods of contemplative silence. Perhaps a retreat would be helpful?

Though I'd occasionally participated in the monthly 'Days Aside' run by local Spiritual Directors, and our Nelson Diocesan retreats (which include a lot of talking!), until August 2015, my longest retreat had been two days and just one night.

Now I sensed the call for something longer – our Vestry generously granted me paid time away. I thought I could just about manage five days. Okay – agreed!

Then came the doubts and challenges. Nothing this long was organised locally and I didn't want to travel far. So where would I stay? What would I actually do? Should I study something in particular? What resources would I take with me? My feelings about the whole deal became even more confused.

Of course, the One who'd been drawing me had these things all sorted. A local couple had invited me to stay some time back. They had a room and they would feed me and care for me. My own Spiritual Director would help with content and resources. I could meet with her as little or often as I wanted. It all fell into place. We settled on a week that would suit us all.

Day one, on my way I paused in a secluded spot for lunch. I took out *A Retreat with Thomas Merton* by Esther Waal – a book my Spiritual Director recommended. I asked myself the suggested questions: Why have I come? What do I hope to do? With what mission will I be sent out again?

The pause was very helpful – reminding me again that the One who loves is always speaking, leading, guiding, clarifying.

I knew I needed to spend quite a bit of time journaling. Especially for extroverts, journals are almost like having another person present in the silence. So I began my experience with my journal and with God that day – quite unsure about what would happen, if anything. Certainly not wanting to presume any super-spiritual experiences.

I simply needed refreshment.

In the silence and solitude, I was never alone. Actually I cheated a bit. In fact, I ate my evening meal with my hosts and we had very meaningful conversations during these times.

(Come on, a five-day retreat with no words at all for this extrovert! That was beyond imagination.)

During the week, all three of us were very conscious of the presence of the Holy Spirit with us in an unusually intense way. We all felt God was very pleased time had been set aside simply to be in the presence of the One who is perfect love.

During the silence I walked, and sat, and listened and read. What I didn't do was pray – at least not in my normal way. Yet I heard many voices in the silence – the voice of God and of God's creation certainly. But I also heard the voices of others; others who love me and others for whom I am concerned. I was conscious of the prayers of others for me too. In the silence was a rich depth of companionship I hadn't anticipated.

All of this somehow without words.

As I came to the last day and began to pack up my stuff, I felt quite sad our time was drawing to an end.

Of course it was just the beginning. I said to the Lord, 'My soul can't contain all the riches you've given me.' And my Lover replied, 'Then allow me to expand your soul.'

In the silence was a rich depth of companionship I hadn't anticipated.

This taste of silence, and the riches discovered there, has left this extrovert longing for more. I figure the ideal is a week a month. Sigh! That's not possible for anyone in full time work or ministry.

I'll have to settle for mini-doses until I plan this year's week of silence – perhaps I'll even stay somewhere different this time – somewhere by myself. A prospect that's not beyond my imagination anymore!



Communal silence

by Jill McLeod

Extracts from my Journal: Retreat at St. Francis Friary, Hillsborough, Auckland. 21 - 28 January, 1991.

That was the time I discovered the power and delight of communal silence.

Wednesday 23rd: We were silent for supper tonight, and tomorrow will all go into silence for three days. I'm not talking much anyhow, but with no-one else speaking, supper was incredibly quiet. It's amazing how 30 people can arrive in a room and move around a building with so little sound. I love it; it encourages all my naturally 'anchoress' tendencies!

Thursday 24th: 'Silence is a discipline of the ears, not the tongue!' we are told. I'm sure the four who've already been silent the whole time will be delighted we've all joined them. The only words we speak are responses at Communion, and daily to our Director. We all meet at morning and night prayer, Communion, and meals.

After lunch, I went outside, and found a pohutukawa growing at an angle out from the slope. I climbed out along it, settled in the fork. I thought about healing, and bandages, and oil, and remembered the good Samaritan. (*Written in the present: Suddenly I was the one by the wayside, wounded, battered and bleeding. The following moments were so powerful I won't make them public; I guess it was an Ignatian time of prayer with the scripture.*)

Later, after tea, I ask Him, 'what must I do?' 'Wait, be still.'

Friday 25th: I really love the silence. So good to be free from the social conventions of please, and thank you, and pass the butter! I'm so glad I discovered this way of spiritual growth! Better late than never and maybe I wouldn't have been able to handle it before. So much is happening inside me!

Saturday 26th: Sr Margaret says, 'Your life and His become one'. I walked out on the lawn, in bare feet, and crushed the pennyroyal. Over this time – taste, texture, colour have become so important. I gazed into the Chapel through the red cross on one window; how different it looked!

Christ is so close to me, in ways that never happened before. This afternoon, I simply asked if all that was happening was wishful thinking, so overwhelming was His love, meeting mine.

After dinner, I went to my tree, and asked Him to talk to me about it all. It **is real**, not my unbridled imagination!! He **is** the lover of my soul, and that was the hymn He reminded me of.

Sunday 27th: Song of Songs is a very sensual piece of writing, I realised, as I crushed pennyroyal and lavender in my hands. Over this time, Christ is loving me through my senses.

The Friary cat, Murgatroyd, comes on soft feet, rubs around my legs, escorts me. This morning at breakfast he came to me again, mewing faintly.

I fed him fingertips of milk, then filled a saucer for him when I went to get my tea. He lapped it eagerly, blissfully, and drops of milk flew on to the carpet. Naomi tucked two serviettes round the saucer, and there was a ripple of laughter around the room...I hadn't remembered anyone else was really there.

Sunday 27th: We're to bring to Monday's Eucharist something that symbolises what the Retreat has meant for us. As I strolled round the block, cogitating, I picked rosemary, pepper tree, and breath-of-heaven. I've collected a nosegay of scented leaves and flowers, symbolising my newly-awakened senses of perfume and texture. This is myrrh, this is my funeral spray. 'I have died, and my life is hidden with Christ in God.' It is also frankincense, prayer, the symbol of the divine.

Monday 28th: A very moving moment, when I placed my spray at the altar, **and could not speak a word !**

And so the journey, wrapped around the call to silence, continues.

Christ is so close to me,
in ways that never
happened before.

Silence

by Frances O'Leary

Silence of heart
endlessly
day after day.

Realising
agonising,
nowhere to hide.

Surrender,
confess to God
sins, failures,

myself.
The lessons have
been learned.

I wait on God.
Silence.

Silence that is not silent

by Veronica Parton

Just over a year ago when the cicadas stopped 'singing' I was unaware. It was a month or more later that I realised it was too cold for them, too late in the year, too dark. How was it that I could still hear them?

Must have blocked ears; too much swimming? Or perhaps that overseas flight last month? Very annoying, it will pass, but it didn't.

Eventually on a visit to the doctor I mentioned 'my cicadas'. 'Um', she said as she checked my ears (among other things) asked various questions and surmised it must be tinnitus.

Really! Tinnitus was surely much louder, more aggressive, ringing, a constant annoyance. I've since learned it varies for each sufferer. I won't say I was devastated at the diagnosis but I was upset. I'd always rejoiced in my acute hearing and to be surrounded by total silence is a real joy.

Many years ago, in a conversation with my elderly mother-in-law who suffered from glaucoma, we talked about her losing her sight and how she fervently hoped it wouldn't happen (it didn't). I contributed that I thought I could cope with loss of sight but loss of hearing was what I feared. Never to hear again the voice of a loved one, a child's cry, glorious singing, growling thunder, swoosh of waves, skirl of bagpipes, bird's call.



Every new sound I heard I added to the list.

So I disgruntledly lived with 'my cicadas' through the days and nights.

And then this February I heard the cicadas again – real ones 'singing' their hearts out all around me. My prayer that day unexpectedly became a prayer of praise, thanksgiving, tears and rejoicing. My silence wasn't disturbed by artifice but by the sound of nature. A gentle 'song' which, while it can intrude, does at times seem to disappear altogether. And, 'Thank you Lord', it never separates me from you, never disrupts the conversation.

As I write this I can hear cicadas – in the garden, and I'm content their sound will remain with me long after the insects themselves have gone – reminding me of hot summer days and nights, and blessings to be thankful for.

Walk to Silence

by Jo Anastasiadis

I walk towards New Zealand's bush
seeking solace in silence.
Crunch, crunch, crunch go my feet upon the path.
In the thinner bush lies the outskirts of town
where butterflies sample the local stores;
wares yellow the preference over white today,
while bumble bees favour yesterday's favourite.
Small blue dragonflies line a pond's edge
clinging to blades of grass
waiting ... waiting for a stirring.
Flies bizz, bees buzz
spiders hang alert for a stray movement
or hold vigil over this season's nest.
Yellow and black dragonflies wait on path and branch
dogfighting for the best spots
or perch on my hand and head
using my hat as an ambush platform
looking for a better lunch.
Zip: one cicada will call no more!
Yet cicadas are so plentiful they spot the trees
singles and twos, and crowds beyond threes
even at times, dotting me!
Cicadas, cicadas everywhere.
So many, one tumbles to the ground and plays grasshopper:
climbing a stem, launching into the air
only to catch on other stalks and beat its wings
in panic or rage at the indignity of it all.
Other cicadas crawl backward down the tree
before starting up their cacophony.
The air is a buzz with noise and movement
and only a solitary fantail to enjoy the feast.

Then a grey warbler serenades me until I come close;
taking up the song once more after I have passed.
And a tui sweeps overhead oblivious to it all
Searching for its own brand of nectar.
People tramp, tramp, tramp by;
what do they see of the buzzing in the air
or is it only me, now sitting, they see,
passing by, not wanting to stare.
I sought some quiet in the day
and still wait for the silence to be found
between all the wing beats.
Eventually I rise to move on amid the noise
and find a hush descends at my movement:
brief; dispelled as I walk on.
Yet the moment of this silence still restores;
in the stillness my soul now sits in, while walking.

Silence

by Marilyn Wilkinson

Pregnant pause

Divine depth

Time released

Deep rest

Senses kindled

Connected bliss

Profound peace

Love kiss.

Villanelle

by Clare Lind

When commitments come in endless waves
And duties tower beyond my height,
Here is knowledge that can save.

In the deep sweet centre there is a cave,
A gentle refuge from the wild night,
Where I may find the pause I crave,

Reflect upon the day God gave,
In the warm flicker of the fire's light
And give thanks for what I've learned and have.

The flames my altar, the rock walls my nave-
Here I can start to put things right,
Confess the truth, hear words that save,

Forgive myself what God forgave,
Still my jabber, clear my sight,
Step free once more from what enslaves.

When commitments come in endless waves
Christ, my Lord, the world's light
Awaits within to heal and save
And give me peace throughout the night.





The Colours of Silence

by Jill McLeod

I wrote this during the ten days of silence which we experienced at Teschemakers in Oamaru, on the Emmaus Journey, 1993.

Silence is brown: bread-brown, broken, given;

Silence is red: wine-red, blood-red, forgiveness flowing down the ages.

Silence is blue: the cobalt vastness of sea and sky; God's love, deep beyond imagining.

Silence is green: bud-green, grass-green; the tender, sharp, aching green of new life.

Silence is silver, like sunlight on surf, dewdrops in the dawn, Light of Christ reflecting, scintillating.

Silence is golden: leaves glowing in autumn, sunrises and sunsets, beautiful, but past, not to be held on to.

Silence is white, pure light, all colours blended, the absolute purity of Christ.

Your Name

by Anna Johnstone

Your name has tremendous power

Shouting it

brings kingdoms down
opens impossible doors
releases long-held prisoners

Whispering it

brings comfort to broken hearts
encouragement to those without hope
loving presence to empty loneliness

Jesus

I sit in silence

your name a burning bush
which holies me
gently taking my need
to elaborate, to explain
and laying it outside
this circle of gold





A lot can happen in silence

by Maggie Quinlan

On the twelfth of February this year, with Sue Pickering's book in hand, I set off 'On Holiday with God.'ⁱ It was to be the annual SGM seven-day silent retreat hosted at the Magnificat Community nestled in a wonderful place right next to the Rimutaka Cycle Trail, near Featherstone. Two buildings are used – Bethlehem for female guests, meals and meetings – and Nazareth for the 'boys'.

On arrival, I'm greeted warmly by members of the retreat team and shown my comfortable room with its fantastic view over Lake Wairarapa. My excitement is enhanced by the farm animals which I love. The Angus and Highland cattle, sheep, alpacas, donkeys, llamas and Kunekune pigs are all friendly and inquisitive.

The days are structured: early prayer at seven, morning prayer after breakfast, evening prayer at eight, two in the week with Eucharist, and an daily hour of personal spiritual direction. Members of the Community cook all the meals. Nothing is too much for them as they go about creating a lovely, warm, welcoming atmosphere. The food is delicious.

The retreat team provides resources for all forms of creativity, including a few jigsaw puzzles.

My personal pilgrimage

The flight from Auckland to Wellington is the beginning of my precious time with God. It's a beautifully clear day, and from the window I can see the whole of Mount Taranaki and the coast of South Island – the beauty of Creation looms large.

We arrive Friday evening. Silence commences after morning prayer Saturday.

And so began my wonderful time of enjoying and conversing with my Lord.

The day starts well centring on God in meditation, rejoicing in the day ahead, basking in His love. On the first day I ask for God's touch. I go out for a walk into the beautiful surrounding countryside. Suddenly cicadas keep touching me, then flying off. God has an amazing sense of humour! The next day one flew into my hand and immediately I wanted to sing 'I want to hold your hand'.

By the end of the week as I sit on a rock next to the stream, my arms and legs are covered in cicadas – just as I feel an amazing sense of God's totally unconditional love. I am so in love with my 'beloved' that on Valentine's Day I create a card for my Heavenly Valentine.

During the week I study *Song of Songs*. There's a real wow moment when I read chapter one verse seven in conjunction with Psalm 110:3 – where the same word is used for

ⁱ Pickering, Sue. *On Holiday with God*. London: Canterbury Press, 2012.



© Maggie Quinlan

'dark'. I was 'dark' in that I was ignorant about myself. But, just as the psalm says, 'from the womb of the dawn you'll receive the dew of your youth'.

The darkness of the Bride can be linked to the darkest hour of the night just before dawn breaks.ⁱⁱ I came to a full realisation of who I am in Christ. I am loved unconditionally, I am beautiful. I need not blame anyone for the bad things of the past, because God has used each one of them to bring me to a place of mature womanhood.

Someone lays a labyrinth out in the grounds. This is also significant for me. As I walk towards the centre I let go of all my anxieties, fears and poor self-esteem. At the centre I praise God with all my heart – watched by Highland cattle! Going outward, full of God's love, I yearn to tell the whole world about this amazing love that God has for every person.

During this silent seven days, reading Henri Nouwen's *The Wounded Healer*ⁱⁱⁱ only increases my desire to reach out to those with no vision or hope, to let them know what God has done for me, and wants to do for them too.

The week became a real opportunity to turn my face towards God. I felt the Holy Spirit sending me out to 'become the light'. I thanked Graham Millar for being my spiritual companion throughout the week. I do believe he was sent by God.

As the retreat week draws to a close, we break silence and share our pilgrimages. It's so amazing how God has worked in each person's life. The retreat has truly been a sanctuary for everyone.

I'll finish with a quote we were given one morning, from Amma Syncretia^{iv}

'In the beginning, there is a struggle and a lot of work for those who come near to God. But after that, there is indescribable joy. It is just like building a fire: at first it is smoky and your eyes water, but later you get the desired result. Thus we ought to light the divine fire in ourselves with tears and effort.'

ⁱⁱ McMonagle, Mother Xavier. *Love's Fugue*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995

ⁱⁱⁱ Nouwen, Henri J. M. *The Wounded Healer*. New York: Doubleday Religion, 1972.

^{iv} Chittister, Joan *In God's Holy Light: Wisdom from the Desert Monastics*, Franciscan Media, 2015.

Trusting Silence

by Vincent Maire

In November 2013 when hospice spiritual carers from around the country met in Wellington for the first time, I was taken with how many of my colleagues had a contemplative practice at the heart of their relationship with God. It wasn't because they were hospice spiritual carers that they prayed in this way; rather I believe the Holy Spirit led them to work with the dying because of their capacity for contemplative prayer.

In fact, it's my observation that the spiritual care of the dying is itself a form of contemplative prayer. It involves trust, presence, stillness, listening, at times long periods of silence, and an attitude of veneration towards the great mystery of death and dying.

There is also an attitude of reverence towards the patient. So often do I see an expression of 'my God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' on the faces of my patients. Think of the images of Christ on the cross, head drooping, eyes closed, pain, sweat and exhaustion etched large on fevered brows. And we wonder where God is in all this suffering. At moments such as these the only response is our presence and prayerful, compassionate silence.

I learned many things those first few weeks in mid-2013 when I took up the role of spiritual care coordinator at Hibiscus Hospice. Two stand out. First – how well my two years with SGM prepared me for the role. I continue to be grateful for the way the course introduced me to the diverse nature of spirituality, and what it truly means to be a carer of souls. But, my second discovery took me by surprise – how my practice of twice-daily meditation enriched my work in ways I could never have imagined.

Sadly, the contemplative tradition in Christian spirituality was forgotten for centuries, and revived by Fr. John Main a Benedictine monk who in the '70s, reintroduced it into the lives of religious and lay people alike. Simplicity is the key; the prayer-word or mantra is the Aramaic word *maranatha* [our Lord comes] - the breath is inhaled and exhaled with each syllable. The Desert Fathers called this form of prayer 'resting in the Lord'.ⁱ It's not the way of *intention* but *attention*; we meditate not to get things from God but to be with God.

For me, all this somehow sums up the work of a hospice spiritual carer. It's about attending to people, being present at a level where words may be meaningless or simply get in the way.

In his book *Personhood and Presence*, Scottish healthcare chaplain, Ewan Kelly writes, 'I became aware that as a chaplain my role was something very different, indeed it was to wait with people and not do anything to them. It was to stay with relatives and staff in their state of limbo and not perform tasks on or for them.'ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Ed. Paul Harris (2006) *Silence and Stillness in Every Season*, Continuum, London, 84

ⁱⁱ Kelly W (2012) *Personhood and Presence*, Bloomsbury, London, 31

To be cast into a role of helping someone by not doing anything for them seems counterintuitive. In my early weeks at the hospice, there were days I felt pangs of envy at the busyness of my colleagues. Nurses dispensing care and medication; doctors – knowledge and advice. Counsellors and social workers offering solutions.

But all I had to give was my time and myself.

Like most people who pray contemplatively, I was familiar with the dichotomy of Martha and Mary and counted myself firmly in the latter's camp. Yet there I was at the coal face of caring, struggling to find a way forward.

I then made an awesome discovery: the experience of sitting with someone, often in silence, was similar to meditation or contemplation. The revelation was both comforting and mysterious. The only word that does justice to what I'm trying to explain is – *presence*.

Let me give you an example: Gavin, late 50s and nearing the end of his life, trained as a scientist then worked in information technology. He had no concept of God or an afterlife. His wife Jill asked if I'd sit with him while she went shopping. For over an hour we sat together, mostly in silence.

A few days after Gavin's funeral, Jill thanked me with, 'You talked to him about mystery.' That one word, *mystery*, made all the difference! The word appealed to his scientific mind, the word gave him hope. The word that would have gone unnoticed had I filled that hour with aimless chat.

Over the first few months of my ministry, I struggled with how to measure success in this type of work – perhaps a hangover from my many years in business, with perhaps a tinge of ego neediness. Eventually I decided the only outward measure was the silent affirmation of my colleagues. They certainly let me know when I got things wrong.

That's why contemplatives are encouraged to abandon the idea of making progress.

Fr. John would say, 'Progress is only progress in fidelity'.ⁱⁱⁱ That's why, every time we sit down to contemplate or meditate – we begin again. This is similar to the concept of 'Beginner's Mind' in Zen Buddhism. It's an attitude I find helpful when re-engaging with a patient. Start afresh, let them set the agenda – much can happen in the interior life of a patient between visits.

Over the years, as my confidence grew, I began to discover creative ways to use silence. Spiritual distress afflicts believers and non-believers alike. Time is not on the side of the patient or hospice spiritual carer – unlike counsellors and spiritual directors. In hospice an injudicious question can sabotage the process.

I soon learned to *test* a significant question internally before I spoke – asking the question in my head and *feeling* the response in my gut. *Sensing* the appropriateness

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. 59

of taking the conversation deeper. I believe the practice of meditation enabled me to develop this skill of trusting my inner dialogue.

Another tool I picked up in 2003, for reasons that now elude me, was learned at a 'Focusing' course at Mercy Spirituality Centre in Auckland. Focusing is a process for helping your mind listen to the wisdom of your body – like meditation focusing involves trust, stillness and silence.

The first time I used Focusing at Hospice was with a patient very close to death with motor neurone disease. In the process of focusing, I saw her leave a dark, dark place and step into a globe of light the colour of the most exquisite mother-of-pearl. I was happy to share this image with the patient and her husband.

More recently, I supported 90-year old Mavis, who for months had been stuck in liminal space – between living and dying. Images of dust, weeds, cobwebs, dirt and shadows arose in my mind. Far in the distance I saw the green, green grass of home. A few weeks later, days before Mavis died, I repeated the process and *observed* Mavis waiting behind a large door beyond which swirled a great light. I trusted this image enough to know her inner work was almost done and she didn't have long to wait.

What can we *do* for a patient like Mavis who sleeps all the time? All we can do is turn up and trust that by *being* present, the Holy Spirit will attend to cleaning the inner room. It requires absolute trust in the silence. The other thing we can do is hold their hand, stroke their arm and when appropriate – hug and kiss them hello and goodbye. Touch, like presence, is a powerful form of spiritual healing.

Like any other caring role, in hospice an undisciplined ego may manifest in unconsciously manipulating a patient to go in a direction she may not wish to go.

I was certainly prone to this when I started. With practice, I was able to recognise the warning signs both from the patient and from within myself. It was these early mistakes that led me to test my questions internally, trusting the silence of my colleagues, discerning whether a Focusing session would be appropriate – allowing the patient to set the agenda. Instead of filling time with talk, I was learning to trust a silence I was familiar with and not threatened by, because it was the foundation of my life.

Much has been written on how the practice of meditation and contemplation in the Christian tradition enable us to be released from the shadow side of our personality. When interviewed in *Anglican Taonga*, Wellington priest, Michael Watson said, 'Meditation makes the soul grow bigger. If you keep it up, it gradually shrinks the ego, allowing the soul to expand into the space left behind.' In all my reading no one has said it better.

Please don't get the impression I walk around hospice like a silent monk. My workplace is filled with laughter and activity. Occasionally I use my basketball coach approach. 'You can do this Jim,' I say with great enthusiasm. 'It's your next big adventure, an absolute blast. Don't be afraid, sit back, clear your mind, be as peaceful as you can and enjoy the trip.' The Jims of the world get this.

Yet as Ewan Kelly teaches, 'Attentive waiting with another is a truly draining and intense activity, being simultaneously present yet internally active – constantly processing what is heard, seen and felt.'^{iv} That's why self-care is taken seriously at Hibiscus Hospice.

Silence is my preferred form of self-care and starts with twice-daily half-hour meditation in the Christian tradition. In addition to regular supervision and spiritual direction, every eight weeks I take a one-day silent retreat – and once a year for five-days. More recently our team meetings begin with a few minutes of shared silence.

For Kelly, 'The ability, or not, to be still and silent may be a gauge as to what extent we're comfortable with who we are, with living in our own skin, and the degrees of disquiet or stress in our lives at any one time'.^v

If Kelly's right, and I firmly believe he is – then anyone entrusted with the care of souls has to trust silence, has to find creative ways to use silence. And perhaps above all, use silence as a gateway to God. Fr. John writes, 'Silence is the essential human response to the mystery of God, to the infinity of God'.

^{iv} Ibid. 30

^v Ibid. 163

^{vi} Ed. Paul Harris (2006) *Silence and Stillness in Every Season*, Continuum, London, 162

Silent

by Ana Lisa de Jong

'Amazing grace,
how sweet the sound.'

But grace,
what is its sound?
For as I bite my lips
a thousand times,
to stop my sharp retorts
rebounding,
I realise grace
is more often found
in silence,
than in words
which resound.

More often found
in restraint,
than words
that state my case,

so that I might be justified.
Yes, words to express God's heart
through me, must subside,
must give way to listening,
hearing, reflecting
on another's deepest silence.

Words,
if they must be said at all,
must come from the depths
of stillness inside,
where truth and grace meet.
Where my message is refined,
until it is worth more
than what I might express in silence.
Until then grace,
if it is true,
is quiet.

The Invitation

by Bev van der Westhuyzen

It came softly, gently wrapped in the content of a quiet day ... 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies...'

In the silence, the story of the acorns lying at the foot of the oak tree came to mind: this community of acorns were continuously involved in the caring of themselves, staying burnished and bright; missing the point of their very existence.

One lone, not so good looking acorn looked at the giant oak above, a revelation of his potential became evident ... only if he were to be buried, let go of his acorn-hood and die. This would mean losing all the benefits gained of a life above ground and the time invested in looking good and doing good.

Was I prepared to fall into the ground and die? Alone?

Initially the ground conjured up images of dark, dirt and cold silence. On reflection, a sense of nurturing, safety and protection also emerged. Buried in the soil of silence there came a hum of life and resurrection. The germination of a brand new oak began. I sketched the acorn covered in darkness. In the silence of my heart and the stillness of the 'grave', a resurrection miracle was taking place. The 'acorn' of ego eventually beginning to split down the middle, cracked and broken. A fragile new sprout developed and a small seed of hope was planted in my heart.

The invitation was not only received but also responded to. A new journey begun. Sessions with my spiritual director, going to quiet days, self-reflection with the use of the enneagram all signposted the way. Silence and centering prayer ('God's divine therapy') was also part of the plan; God's grace-filled presence (sometimes evident, sometimes not) was there.

New revelations came to mind and heart of my 'shadow' side represented by the one side of the cotyledon of the acorn. Light the other. Two sides to who I was – yet with the ability to grow something new. Both sides needing to be accepted and then given to nurture what could be. That meant spending time with my 'shadow', not only accepting my faults but beginning to love them as the completeness of me. No longer hiding and living in the pretence of only the 'good' me – which was easy to show off.

This grew to an acknowledgement and acceptance of the completeness of God's love for me; of both light and shadow being embraced in His arms. And so the new shoot, nurtured and protected in this love, is allowing me to love and accept myself in new ways.

A growing acceptance of others has begun. Giving them freedom to have a shadow side, too. Not being fearful of, or wanting to fix or change them. Freedom is a great gift to give anyone...freedom from the bondage of preconceived expectations, freedom to be. The freedom given to us in Christ.

My belief is – God’s deep love is given to us to be able to accept the invitation and come home to freely be and accept ourselves, both light and shadow. Both given to create something new. Not then just an acorn but a new seedling of the mighty oak.

‘I breathe into the depth of life.
I travel into the silence and emptiness.
I surrender my anxiety.
I welcome the darkness.
I open myself to the deep.
I breathe.’

With every breath, Mike Riddell

(With special thanks to Gabrielle, Linda, Jan and Joan)



Let me rise

by Ana Lisa de Jong

'Let me rise
in your heart.
Lay there and let me rise.
The door to the tomb is open.
The door to your heart.
Don't be afraid of the silence.
It's as silent as the tomb
on Easter morning.
Wide open.

The sun shines on the place
where I lay.
The silence of Sunday morning,
only broken by bird song.
It's the silence that speaks
to your heart now.
Lay there and look at the sky.
The clouds that point the way,
to me.

You now live in the place,
between the cross and
the resurrection.
But look closely.
The door has been opened,
to your heart.
And the Son shines in.
Follow the light to me.
I am the way.'

Living Tree Poetry
Easter Sunday 2016

'But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings.' Malachi 4:2



<https://webtechphotoblog.wordpress.com/>

Silence and healing

by Val Chapman

I landed at Heathrow Airport, and took the three-hour bus ride to Broadstairs on the south east coast. It was 2001 when Mad Cow Disease was at its peak in England. The countryside was still, silent, no animals, without life at all – not even birds singing.

Twice I saw pits alight burning the carcasses of animals. The landscape was empty, desolate. It mirrored how I felt. It identified with what I was. I could see nothing on the horizon to lift me, or the countryside, out of this desert.

I'm a contemplative, love silence, stillness, in fact need it. It's when I feel closest to God, to creation, to life. But here I was immersed totally, drowning almost in the desolation, and could see no way beyond.

Five days before I'd been told my mother was dying. My children borrowed money for an emergency fare for me to visit her. I was so grateful to them.

But, she died three hours before I left New Zealand.

I couldn't emotionally tackle my grief on the crowded plane, when I landed, or even when I reached my mother's flat – where my sister declared there was no reason to cry, she'd only died, and it was no big deal!

But for me it was.

I hadn't seen my mother for seventeen years, although we were very close.

I just couldn't afford the airfare. Nor could I leave my chronically ill daughter or take her with me to England.

I prayed most days and really believed I'd see mum again. But no, she was dead.

Her belongings and her memories were all around me in her flat, but not her voice, the warmth of her hugs, nor her tears of love.

On returning to New Zealand a month later, we had a memorial service for her within a week and a week later – my son's wedding. That was hard.

I was angry toward God. The sense of betrayal for not answering my prayers of faith – filled me for some time. God seemed silent.

And yet in the silence I was somehow aware of God's presence, but deliberately turned my back to it. I was afraid to listen, afraid of the reality of God, afraid to trust, afraid of where God might lead me.

God had silently spoken to me in the silence – in a gentle way, a healing way.

Whilst I agonized on Jesus in Gethsemane, I couldn't take the step to surrender – it was too hard. My poverty paralysed me.

A few months later, as I'd often done when I couldn't sleep – I sat on the back porch and looked at the dark sky. This time I saw one bright star, and felt the black night sky as soft as velvet, and so welcoming. The silence of the velvet sky, the deep love of God which embraced.

The star reminded me of the one over Bethlehem, beckoning me to know Jesus. God had silently spoken to me in the silence – in a gentle way, a healing way.

Once more I could trust, once more I could pray and listen, once more believe in the love, the goodness and healing of God. I knew God was closer to me in the dark times of life when I'm not always aware and more so – than when all is going well.

St John of the Cross implies that darkness isn't really darkness and that God is never really absent, but we are blind to see. It was when I began to feel at home in the darkness, I eventually began to see: that while my senses were dry and empty, my spirit was being fed by God.

But the silence and stillness were difficult. I wanted to be active. To 'do' something to make it right. Amidst the loss of faith, hope, peace and love I wanted to restore, I was tempted to believe I had to be in control. Waiting for God when I was blind was hard.

In letting go, in surrendering my sinfulness, and accepting my emptiness, I found peace. I no longer fear darkness. For what could I fear? I know now that every part of my life is being held safely in the gentle, healing and loving hands of our Lord.

I know the awesome goodness and love of the Fatherhood of God and that I'm His/Her child. I know the incarnation of Christ who understands our humanity and the healing and power of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Love is never silent, but in the silence – it becomes a sacrament.

Silence Screams

by Frances O'Leary

This silence,
is not quiet.

Voices,
thoughts
Illusions,
keep
on and on
in my mind.

I feel
like a tree
in winter.
Stripped bare,
assaulted
by factors,
beyond
my control.

This silence
screams,
loudly

Gifts of Silence

by Lesley Ayers

I've never really been one for 'noise', and if you asked me, I'd have said I was ok with silence. After all I once survived, and enjoyed, a 14-day silent retreat.

But in the past six months, I've come to a new appreciation of silence. Instrumental in all this was the loss of the radio that, for decades, had been my companion in the kitchen. Voices on National Radio brought me ideas, debates, subjects to think over. The Concert programme gave me the delight of music. But, with a broken tape system and erratic CD player, we deemed the old workhorse not worth bringing when we moved.

In a new city, new home, new kitchen, there was nothing. Our main sound system was packed up in the wall of boxes which lined the garage.

I felt the weight of the silence, but decided to 'sit with it', go cold turkey, and not rush out to the nearest electrical store for a replacement. At first there was an almost physical craving to fill the air, with, at least, music.

But no...it was to be silence.

Our house has a small room, a conservatory which has been added on. It gets the morning sun and looks out onto the hills in one direction, and a bank of native trees in the other. As my husband isn't one for early mornings, there's time here for prayer, for reflection. Time to learn about and get better acquainted with silence.

At first there was an almost physical craving to fill the air, with, at least, music.

I even resisted my usual need for a book in my hand.

Time in that silent room, brought home to me how dependent I'd become on diversions, none of which was wrong in itself – checking the news or email on the iPad, listening to music, interviews, reading.

I've found one gift of silence and of stopping is that it brings an awareness of how busy my mind gets. There's the internal chatter, the chasing of ideas, the 'things-to-do' lists, the distractions I live with, yet hardly notice – swirling around in my brain.

Silence brings me up short, challenges me. It's a space where I can't hide.

Yet now it feels a safe place. As I stay with the silence and stillness, there's a calming effect. The circus of my mind ceases its busyness. There's time to listen. Tom Wright captures this in his small gem of a book *Quiet Moments*. 'Silence is...the deep well from which we can draw living water'.

There is stillness in silence, but as I walk along the bush track at the end of the lane – I learn another way to practise silence – accompanied by movement. When I'm walking,

paradoxically, silence isn't the absence of noise. It's an inner silence as the background sounds of nature and the steady rhythm of walking help contain my mind.

There's the sound of my feet brushing through the long grass in summer, or the crunch of leaves on the path, reminding me it's autumn. I love the warblers' gentle, tireless song, the distinctive notes of tui and the cheerful squeak of fantail. In many ways these sounds are non-demanding, soothing, providing a comfortable adjunct to an inner silence.

I realise a love of silence is growing in me – for it provides a calming of my spirit, a settling of my mind, a place where all those 'to dos' are put into their rightful perspective.

It could sound as if I'm in danger of becoming a recluse. In fact, the opposite is true. My times of silence, of drawing from Jesus' living waters, run parallel to what happened when we moved. Decluttering our home brought a sense of freedom from too much 'stuff'. By 'decluttering' my mind and soul, there's more room for better interactions with others.

Now, we've unpacked a few more boxes. John's set up the CD player so I can play music in the kitchen. And sometimes I do choose music, and sometimes, when it's something like a Beethoven Symphony, it's loud - yes!

But more often than not, I find that I can choose, just to 'be', and that's all right too.



'Silence is a friend who will never betray'

by Heather Kelly

These words jumped out from the gift shop shelf where I was browsing. The words were set against the background of a seascape. Not the rolling surf of the great Southern Ocean which, depending on her mood, either pounds or kisses the shores in this part of the world – but a calmer, more still view of perhaps a tidal estuary with land suggestive of being pastoral in the background. There is a dramatic sky above in this black and white picture. The whole is suggestive of the view I once knew from a friend's coastal bolt-hole.

Twice the cottage was lent to me as I began to experience the need to withdraw. To go on Retreat. It was during the second of those experiences when I discovered the power of silence. That was the beginning.

By the time I had graduated from a three year course of Training and Education for Lay Ministry, during which time my Spirituality was fed, I knew the reality of, as well as the joy I found in, the silence of Contemplation.

On the day of my browsing I recognised that the picture was not outrageously expensive, but on that day I also knew that it wouldn't be wise, financially speaking, to make such a purchase. So, on the shelf it stayed.

**How God worked this miracle is
beyond me.**

Five months later an unexpected medical event threw my life into turmoil. Purpose dropped out of my world. Shock set in. Silence evaporated.

Eight months of trauma passed. Some silences had come back into my life. Not many. Not often – but some short periods when the silence within began to reappear.

How God worked this miracle is beyond me. Against all my longings, all my need, I had to find the strength to be devastatingly practical. One way or another, I disposed of all but a very small amount of the contents of our home. I prepared the house for sale. Listed at my price it sold quickly. I could never have done all that in my own strength.

On the day of settlement, I was supported by a friend. We went to the legal people and handed over the keys then waited at a coffee shop for the telephone call. Two coffees later the call came. I wept.

Shortly the friend asked what I wanted to do and instantly I knew. The gift shop was twenty minutes away. My friend drove.

Once in the shop an assistant offered help. 'No thank you. I know what I'm looking for.'

And, miraculously there it was. Repositioned, reduced in price (which on that day didn't actually matter!). That it was there, waiting for me still, was extraordinary. Without doubt the work of God.

My 'silent sea' picture hung in room 27 of the Residential Care Home for another two plus years.

It now hangs in the bedroom area of the small dwelling I rent in a Retirement Village. It has been specifically noted in my end of life preparations; an important asset.

During that period in the Residential Home it was my 'silent sea' picture that reminded me of the Truth written by James – that when I draw near to God, He will draw near to me.

In time it did become possible to arrange for quiet time. Occasionally, with the co-operation of the staff, I was able to withdraw to my room for two full days. Healing time. I was drawn to a 'new' (to me) style of Worship at a Christian Centre where I was welcomed, accepted and loved.

Today in the reality of independent living, I know that the grief, which for a season overwhelmed my inner being, is safe in the hands of a friend who will not betray. Furthermore, my clinical depression and my alone-ness which could again overwhelm, really are also safe with that friend.

I am daily sustained by the silence which I actively seek.

Ode to Hildegard of Bingen by Amber Parry Strong

The earth is held in the womb of the Mother-God,
surrounded by an amniotic blackness of such tranquillity.

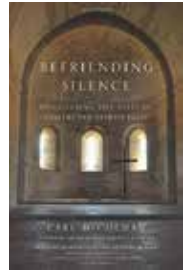
On a calm, clear, starry night, my heartbeat becomes one with God's.

Infinity is my comforter, a place of safety and understanding.

Books and films for the Contemplative Journey

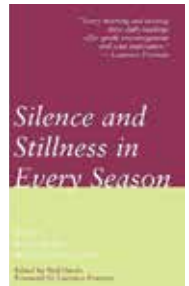
Befriending Silence

Befriending Silence celebrates the ancient spirituality of Cistercian and Trappist monks, showing how the gifts of this long-hidden discipline can bless everyone, even those of us who live 'in the world.' Respected speaker, author, and Patheos blogger, Carl McColman introduces this monastic tradition as 'the hidden jewel of the Church,' grounded in a surprisingly contemporary path. Steeped in chant and silence, grounded in down-to-earth work and service, and immersed in the mystical wisdom of teachers ancient (Bernard of Clairvaux) and modern (Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating), the beautifully humble path of Cistercian spirituality has for centuries made monasteries places of retreat and renewal. Now, McColman offers the first practical introduction to this ancient, contemplative spirituality for all people. This accessible and comprehensive guide focuses on simplicity, living close to the earth, and contemplative prayer.



Silence and Stillness in Every Season

Many thousands of people across the world have found their spiritual lives enriched by the daily practice of Christian meditation, the method of silent prayer taught by Benedictine monk, John Main. It is a tradition which draws on the ancient wisdom of the Bible, the Hindu Upanishads and the early Christian Desert Fathers. John Main wrote several books on contemplative prayer before he died in 1982, but this collection is the only one to draw the essence of all his teachings into one volume. Paul Harris has devotedly selected the essential extracts from each of John Main's works and arranged them here in an attractive and practical daily readings format.



Silence directed by Martin Scorsese.

Based on the novel by Shûsaku Endô.
Starring Adam Driver, Liam Neeson, Andrew Garfield

Six Franciscans were crucified in Japan in the late 1590s. Martin Scorsese's 2016 film, *Silence* tells the story of how a 16th century Shogun expelled the Jesuit missionaries and issued an edict requiring all Japanese to register as Buddhists. Ten years later twenty-six Christians including six Franciscan missionaries were crucified at Nagasaki. Liam Neeson plays the lead in this story of Japanese inquisition when nearly 6,000 remaining Christians were tortured and killed. By 1603, when the Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu unified the country, the persecution of Christians began in earnest.



SGM NEWS!

During the SGM 'road-show' to Auckland, Palmerston North, Christchurch and Dunedin in 2014, feedback from many involved with SGM over the years revealed that there is a keen desire for SGM to work strategically in the community. So, in addition to continuing to offer the Spiritual Directors' Formation Programme and the bi-annual 'Refresh' Journal, SGM is now in a position to explore a way forward which will make the riches of our resources and experience more widely available.

We seek to establish 'BEHOLD', an outreach of SGM devoted specifically to provide:

- enriching and engaging professional development opportunities for pastors and clergy who want to deepen their relationship with Jesus by exploring contemplative prayer, retreats and workshops
- short events geared to the general public which will open up topics relevant to Kiwi spirituality as a response to the spiritual hunger of 21st century people. Through these creatively presented 'taster' events, people will be encouraged to explore how they and their communities might benefit from a deepening sense of connection with themselves, the world and the sacred.

We plan to offer a 0.2 position to allow someone with the appropriate skills, experience and passion, to get this new project off the ground. More details of this project will be available later in the year, but in the meantime please contact our administrator Joanne Garton: sgm@clear.net.nz or write to her at 36 Buller Crescent, Manurewa, AUCKLAND 2102 if you

- are in a position to help fund/sponsor this exciting development or make a specified donation OR
- have an inkling that you or someone you know might be interested and want to send in an expression of interest.

We would love to hear from you!

In the silence by Judith van Rees

Psalms 42:1-2

The buzzing of voices
Filled the café
I stepped outside
The warm air thick
With the sound of cicadas
I sought for silence
To hear God's voice
Somewhere?

I waited
And in the waiting
Deep in my spirit
I heard the voice of God
A soft whisper
The Holy Spirit
'Do not fear,
My hand is upon you.'

The Last Word

In twelve years of parish ministry – preaching once a week, sometimes three times – I found my practice of silent contemplation kept the pressure gauge at the low end. Today, when I only work half days and completely voluntarily at that, I'm able to add a new form of silence to my spiritual disciplines: electronic device and media free mornings. I find noise can be visual too. All this reminds me of something Thomas Merton wrote: 'Preaching God implies silence. If preaching isn't born of silence, it's a waste of time. Writing and teaching must be fed by silence or they are a waste of time. There are many declarations made only because we think other people are expecting us to make them. The silence of God should teach us when to speak and when not to speak. But we can't bear the thought of that silence, lest it cost us the trust and respect of men. [sic]'

Because Refresh readers are generally a bunch of contemplatives, the topic of 'silence' elicited many more contributions than normal. This meant some people's excellent offerings had to be left out. I am grateful to everyone who blessed me with their insights and experiences of silence.

Diane [dianegw@actrix.co.nz]

Summer 2017 Refresh theme 'Like a child'

Deadline September 28, 2016

For an answer Jesus called over a child, whom he stood in the middle of the room, and said, "I'm telling you, once and for all, that unless you return to square one and start over like children, you're not even going to get a look at the kingdom, let alone get in. Whoever becomes simple and elemental again, like this child, will rank high in God's kingdom. What's more, when you receive the childlike on my account, it's the same as receiving me.

Matthew 18:2-5 Message Translation

Using any version of this teaching you like - how does this teaching of Jesus impact on your spiritual life, your contemplative practice, your relationships, your understanding of mission and service? How do you practise being 'like a child' – do you find it easy or difficult and why?

Guidelines for writers - please!

*keep contributions to fewer than 2000 words
use single quotation marks
be conversational in style
use conjunctions wherever possible
use endnotes instead of footnotes
use inclusive language wherever possible
ensure any images you send are larger than 2MB.*

A Blessing, Aotearoa

by Pamela Gordon

May the peacefulness of a sleeping child, bless you
May the bliss of a hot bath after a hard day's work, warm you to your very bones
May the utter silence of softly falling snow, entrance you
May the calm of gently floating down the river, carry you
May the serenity of the pinprick of stars you see
when you have to get up in the night, encompass you

May the deep peace of saying or hearing, 'I'm sorry', liberate you
May the soft green stillness within our native bush, nurture you
May the sigh of relief that the pain has gone, restore you
May the contentment of knowing someone loves you, sustain you

May the harmony of the last chord at an organ recital, echoing,
then fading into silence, resonate within you

May the serenity of a solitary burning candle, centre you
May the deep satisfaction at completion of a long and difficult task, be your reward

May the tranquillity of cows, just standing there, be with you
May the reassurance of the call of a morepork through a cold night, comfort you
May the inspiration at the centre of the labyrinth,
guide the next step on your life's journey

May the closeness when lying in exhaustion after making love, gird you
May the joy at the changing colours of the sky at sunset, enhance you
May the warmth of a dear friend's hug, envelop you
May the relief of knowing 'they are all right', engender gratitude
May deep peace always be there, within your reach, through all of life's turmoil

Arohanui



Contributors

Andrew Dunn lives and works at Oasis Retreat Centre, Albany, where the bush cathedral continues to delight and nourish and has inspired the move to covenant the bush with the Queen Elizabeth II Trust.

Andrew Pritchard, Acting Coordinator, SGM's Spiritual Directors Formation Programme is self-employed in spiritual direction, supervision and adult education. Andrew & Lynn have been part of Shalom Christian Community on the Kapiti Coast since its inception over 30 years ago. Leisure pursuits include golf, reading and working with wood. Andrew is an associate of Southern Star Abbey, the Cistercian Monastery at Kopua.

Sheila Pritchard lives in Orewa and is enjoying a 'semi-retired' lifestyle while still offering spiritual direction and supervision three days a week. She is the author of *The Lost Art of Meditation* (England: SU, 2003) More of her writing can be accessed from her Blog: <http://sheilapritchard.blogspot.com/>

Susan Gill How does one balance a busy schedule and meaningful time with God, family and others? This is a question Susan often asks. She is Vicar of Church on the Hill, Richmond, Tasman, lives with her beloved Kevin, has 3 adult children and 7 ½ grandchildren. The latter all live in the Canterbury region. She chairs the local Ministers' Association and has various other balls in the air.

Jill McLeod and her husband Alec are still living in Tararu village, on the coast just north of Thames. She is harvesting vegetables grown in homemade compost, making many new friends, enjoying trips on the village bus, and is amazed at where the journey has taken her! What next, is the daily question...

Anna Johnstone and her husband Kerry are part of the editorial team for Refresh. They continue to enjoy Auckland's North Shore and explore new paths of creativity.

Frances O'Leary is a wife, mother and grandmother, who spends many hours a week on voluntary church work. Writing poetry is a therapy, a way of dealing with frustrations and of keeping sane!

Veronica Parton Blessed by God in being gifted with a 'late vocation' to spiritual direction which enriches my living as - wife, mother, granny, sister, friend. I live in the Hutt Valley, with glorious views of sea, sky and hills, plus all the weathers we experience (occasionally snow to sea to snow again). Creation's goodness and beauty offer a counterbalance to the pain found in the world.

Jo Anastasiadis is a born and bred Wellingtonian, wife, mother of grown children and spiritual director. She enjoys being outdoors, particularly walking on the beach, taking time out for retreats, and utilising creativity in her relationship with God.

Marilyn Wilkinson is a Kapiti Coast grandma who likes nothing more than engaging with her environment be it walking in the bush, creating with wool and words, sharing with others, being still.

Clare Lind is a Presbyterian minister. For the last six and a half years she has been based at Tawa Union Church in Wellington's Northern suburbs. Many of her poems hinge on the interplay of landscape and spirituality.

Ana Lisa de Jong is a poet, mother to Natasha and Lewis, wife to Richard, and Chaplains Administrator to the NZDF. Not always in that order. Two volumes of her poetry, *Songs in the Night* and *Hope Springs*, will soon be followed by a third in her series *Poetry for the Soul*, entitled *Seeking the Light*. Ana Lisa writes at joyinanewway.com and lives in the beautiful North West Region of Auckland, where she's currently learning to become an acceptable back yard goalkeeper.

Maggie Quinlan is a part-time GP and lay minister/pastoral care co-ordinator in Clevedon Anglican Parish in Auckland Diocese. I have two children and two grandchildren with another one on the way! I enjoy the outdoors, looking after my menagerie of animals, dancing, singing, mosaicking, writing poetry and photography.

Vincent Maire is the Spiritual Care Coordinator at Hibiscus Hospice, Red Beach, Auckland. He is a spiritual director and currently National Coordinator of the NZ Community for Christian Meditation. He is active in the Hibiscus Coast Catholic community and regularly teaches Christian meditation.

Bev van der Westhuyzen after five years in Tauranga she still continues to be blessed and so grateful for the beauty seen daily around her. Her time is shared between caring for grandchildren, taking communion services at a local retirement home and seeking God in the quiet spaces.

Val Chapman is married with two children and three grandchildren. She is a Spiritual Director and Retreat Director as well as a Ministry Supervisor. Pastoral care and chaplaincy are her ministry. She loves travelling overseas, studying theology, reading and walking by the sea.

Lesley Ayers is married to John, lives in Tauranga, which is feeling more and more like home. She has started to get to know, and enjoy, an interesting range of people in this city. Writing is fitted in around hospitality, grand-parenting, keeping in touch with old friends, walking, swimming and reading.

Heather Kelly is one of the younger residents living independently in an Invercargill Retirement Village. Heather endeavours to live a lifestyle of pastoral care to those whose lives touch hers, she 'plays with words' for refreshment and is energised in the process.

Pam Gordon I have always appreciated the beautiful natural surroundings we have in New Zealand and feel so blessed with friends and family. Since retiring, and when I have time between grandchildren, I have created a labyrinth and now working on a path of contemplation through native bush on our organic farm.

Amber Parry Strong is reclaiming her inner life with three smallish kids and a life in ministry in Wellington. She enjoys finding God's grace in the nitty gritty of life and relationships.

Judith Van Rees

