

Refresh

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A woman with her hair tied back, wearing a white button-down shirt over a dark green top, stands in a vast field of white flowers. She has her arms slightly out to her sides, looking down at the flowers. The field extends to the horizon, where rolling green hills and dark, forested mountains are visible under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds.

Joy

Contents



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Surprised by joy by Allister Lane

With four young children, I don't get to as many art galleries as perhaps I'd like. But maybe it doesn't matter.

I'd feel a lot more sophisticated and cultured if I had more stories about spiritual epiphanies I've had in art galleries. To be honest, I've only had one. And, it's a bit of stretch to describe it as an epiphany – but it was definitely spiritual.

In a rather cluttered room of the gallery, this painting caught my eye.



*Saint Mary Magdalene
at the Sepulchre (c1530s)
by Giovanni Girolamo
Savoldo.*

Saint Mary Magdalene at the Sepulchre (c1530s) by Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo.

The vivid colours and deep texture hitting my retina before my brain could process what the painting was about. Folding fabric with light reflecting off the contours, creating shadows in the recesses.

A hood over a half-turned face. Only a small part of the face is illuminated, but there is definitely a person under the garment. Their back is to the viewer but the figure turns their/her head to look around behind them/her.

Giving up any pretence that I know what I'm doing in the art gallery, I peer up close at the small caption to find out some clues about this painting. And what I read instantly connects what I'm looking at with one of the most joyful stories I know.

The 'back story' to the moment captured in this painting is told in John's Gospel (John 20:1-20) Even if you know the story, indulge me as I re-present the drama of it.

Here it is, Easter day and Mary's gone to the tomb of her dead Rabbi. To her astonishment and bewilderment, she finds it empty. Simon and John come and confirm Jesus' absence. While the instinct of the two blokes is to take off, Mary remains in the garden. She weeps because she has lost the most significant connection to her teacher she had left.

She is distraught and confused – the last few days have been horrific: Jesus, whom she knew to be so real and whom she believed was destined to be so significant for everyone, has been killed. And now his body has gone missing.

Hunched over and turned in on her grief, she becomes aware someone is standing nearby. She does not know who the person is, and she assumes the person standing there in the garden is... a gardener. (Fair enough, right?)

The gardener engages her, asking why she's weeping. Mary shares with him the reason she's weeping: she has lost something; she has lost the only remaining connection to her teacher and friend: Jesus' dead body. It has gone and she yearns for the body, and really all that has been snatched from her in the last few days, with such brutality and finality.

With her face still downcast, Mary asks the gardener if he can help her with any information she might have to help her reclaim a part of what she aches for.

And it's this very next moment that I love especially.

But before we continue with the story, look at the painting again...

As well as the amazing colour and texture the light gives her garment, the garment casts shadows with the light. This gives the painting a realism that's almost three-dimensional. With any good artist, there is evident skill, not just in the technical expertise of the painting, but in the telling of a story.

The simple and yet profound 'story' the artist tells us is the source of light in this moment.

Behind Mary, in the background of this painting, we can see the dawn. The sky is just getting light. This tells us the light shining on her garment is not the sun.

Mary is turning to the source of the light – another heavenly body.

The light has just spoken her name, "Mary!"

This painting captures that split-second moment she hears the familiar voice; that voice that had spoken so many times with love and wisdom and compassion; that voice of her Rabbi and friend calling to her with an intimacy that she knew so very well. All of this in the simple sound of her name.

**The sky is just getting light.
This tells us the light shining on
her garment is not the sun.**

Mary spins around – instantly recognising the risen Jesus standing before her. What a moment! Mary encounters the wonder and joy of the resurrected Jesus.

The artist depicts the source of light as shining from the glory of the risen Jesus. Looking at this scene, and how the light is shining, evokes, for me, the sense that the risen Jesus is beside the viewer's right shoulder.

It's such a powerful moment – just a moment. She had seen Jesus but had not recognised him. In an instant the risen Jesus speaks her name 'Mary!', and she turns. Grief and fear and loss...melt away. And what floods in is recognition, restoration, regained intimacy of the one she loved.

Mary's first encounter with the wonder of the resurrected Jesus was in hearing. For most other people recorded in the Gospels, encountering the wonder of the resurrected Jesus was in seeing.

How do we encounter the wonder of the Resurrection today?

Although Christian orthodoxy insists on the full historicity of Jesus' Resurrection, believers have nevertheless struggled to depict what the event looked like. That's the way it has to be. It defies depiction. Perhaps it indicates the Resurrection isn't something we capture, but rather something we let loose!

Minister and author, Eugene Peterson, suggests clinical descriptions of resurrection life (as abstract concepts) fail to see the resurrection as an open door through which the risen Christ comes to us.

The life of the resurrected Jesus springs up in our midst; in the places we live and work, where we share food and journey with others.

The Risen Christ shares fresh perspective and joy with us in community.

His life emerges among people in unpredictable ways. It is confusing and bewildering – just as it was for those first disciples. The risen Jesus startled Mary and transformed her understanding – and he does the same with us.

Resurrection life is not an intellectual concept to be grasped, but joy to be lived.

This painting caught my attention for one other reason. As Mary turns around to look at Jesus, her gaze is caught in a moment as she is still turning to look at Jesus, and so she is looking straight out at us. Mary's gaze crosses the centuries, and by it she draws us into the story. Mary speaks to us.

Do you see what I see? The joy of the risen Lord?

Listen carefully.

Based on a Sermon Surprised at St John's in the City,
Wellington 16th April 2017 Easter Sunday

Joy by Lynne Taylor

Joy sparked
Not by the object that I hold
But by the memories that imbue it

Joy
Joy nourished
Not by the more, nor the less
But by gratitude:
for goodness, for grace

Joy
Joy practised
Recognised,
valued,
nurtured
and named

Joy
Joy embraced
As resistance against despair
As connection with others
As beyond-self-ness

Joy
Strengthening
Transforming
Enjoyed

Dancing the Tango An Invitation from God? by Christeen McKay

Early in 2018 I planned a trip overseas which included a stop-over in Buenos Aires. Well, what choice did I have? Before leaving on my journey I sought lessons in learning to dance the Tango and was fortunate enough to find a teacher who was wonderfully expert in the practice and execution of this dance style. Little did I realise it would be such a joyful experience and that for me it would become a metaphor for connecting with the Divine.

The Tango, although it's usually performed with other couples in a town square or dance hall, is very much a partnered dance in which each person in a couple is intensely focused on the other – almost to the exclusion of those around.

I must add that it's a dance with no political correctness for this day and age. The man takes the lead almost entirely by initiating each move and it is for the woman to follow her partner and respond to every shift in the changing motion of each step.

Dancing the Tango is far from methodically learning a sequence of steps and moving in a set direction – as you might do when learning to Waltz or Foxtrot (now I'm showing my age!). There's no prescribed routine so it's impossible to dance the Tango with a memorized map in your head of where you should be going – forward, backward, in a circle, to the right or left – this dance can take you anywhere your partner wills.

...a wonderful invitation into the
even greater joy of moving in
unison with the Living One

As you begin, the main requirement and indeed the essence of Tango is a focused awareness of and tuning in to your partner so you can respond to the subtlety of his movements – his prompts and pauses.

When you begin the Tango, you map yourself to each other's body – not by physically clinging but by connecting through a focused awareness of the other from the centre of your being. Physical contact is with your hands and arms and perhaps your cheek – but space is held between your bodies to give some freedom of movement within the embrace.

Because the Tango can go in any direction, you need to remain open and poised, ready to yield to your partner's lead – not in a push / pull way – but by sensing and responding to subtle invitations to move one way or the other. All the impetus springs from this felt sense of tension between your bodies and a sustained tuning in to every slight shift within that space.



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I found that when I stopped trying to anticipate moves, stopped trying to go in my own direction or be concerned with doing it right, when I lost my self-consciousness and trusted my partner and the connection between us, I began to move effortlessly and dance beyond my own capacity.

Now I have moments of joy when I lose myself in this dance, swept along in the moment of the movement, my one concentrated focus – an open and instant responsiveness to my partner.

Moving in unison with someone you trust is joyful in itself, but even more, it can be a wonderful invitation into the even greater joy of moving in unison with the Living One. Which, even when that happens for a nanosecond, is wordless delight!

Now my lessons in dancing the Tango have become a type of joyful prayer of self-forgetting, trusting my partner enough to let go and enter the flow of movement.

Dancing with Joy

by Margaret Gwynn

Dancing has been a profound part of my spiritual journey.

My very first encounter with Spiritual Growth Ministries led to a discovery of simple gestures to express my feelings, my hopes, my fears. Encouraged by Sister Mary Concannon to explore this further, I began to dance on retreats. I even introduced dance to a rather surprised Anglican church.

When I realised I'd have to leave the church, I grieved this sort of dancing would come to an end. But I'd already been provided with an alternative – a simple form of dance known as circle dancing.

I've been teaching circle dancing for almost thirty years now, yet I still feel a bit nervous as the time comes to share the evening's chosen dances. Will the other dancers enjoy what I have to offer? Will they manage the steps?

Many in the group are older, some with hip replacements. I must teach alternatives to grapevines and quick turns. As we settle into each dance, I watch the intent faces. I notice how the circle gently holds variations as feet get muddled.

In the second part of the evening, we turn to more meditative dances, using only candlelight, casting our shadows on the ceiling.

Now I can close my eyes, trust to the handhold on either side, feel in my body the gentle sway of the rhythm of the dance. At these moments, I understand what Rumi meant when he wrote:

'When you do something from your Soul

You feel a river moving in you, a Joy.'



A Story

by Helen Bathurst

Once upon a time a little boy called Pauly lived with his wise old grandfather and his Uncle Joshua in a small bach not far from a creek.

One day Pauly decided he wanted to know what joy was and set out to find it.

Joshua was doing some baking and had just finished decorating a pavlova. It had a crisp outside with light marshmallow inside, piled high with whipped cream and finished off with strawberries and kiwifruit. 'Oh yum,' thought Pauly, 'that looks delicious, that will bring me joy.' Pauly took the pavlova outside to his favourite spot, sat down and began to eat. At first, he enjoyed the pavlova very much, but as he ate more and more his tummy began to hurt and he didn't feel so happy.

He went back inside to his wise old grandfather.

'Grandad,' he said, 'I wanted to feel joy, so I ate Joshua's pavlova and now I feel sick, which makes me unhappy.'

'That was happiness you felt, when you ate the pavlova,' said the grandfather. 'Happiness comes and goes but joy is lasting.' He took Pauly onto his lap and gave him a big hug.

Another day dawned warm and bright and Pauly set out on his quest for joy again. That day he went down to the creek where there was a rope swing over the water. 'Maybe I'll find joy here,' he thought. There were some other children at the swimming hole in the creek taking turns swinging out on the rope and letting themselves drop into the water. Pauly joined in and enjoyed the sensations of swinging through the air. But soon a southerly storm came through and the weather turned very cold. Pauly was blue and shivering by the time he got home.

'Grandad,' he said. 'I wanted to feel joy, so I played on the rope swing. But now I feel cold and shivery, which makes me unhappy.'

'That was happiness you felt as you swung out over the swimming hole,' said his grandfather. 'Happiness comes and goes but joy is lasting.' And he dried Pauly off, helped him into warm, dry clothes and gave him hot chocolate to drink.

Another day came along and Pauly decided to continue his search for joy.

Rain was lashing at the windows and outside trees were swaying in the wind. Joshua was busy in his workshop and Grandad had gone to town, so Pauly found his favourite book and snuggled up in his favourite arm chair. He read all day until the book was finished.

It was a jolt to come back to the stormy day after having been on the beach in the sun with the characters in the book. Pauly went to find Grandad.

'Grandad,' he said. 'I wanted to feel joy, so I read my favourite book. But now I've finished it I feel bored and shut indoors, which makes me unhappy.'

'That was happiness you felt as you enjoyed your favourite book,' said the grandfather. 'Happiness comes and goes but joy is lasting. Come, lets play a game.' So, he and Pauly played Ludo until tea time.

Another day came which was sunny and warm. Pauly decided not to go looking for joy, instead he went and sat on a big rock overlooking the creek. He did some thinking and he thought and thought and thought. 'Happiness is not joy,' he thought. 'Happiness comes and goes but joy is lasting. What is lasting? – I know! Grandad's love!'

Pauly ran inside to Grandad. 'Grandad,' he called, 'I know what joy is!'

'Tell me about it,' said Grandad.

'Joy is knowing I belong to you and you love me.'

'Yes,' said the wise old Grandfather. 'Joy is knowing who you are and where you belong. You belong here with me, with Joshua and with my Spirit. You are mine and I am yours. We all love you.' And they all had a great big family hug.

'Happiness comes
and goes but joy
is lasting.'

Joy is bent

Ana Lisa de Jong

I'm good at pretending,
and so are we all.

But joy is bent,
and love oftentimes a strident noise,

of notes played off-key in
inexpert hands.

Yes, joy is bent,
not perfect,

or it could not be
in the relief

of a softened gaze
after a sharp retort,

or in the small crises that teach us
how love is forged through tears and smiles.

The touch that says,
'we start again',

that those we bruise and hurt
we kiss and heal.

For joy is bent
so that it returns again

and love is learned
that even those that feel the deepest

must learn to develop
the means of expression.

And even then,
love will sometimes hit a strident note

as a flute at the lips of one
still learning its art.

Yes, we're good at pretending
that all's well and together

when in truth all is broken
and re-mended.

And love both the calm before a storm
and the sun that shines after rain.

Yes, joy is bent
that it returns again.

Living Tree Poetry
December 2018

Joy-givers

by Lesley Ayers

In the current craze for decluttering our homes the method, according to Marie Kondo, is to take out items, ask if they bring us joy, and if not, out they go. This seems to be effective for people, but the kind of joy my belongings bring to me, is a very shallow image of the joy I've known.

For me, finding that other kind of joy can be a daily experience, and the 'method' is simple.

Or it can be an out of the blue, well beyond human understanding, experience.

First, picture me as a cartoon character with a large thought bubble above my head. Sometimes that bubble will be swirling full of heavy cares and concerns that are:

- 1) Global – the state of the world...or
- 2) Local - state of the nation...or
- 3) Personal - state of health, family, friends...or
- 4) Just plain tired and grumpy thoughts

In the morning I head out the door, walk down the lane, go down some steps and arrive at the start of the bush walk.

I hear some busy, quiet chatter in the nearby trees, and suddenly – here it comes, swooping and flitting and nearly tripping me up. The fantail lands on a low branch, tilts its head and eyeballs me. I tell it what a lovely little creature it is, and my thought bubble becomes bright with joy.

I walk on, being first to make a track through the morning dew and feel the wonder of yet another new day as gift – joy!

Sun warmth filters through the leaves, caressing my bare arms; tui chime clear notes; quail babies, a mass of fluffy little balls from the nursery, scurry across my path to safety. Sometimes a shining cuckoo sings – joy.

Yes, the concerns still take their place in my thought bubble when the walk finishes, but I have a new perspective, and a new hope. And I'm definitely not grumpy.

Then, there is another time, another place, where joy found me.

It was three decades ago, and a few weeks after my mother died. I was in the garden, hanging out the washing. Suddenly there came a sound – one no earthly words can adequately describe.

The sound shimmered like silver – like the tinkling of crystals, and all I knew was that its content was pure, delighting, joy. The other thing I knew, without doubt, is that it was somehow connected with my mother. To me it was an assurance of heaven. This

memory is as clear today as it was then.

I heard the sound one more time, when a close friend died, after a long illness. There were the ethereal, joy-filled sounds and a deep reassurance.

Both times it was unexpected, unlooked for.

Many people close to me have died since that time, but I have never heard it again.

What I've learned is that my joy can come in a walk down the road, in the beauty and delight of nature, or it can come in a totally supernatural moment, when the lines between this world and the world of the spirit are momentarily lifted.

What I do know is that the originator of soul-filling joy is the Lord of both heaven and earth. And that is – literally – awesome!

Joy can't be removed, stolen

by Anna Johnstone

Psalm 86:4 Give me happiness, O Lord, for I worship only you.

This made me stop
happiness sounds a bit frivolous
a bit here-today-gone-tomorrow
I'd rather ask for joy
but actually, I don't have to ask
it's mine already
A gift from the Three of you
placed deep within
like hidden treasure
Discovery can be anytime
It keeps revealing itself
at odd moments which
light up my life
drawing me deeper
into your heart
sealing me forever
in the mystery
called Love

Then I read this from Eckhart Tolle, The Power of NOW:

Things and conditions can give you pleasure, but they will also give you pain. Things and conditions can give you pleasure, but they cannot give you joy. Nothing can give you joy. Joy is uncaused and arises from within as the joy of Being. It is an essential part of the inner state of peace, the state that has been called the peace of God. It is your natural state, not something you need to work hard for or to struggle to attain.

Joy

by Anna Johnstone

Not some here-today, gone-tomorrow
cheaply-come-by commodity
Rather, the deepest of deep wells
its source going back forever
back before time began

My mind tries to picture
no-time, nothingness
emptiness

But instead, sees only
the Three of you
in radiant wonder
perfect harmony
glorious light

You could have stayed
like that forever
so beautiful your unity
but the urge to share it
was too strong

The amazing plans
began and that
which was not
began to be

Then you, Christos
from your heart
breathed joy over
every single newness
so that the Trinity's life-flame
became the free-gift
to your complete
creation

And still to us
today
Joy

The Joy of the Lord is Our Strength

by Jo Anastasiadis

Nehemiah said, 'The Joy of the Lord is your strength' (Nehemiah 8:10)

I wonder how you react to this verse. Mine included: whose joy are we talking about – God's or mine? How might 'joy' give me strength? Indeed, what's meant by 'strength'? And I recalled a time when joy was very hard to find because my world felt so dark. Then the word 'joy' only brought out a sense of lack.

So I invite you to ponder God's invitation in these words with hesitation.

In context: Israel, led by Nehemiah, recently returns from exile and rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem under difficult circumstances. The Law of Moses is explained to the people by the Levites. Their response is worship and weeping. We're not told why they mourn, but whatever the reason, Nehemiah encourages them to lay aside grief and see the day as sacred – to notice that the joy of the Lord is their strength. And celebrate – because now they understand God's words!

I wonder how joy can be our strength.

How was 'the joy of the Lord' Israel's strength in Nehemiah's setting? Maybe it was literal. They'd rebuilt Jerusalem's walls in only fifty-two days! Four kilometres in diameter, roughly twelve metres high and two and a half meters thick. (In the 1500's, it would take the Ottoman Empire four years to complete the same task!) Did their joy that God brought them back to Jerusalem from exile, give Israel extra physical strength to complete the wall combined with God's miraculous help?

Or was Nehemiah reminding them that while much was still not as they'd like, God had proven God could help them go forward – even in the face of considerable opposition? So, looking back on the joy of God in their lives could help them find strength to go forward again!

What about the joy of the Lord in my own life?

What joy do I have in God? For me, 'the joy of the Lord' reminds me of moments a smile lights up my face as I connect with God. Or joy ignited by delight in a radiant sunset, birds singing, rainbows, monarch butterflies, an idea for a retreat, encouragement from God through a sermon or friend, a time of play. The joy of seeing my two-year-old granddaughter's life, energy, total freedom and trust as she explores the world – knowing she's loved and cared for. Yes, I find strength in the joy of reconnecting with God, and in the re-creation of a soul lifted by goodness and beauty.

Then there's more grassroots joy: I rejoice that God brought salvation into my life; indeed, into all our lives. I would not want to journey alone! God's forgiveness gives me strength to get up and try again. The joy of spending time with God grows our relationship and deepens my sense of a solid place of belonging from which to move.

And what about the joy that's housed in hope? The hope in God's promise that all things work together for the good of God's people. This joy gives me strength to face into my difficult and painful spaces.

So, what joys take you to God? What is it about your relationship with God that you take joy in?

Or do you perhaps feel as I once did, sad or even resentful that joy seems like a foreign word and far from your current reality. If you are in that space, I'd like to gently lay before you that Israel didn't push down their grief or try to ignore it. Yes, they did lay it aside for a time so they could celebrate what God had done – but in the next chapter – they do mourn. I hope you'll hear in this reflection an invitation to hold your reality in gentle hands – just as it is. And to remember the good God has already brought into your life – difficult though it may be to celebrate in the midst of winter.

But are Nehemiah's words meant to be limited to our joy? What of God's joy?

Wouldn't God have been joyful too at the return of God's people and the completion of such a monumental task? Where does God's joy fit in? What brings God joy and how can God's joy give us strength?

looking back on the joy of God in their lives could help them find strength to go forward again!

Zephaniah 3:17 reminds us, 'The Lord rejoices over us with singing'. Pause for a moment and really think about this. Can you imagine God, your heavenly Parent, holding you and swinging you around, smiling; laughing with delight that you are God's child? Can you believe that They – Parent, Son and Spirit – love you? Delight so very, very much in who you are – that you are this person They created? Taking joy in you just as you are?

If you're anything like me this is where your 'buts' surface: but I'm not... I should be... I can't... I don't... BUT, ACTUALLY none of these matters where God's love is concerned. It was while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Romans 8:5) – the ultimate expression of love. And 'how great is the love God has lavished on us that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!' (1 John 3:1)

Meister Eckhart talks about us being created out of the laughter of the Trinity. Imagine the joy as the Trinity come together in laughter and say 'Let's create ... [put your name in here]. Let's create [your name] with all the abilities that you have and your particular combination of looks, personality, gifts and talents, strengths ... and weaknesses'.

I heard Joy Cowley say something that challenged my perception of weaknesses: 'Celebrate your imperfection. Every weakness is attached to a strength. If we got rid of the weakness, we'd also lose the strength. We project both our weaknesses and our strengths. What we admire in another could well be our strength in potential embryonic stage. You can't get rid of your weakness, but you can celebrate your strength that's born of your weakness.'

One weakness of mine seemed to have no possibility of strength. As a child I was teased for being 'too sensitive'. I spent years trying to suppress it. (Unsuccessfully I might add.) God has since shown me that my sensitivity is actually God given. It helps me better hear another's story, and empathise more with others – two qualities that are, not surprisingly, helpful for a spiritual director. I can now say what I thought of as a weakness, God has shown me is actually gift; something the Trinity 'laughed with joy about' as They created me.

I wonder what comes to mind for you as you think of 'weakness'? I wonder what strength God sees can come out of it? God's joy and love in you is part of your strength.

And finally, there's the joy set before Christ as He moved towards the Cross (Hebrews 12:2). This joy gave Jesus strength to face the journey to Jerusalem: joy at returning soon to the Father He loved so much, and joy more people would soon be restored into relationship with God. The joy of the Lord is redeeming people: 'Rejoice with Me, for I have found My sheep which was lost!' (Luke 15)

In John 15, Jesus talked about His joy being wrapped up in His love of the Father, the Father's love of Him, and Jesus' love of His disciples, which includes us. Jesus wants us to know and live out of this love, so that our own joy might be complete.

So, I invite you to consider: what of 'the Joy of the Lord' is God inviting you to carry with you? And how might this joy be your strength?

Joy's way by Ana Lisa de Jong

I wrap joy around me today,
as a talisman.
A cloak of entitlement worn
to claim my place here,
to gird my strength.

Joy, which is not a reward
for good labour,
or questions answered right -
but a first port of call,
a threshold from which I step.

A river into which I merge.
Feel the rocks and follow.
Determine the clear path,
and like the current,
learn to flow.

And all that would disturb me
I move through
as though co-cooned,
white noise like the rush of rapids,
water vapour above the stream.

Yes, I wrap joy around me,
more than a fleeting gift,
or a prize to retrieve at the end,
but a garment of endless praise,
a way to meet the day.

Ana Lisa de Jong
Living Tree Poetry
February 2018

'The joy of the Lord is your strength'
Nehemiah 8:10

Elixir for the Soul by Val Roberts

Joy comes to me
Like shimmering bubbles
Sent by the Spirit,
A baby's laughter
A butterfly flitting by
A friend's unexpected gift
Light rain on my face
Wild blackberries for picking
Music that twirls my heart
An epiphany in the night

Joy resides in me
Like an anchor of deep knowing
A grounding ancestral drumbeat
An unsung song stirring
Sap rising in branches
Gratitude infusing my veins
Sun waking each morning
Evening call of wild geese
Creative seeds germinating
God's DNA grafted into mine



© Martin Stewart



We do not worship Jesus alone

by Chris Green

We do not worship Jesus alone. Odd as that may sound, it is true in at least two senses.

First, worship is always necessarily a shared, corporate event, an event which happens whether we join in or not.

Second – we never, ever initiate it.

From eternity to eternity, God is delighting in God, making room in his time for us to enter the celebration. So, when we turn our hearts toward God in praise, we find the saints and the angels, the heavens and all the works of God's hands, have already beaten us to it. They are long since caught up in enjoying God's delight in God – and they welcome us to the party!

But it's the second understanding that's difficult to hear, of course. No doubt you've already thought of the obvious objection: Jesus is God, and God is to be worshipped; therefore, we should worship Jesus.

Yes, of course, all that's true. But we worship Jesus with and in the Father and the Spirit – not apart from them. Notice, everything depends on that last word: we do not worship Jesus 'alone'.

Jesus is not the end, the goal, of our worship. He is, as he himself said, 'the way' to God. Jesus, we might say, doesn't want us to stop with him. He wants to lead us in the Spirit into the Father's embrace.

The wonder of the Gospel is this: God would rather not be God at all than to be God without us. That's why he makes time for us, creating room in his life for us to dwell.

God makes his home in us and we make our home in God so that we find ourselves in him in the same way that he finds himself in Jesus.

As Rowan Williams reflected on the poems of St John of the Cross, 'The Son is not only the cause of the Father's joy in himself; he's the potential cause of joy in other beings. The Father – rejoicing in the Son – envisages beings who can participate in the Son's life and status, and can receive the same gift that the Father gives the Son eternally. Again, the Father desires that the Son be loved by others than himself, others who'll learn to rejoice in the miracle of the Father's self-bestowal to the Son.

Just so, the Father pours out the Spirit on all flesh.

God's delight in God turns out to be the same as God's delight in us. This is why our delight in God can be translated into joy for God as well.

Jesus can do nothing on his own.

As you've probably noticed, as often as not our sermons and songs suggest that we worship Jesus in isolation from the Father and the Spirit. (I'll refrain from citing examples, for obvious reasons, but Lester Ruth's research of contemporary worship music shows that our music simply never refers to God as Trinity, and only rarely refers to all three persons. Often, the songs are addressed either to the Father, to Jesus, or to the Spirit individually.)

But the truth is that Jesus simply isn't himself apart from the Father and the Holy Spirit. If you were to take away the Father and the Spirit, you would have necessarily taken away Jesus, as well. There's nothing to Jesus but his Spirit, his love for the Father. And there is nothing to the Father but his Spirit, his love for the Son. And there is nothing to the Spirit but the love the Father and Son share.

God simply is the joyful relation of these three 'persons.'

It's not as if there are three individuals, each God, living separate lives, who then decide to be in relation with one another. No, God simply is the joyful relation of these three 'persons.' To call Jesus 'God' then, is to say he fully shares the divine nature, and that means he is to be worshipped with the Father and the Spirit.

Jesus made this intimacy and submission to the Father clear, again and again.

'Whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.' 'There is none good but God.' 'Have faith in God.' 'The Father is greater than I.' 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.'

We can't remind ourselves too often that Jesus prayed, a practice that reveals how even as God – he lived in the need of God. On the cross, even while he himself felt abandoned, he abandoned himself completely to the transcendent source he called Abba: 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.'

Perhaps most startling of all are Jesus' words, repeated three times in John's Gospel: 'I can do nothing on my own.' What could this mean?

If Jesus is fully divine, as we confess that he is, how is it he can do nothing on his own?

Some have read this to mean that Jesus 'gave up' his divinity so he could live a fully human life in dependence on the Spirit. But the truth is he didn't need to lay aside his divinity – as if this were something he could do anyway – in order to take up humanity as his own.

In God's wisdom, the divine and the human are compatible with each other. So, Jesus' humanity is not at odds with his divinity, and his life is one with the Father's and the Spirit's.

What the Father does, the Son and Spirit do. What the Spirit does, the Father and the Son do. What Jesus does, the Father and the Spirit do. There are distinctions in their shared work, but never separation or division. That is what Jesus means when he says he can do nothing on his own.

Worshipping the One God

It's worth reiterating at this point that we worship not three gods, either individually or as a group, but one God in three persons. The God who is personal is the God who has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Spirit. And his tri-personal work is indivisible. In other words, it's not as if Jesus does some of the Father's work, and the Spirit the rest! We do not worship the Father for creating, the Son for redeeming, and the Spirit for consummating. Creation is the work of the one God in that all things are from the Father, through and for the Son, and in and by the Spirit. And the same goes for redemption and consummation. To see Jesus is to see the Father. To be filled with the Spirit is to have the Father and the Son make their home in you.

Thankfully, Jesus won't allow us to fixate on him. He lives for the Father's glory. And we can't fixate on the Spirit, either, because he does not speak of himself, but witnesses to the Son, always only speaking the Father's word about the Word. Even the Father will

not let himself be the terminus of our delight. He deflects our attention back to Jesus. In short, then, the one God is so humble, so gracious, that his life is an event of eternal deferral, each "person" delighting in and preferring the others.

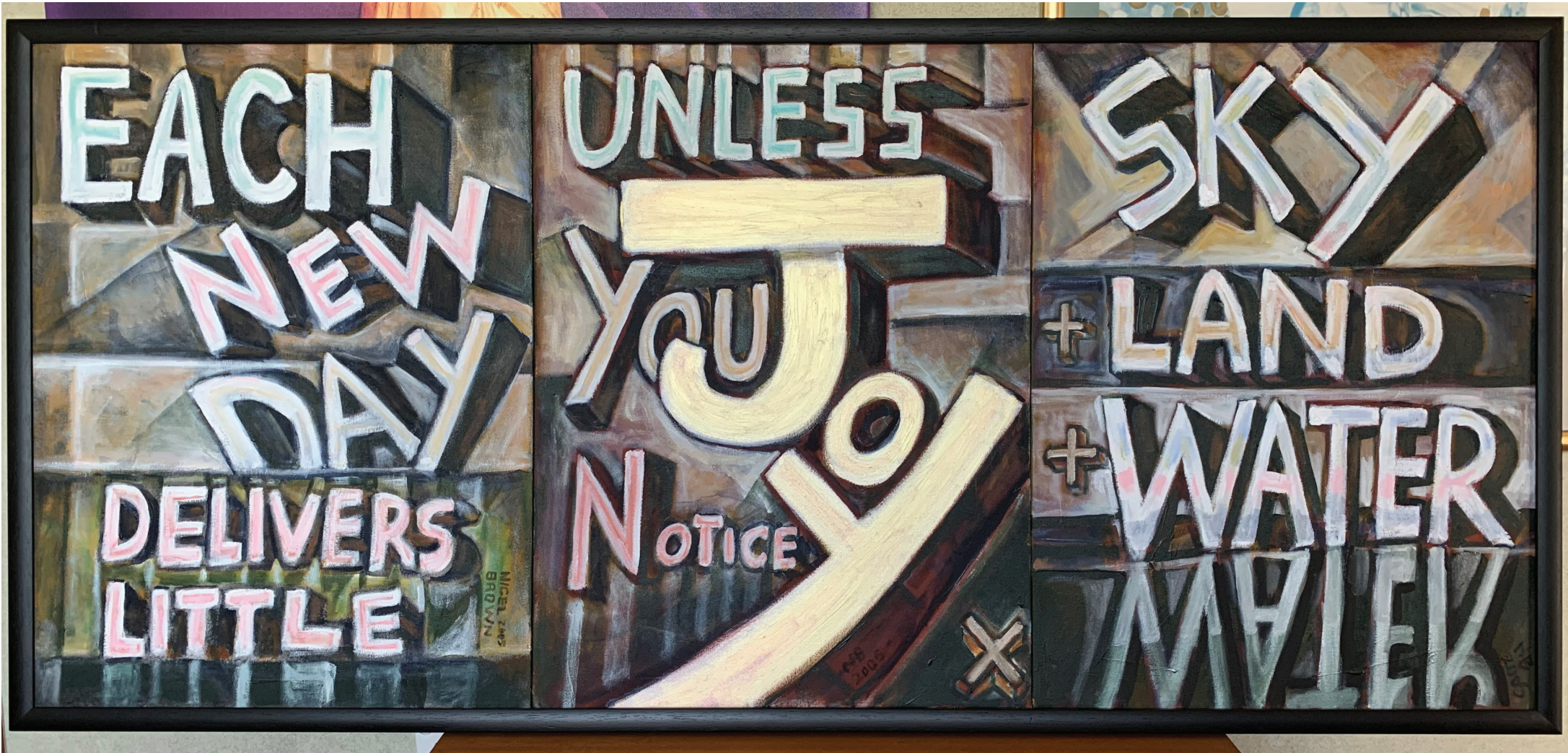
Rublev's Trinity icon (pictured above) captures this dynamic perfectly. If we look at the Spirit's face (the figure on the right), we see his eyes are on the chalice in the centre of the table. We then follow Christ's hand up to his face and see that he is gazing into the Father's eyes. Looking at the Father, we have our attention turned back to the Son, and then to the Eucharist, and then to the Spirit, where the circuit begins again. In the end, then, we do not worship Jesus full stop. We worship God in him and through him. We can do that because the Spirit, in the Father's kindness, leads us to the Son, who welcomes us into his delight in the Father. In Christ, we can offer our praise to the source of our being. Just that is our fulfilment. We are finally fully ourselves as we are caught up in God. This is what it means to live a Spirited life, a life baptized in the Spirit: Jesus makes room in his eternal intimacy with the Father for us, so that we can trust in God in the same way that he did and does. He lived the divine life humanly so that we can live the human life divinely.

And so we, with all the saints and angels, are freed to sing (a song of St Francis):

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty,
Who is and who was and who is to come.
Let us praise and exalt him above all for ever.
Worthy are you, O Lord our God, to receive praise, glory, honour, and blessing.
Let us praise and exalt him above all for ever.
Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and divinity,
wisdom and strength, honour, glory, and blessing.
Let us praise and exalt him above all for ever.

Let us bless the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Let us praise and exalt him above all for ever.
All the works of the Lord, now bless the Lord.
Let us praise and exalt him above all for ever.
Praise God, all of you his servants, and you that fear him, both small and great.
Let us praise and exalt him above all for ever.
Let Heaven and Earth praise his glory,
and every creature that is in Heaven, and on Earth, and under the Earth.
Let us praise and exalt him above all for ever.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.
Amen.

Chris Green recent book *Surprised by God: How and Why What We Think About the Divine Matters* can be found on Amazon.



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Instructing myself in joy

by Paul Fromont

Over Christmas I was reading one of Louise Penny's delightfully life-affirming novels, *Dead Cold*, the second in her series of novels featuring Chief Inspector Amand Gamache, of the Sûreté du Québec. Gamache was telling a woman of an experience, an encounter, with a man he felt was God incarnate. And 'what did God do?' Emilie asked, her voice hushed, '...he turned back to me with the most radiant smile I'd ever seen', Gamache responded, 'I was filled with joy.'

Yet, 'joy' is a word I don't hear very often. It's a feeling or experience I'm not particularly aware of in my own life. If you'd asked me last year how I'd explain or describe what joy was, I wouldn't have been entirely sure. I almost never use the word joy to describe what I'm feeling. But, ironically, I can tell when I've lost my joy, when I'm feeling flat and joyless.

The NIV version of Galatians 5:22 – nestled in a chapter that contrasts 'the fruit of the Spirit' and 'the acts of the flesh' – reads: '...but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness...'. Eugene Peterson's contemporary translation doesn't include the word 'joy' at all. Instead, he prefers to draw a contrast between living 'God's way', a 'free life', and the 'compulsions of selfishness'.

Peterson begins with a question, '...but what happens when we live in God's way?' and then responds: 'He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way fruit appears in an orchard – things like affection for others'. Instead of the word 'joy', he uses this phrase: 'exuberance about life'. Clearly Peterson sees a link between joy and exuberance, and an orientation toward *life*.

Reading the passage again, I wondered, 'how often am I exuberant about life?' 'Do I live exuberantly? How free am I? How often am I 'full of energy, excitement, and cheerfulness'? Not often, I had to admit.

As far as I know, I'm healthy. I live in the presence of so much beauty. I have a roof over my head and food on my table. The most wonderful woman I know loves me and is my wife. I have five children, all loved by me. I have a rich and diverse circle of close friends. I have a job. Books, music and films surround me. I have so much, and while I'll admit to having a strong melancholic leaning, I'm also deeply aware that I don't often feel joyful, exuberant, and full of energy and life.

Most often, it seems to me 'happiness' serves, in popular parlance, as a synonym for 'joy'. This is especially true in the language of popular psychology. Similarly, 'pleasure' is often linked with 'happiness'. I'm encouraged to pursue happiness and pleasure. I'm told 'happiness and emotional fulfillment are within my grasp'. Happiness is the result of cultivating 'daily habits', like self-acceptance, ensuring I'm around others who make me smile, imagining what I really want and seeing myself get it, doing things I love, and contributing to the well-being of humanity.

All good, in and of themselves, but I don't feel these habits touching the deep questions in my life – about what it means to be a human being, what it means to be alive, what it means to be psychologically free, and what it feels like to be joyful, caught up in the wonder, delight, and the energy of life, even when life is difficult.¹

I feel myself in a dilemma – one given expression by Indian Jesuit priest, Anthony de Mello. So many of us, he wrote, are 'crazy...living on crazy ideas about love, about happiness, about joy, about everything.'²

I struggle. I compare myself, and what I have, to others. I sense I'm caught up in so much that is shallow and superficial. I feel I'm tangled up in ideas, ideas that while I mightn't affix the adjective 'crazy' to them, don't seem to get me closer to feeling deeply joyful, to realising in my life what Brother David Steindl-Rast describes as 'that extraordinary happiness that is independent of what happens to [me].'

Happiness, or unhappiness always feel fleeting to me, and invariably linked to – or dependent upon – what's happening in my life. One moment I feel happy. The next I don't. It's frustrating for me and for the important others in my life. Joy, by way of comparison to happiness, has been defined as 'happiness that lasts'³. St. Ignatius of Loyola might call it a 'permanent disposition of the heart'.

Reading Thomas Merton, I'm reminded I wasn't 'created for pleasure'. I was created for joy

Reading Thomas Merton, I'm reminded I wasn't 'created for pleasure'. I was created for joy, and if I didn't know the difference between pleasure and joy then I'd 'not yet begun to live.' Somewhere else, I remembered him writing, that 'joy is the surest sign of the presence of God', or to quote Peterson again, joy is the result of living 'God's way', of living a 'free life', one 'animated' and empowered 'by God's Spirit.'

But, is joy something I can nurture in my own life?

Christianly speaking, joy is a 'fruit' of a life lived God's way; a life lived exuberantly by means of God's empowering presence, the Holy Spirit. Joy is the result of the overflowing of Jesus' life in me. I'm also discovering that there's a strong relationship between joyfulness and *gratefulness*.

Joy flows from what David Steindl-Rast calls 'grateful living'. Gratefulness, he writes, is 'the root of joy', but adds, 'we tend to misunderstand the link between joy and gratefulness. We notice joyful people are grateful and we suppose that they're grateful for their joy. But the reverse is true: their joy springs from gratefulness. If one has all

1 Thinking of the opening sentence of M. Scott Peck's book *The Road Less Travelled: A New Psychology of Love, Vales, and Spiritual Growth*.

2 Anthony de Mello (2011). *Awareness: Conversations with the Masters*, p.14. Image.

3 David Steindl-Rast OSB.

the good luck in the world, but takes it for granted, it will not give one joy. Yet even bad luck will give joy to those who manage to be grateful for it. We hold the key to lasting happiness in our own hands. For it is not joy that makes us grateful; it's gratitude that makes us joyful.⁴

When I'm honest with myself, I recognise that gratefulness, like joy, is not the bedrock upon which my life is lived. But the link between the two of them is clearer for me now than at any other time in my life. Gratefulness is a *need*, the need of a life – my life – that so often runs the risk of slipping through my fingers unappreciated.

In opening the door to love, surprise, wonder⁵ and gratitude, I'm increasingly learning how to 'find God in all things', and how to receive that *finding* as a means of nourishing in me – a disposition of gratefulness in all things. Again, Anthony de Mello has been helpful to me. He reflects that, 'when the eye is unobstructed, the result is sight. When the ear is unobstructed, the result is hearing. When the mind is unobstructed, the result is truth. When the heart is unobstructed, the result is **joy** and love.'⁶

So, at the start of 2019, accepting the links between gratefulness and joy, I've asked for grace⁷, and I'll continue to ask for it, the grace of humility, the grace to partner with the Spirit in healing the obstructions of my heart, and the grace to respond with gratefulness to all the breath-by-breath experiences of being alive, both the good, and the seemingly not so good.

And more than the act of asking, I need practices of response in my life.

A number of years ago, Sheila Pritchard highlighted her practice of keeping *gratitude journals*⁸. And in the Ignatian spiritual tradition there's the daily practice of *Examen*⁹. Both help me to stay open, to notice and to respond to all of life with gratitude.

Another gratefulness practice is my nearly daily habit of slowing down, stopping, looking, seeing, and taking at least one photograph on my mobile phone. I then post that image to my *Instagram* account where it serves as a *visual* invitation to me to be grateful – for that momentary experience, that seeing, that feeling.

'Every day' she was alive, American poet Mary Oliver reflected that she saw or heard 'something that more or less [killed her] with delight', something by which she daily

instructed herself 'over and over in joy and acclamation.' She encourages us that 'there's always something, and it's a good way to live.'¹⁰ New Zealand painter, Nigel Brown, captures a very similar sentiment in his 2005 oil on acrylic triptych *Notice Joy*.

I wonder what practices might be helpful to you in allowing gratitude and the slow work of the Spirit to nourish within you a disposition of joy – 'that extraordinary happiness that is independent of what happens to you'?



Leunig

The long forgotten genius within;
The tender innocence beneath the skin,
Living like a pixie in the wild:
The soulful genius of every child
That calls the heart to be alone and rare
And rapturous and rather strange,
and dare
To sing the songs of joy into the land
And say the prayers that none
can understand
To ancestors, the blazing stars at night
Who gave you all this mystery and delight.

© Michael Leunig

4 David Steindl-Rast. *From Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer: And Approach to Life in Fullness* (Paulist Press, 1984).
5 'In moments of surprise', Steindl-Rast explains, 'we catch a glimpse of the joy to which gratefulness opens the door.'
6 Anthony de Mello (2012). *Rediscovering Life: Awaken to Reality*, p.34.
7 St. Ignatius of Loyola, recognizing our need for God's enabling in all things, itself a humble recognition, encourages us to ask for *grace*.
8 See her wise and gracious blog *Concentric Circles* - <http://sheilapritchard.blogspot.com/>
9 St. Ignatius believed gratitude was among the highest of virtues, while also recognizing that ingratitude was the root of all sin. Of most practical help to me in this practice is *Reimagining the Examen: Fresh Ways to Pray from Your Day* (Loyola Press, 2015). See especially his Examen 15, an Examen for Gratitude, pp. 38-39.
10 See her poem *Mindful* from her collection, *Why I Wake Early* (Beacon Press, 2005).

The joy of being who you are Holding the opposites in tension

by Susan Jones

for Transgender Day of Remembrance

Readings for the Gathering

Matthew 26: 36-39

³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' ³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.' ³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'

Contemporary reading from 'Jung and the New Age'

by David Tacey

But Jung argues that conventional religions morality has misread its own religious symbols. The way of Christ is not, he argues, a way that leads to the privileging of the light above the dark, but a radical way that leads to the integrative or both/and perspective. This is why Jung often argues that Christ is a symbol of the Self, namely, the archetype that leads to psychological integration and whose dynamic energies lead to 'wholeness'. For Jung, the symbol of Christ upon the Cross is a major world-symbol for the inevitable suffering that results from the human experience of being pulled in opposite directions, or from enduring the pain of the tension between the archetypal opposites.

The Reflection

I was thrilled to get an academic paper sent to me last week from Frances Bird. Frances has been awarded a PhD on her thesis on the Glamaphones!¹ She's also written a paper from the thesis specifically on the relationship between the choir and St Andrew's.²

¹ The Glamaphones are a Wellington gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, inter sex community SATB choir. They welcome anyone who wishes to sing. Their emphasis is on participation, inclusiveness and building our GLBTIQ community. The choir is in good health with nearly 60 members

² St Andrew's on the Terrace identifies as a vibrant, progressive and inclusive Presbyterian church in the heart of Wellington, a faith community committed to acting for a just and peaceful world.

Fascinating. Today, in just a few minutes, I want to bounce off one of the comments Frances quotes in her paper. It's about what we might call the elephant in the room – the great big cross at the front of the building!

Crosses aren't popular these days when waved by a conservative and domineering, abusive church. Yet they are popularly used on roadsides at crash sites. I've just been in Dunedin where 4,000 white crosses made by the local Menz Shed have been a feature of the armistice commemorations at the cenotaph. The triumphal use of the cross as a trademarked logo contrasts with this use of the cross as a symbol of sacrifice. But, suggests David Tacey in our contemporary reading, perhaps neither have it quite right. (David is a Jungian lecturer of English literature, now retired, but at one time lectured at La Trobe in Melbourne.)

The meaning to which Tacey refers is important today when we are enjoying having the Glamaphones with us and as we commemorate the struggle and, in too many cases, the deaths of transgendered people here and overseas.

Though this cross here at St Andrew's is larger than life and imposing, built in dark wood and shining with varnish, it is in fact an Iona cross. This echoes the spirituality of the Celts, an Earth-friendly, organic spirituality with a grounded, rooted quality. The circle at its centre symbolises wholeness – the completeness which comes when we achieve authenticity ourselves and in our relationships. A key word for a transgender day of any sort; *authenticity* is the ultimate goal in the search made through gender transition.

so the cross points us up
into joy and into light yet
remains rooted in reality.

The Christian cross is one of many examples of a tree of life. Like the more rooted and branched tree of life symbols you'll have seen, the cross connects earth and heaven – it keeps contact between our ordinary human lives here in the mud and glory of life with the joy and love and lightness associated with the word heavenly. Just as a little child sees Christmas lights going on and raises their hands in joy and wonder, so the cross points us up into joy and into light yet remains rooted in reality.

The horizontal bar of the cross is like arms stretched wide open in an accepting loving embrace, wide enough for the whole world to be included. But even more than a wide, loving embrace, the cross also can be seen as one person – Jesus the Christian example of this – stretching wide to hold the opposites of our life together. To keep the lovers and the haters in dialogue, to keep those who suffer in the circle, to keep male and female connected, for as a female makes the transition to male or a male to female, they find that still within is the Other. It isn't rejecting one for the other, but embracing each, though perhaps in a different proportion than before.

It's here our wholeness is forged. Here in the intersection of our groundedness and our lightness. Here in our holding together the inevitable opposites in our human existence. And the Iona cross gives us that symbol, above all cross shapes, with the circle of

tension and struggle right at the intersection of those continuums. And for some of us not only two continuums crossing each other here at the point of struggle, but multiple continuums – as we deal with being lover, sister, brother, wife, husband, colleague and friend and more...

Some suggest the circle at the heart of a Celtic cross comes from the pagan symbol of the sun god. Supremely, that suggests all our lives are crucibles in which we are being refined more and more into our true likeness, into wholeness and authenticity. For Christians, the cross is a reminder that Jesus knows about pain and struggle and is with us in solidarity in so many of the dark moments of our lives.

No wonder it's hard work sometimes simply being human, and even harder work transitioning our mode of being human – coming out – and being true to yourself.

And it's no wonder life expectancy for trans people can be as low as 35 years in the Americas, even worse if you are a person of colour.

For as we deal with all these changes and rearrangements and returns to ourselves we are 'making' ourselves, we are holding opposites together in tension.

Let us make that tension a loving, creative one so we can all grow from it.

When we do that we are doing God-work.

And, thank God, there are moments, sometimes even within the struggle, when we experience the joy of being fully alive because we have endured the struggle.

That's what Christianity is about, not triumphal waving of a dominating cross-symbol of pain and torture to keep victims down.

It's about a cross which shows us all standing tall and proud on this earth, holding opposites together in tension.

It's about loving ourselves as we are.

It's about loving others enough to die for the right – if needed – as Jesus died.

And for most of us, it's about living well here and now, so the right and the good, tolerance and justice, will flourish on the Earth for all of us.

St Andrew's on The Terrace, Wellington. Sunday, 18 November 2018

'I'm overjoyed you need my love.'

by Diane Gilliam-Weeks

It never occurred to me I might be ashamed of my own needs – until I was almost 70.

But the seed was planted. I'd fertilised the soil exercising unwise freedom. My need for God's presence and love was searing and painful and I felt that I'd blocked myself from it by my own hand – not that it wasn't there.

Worse – that somehow I didn't deserve it. Though I'd completely reject that possibility out of hand if anyone else said that about themselves.

I'm sitting on the couch looking out the window toward the mouth of the harbour beginning my contemplative work for the evening – and I think.

'I really NEED God's presence and love and I'm ashamed how much I need it. Ashamed to admit it – out loud like that – to myself and to God. Why?!!!! Such a sad thing for me to be afraid of – in light of God's love!'

The truth...rises like the sun into my consciousness...shining a light...

I'M AFRAID MY NEED MIGHT BE REJECTED. 'I' might be rejected. Disappeared. Pushed away.

To avoid that unbearable pain, have I rejected my own needs all this time? Better not to have any – better to look after the emotional needs of others.

Suddenly Jesus pops in behind me: 'I'm right here.'

Aware of my vulnerability and shame...I confess the depth and desperation of my need for him – for them – Creator, Spirit, Older Brother.

'I'm overjoyed you need my love.'

I rest against him. Holy relief floods my being. Jesus did not reject me even though I was thoroughly needy and ashamed of it.

'Everyone needs my presence and my love, Diane. Just to be alive at all and after that for wisdom and guidance. It would be good if everyone could recognise their need for me. The problem wasn't your needs, but the shame which made you hide them even from yourself. Take some time to know what they are.'

29th March, 2019

The horrific events in Christchurch on 15th March have had me reflecting on what I wrote below a month ago.

Can I still claim the above as true?

Does my sense of joy hold even in this experience? And I find the answer is 'YES!'

Actually, I find it even more true! For as I learned at a week-long seminar on the topic of evil: '*The Dark Flame*' - *Guild for Psychological Studies, San Francisco – 2000*:

**'In even the greatest good there lies the seed for evil;
and in even the darkest evil lies the seed for good.'**

Is this not what we have seen over the ensuing two weeks?

Discovering Joy

By Joy MacCormick

Joy – according to an old song is – 'Jesus first; Yourself last; and Others in between'.

How I hated that song!

My dictionary defines joy as 'a condition or deep feeling of pleasure or delight; happiness; gladness'.

Joy – a strange word with which, from time to time, I've had a precarious relationship.

Possibly because it's my given name. There have been times I knew in my deepest being the name didn't fit who and what I experienced myself to be.

As a teenager I remember asking my mother, 'Why on earth did you ever called me Joy?'

Her reply, 'Because you were – once!' haunted me until my late forties when I was helped to work through the related issues.

At one stage I even considered changing my name by deed poll. The only problem was – I had no idea what to change it to. Fortunately, over more recent years, I've been growing into it.

Another factor in my discomfort was that – until my mid- thirties – 'I'd never really accepted my humanity'. These words were revealed to me during a Eucharist where I prayed for healing after cancer. Those words, unspoken yet so clear, reverberated through my being – bearing undeniable truth.

I always had a strong sense of pre-existence; of having come reluctantly into this life from a place or state of absolute harmony, unity and peace. During that Eucharist, the realisation that being human meant not *separation* from God but sharing in the *being* of God who also became human – was for me the beginning not only of acceptance but of a sense of joy in the possibility of becoming Joy.

As I understand it now, joy is more than a transitory experience of 'pleasure; delight; happiness or gladness' but rather a deep underlying sense of being blessed - one which pervades all of life regardless of circumstances and which nothing and no-one can take away.

Blessed in being part of this amazing cosmos of life-giving energy and transformation at a time when we are privileged to be able to explore, see, and understand it in ways we have never been able to before. Blessed in being one with all that is - seen and unseen - for I share the same cosmic energy vibrating in every sub-atomic particle of my being.

This blessing is heightened in those occasional gifted moments of sheer ecstasy when I experience, once again, the 'home' I left behind – that total unity and harmony with everything. One with the birds gliding in the air as well as with the air supporting them; one with the ground or couch beneath me and with the clouds floating above; one with every colour, every sound (whether melodic or grating) and one with the stillness and the silence beyond them all.

One with every human being, even those I don't like.

Blessed being able to wonder what the energy that's now me was before it was me – and what it might become by further transformation when I leave this life. Blessed in the understanding that even the worst of the destruction wrought by humankind releases energy for transformation into something potentially life-giving and beyond our imagination.

My heart, on the surface, may be battered and bruised by the storms of news reports and the events of daily life, but those storms are unable to penetrate to the depths where deep calm prevails and I rejoice to sing and dance with folk like Gerard Manley Hopkins who, in his poem *God's Grandeur* (1877), reflects on the destruction of the environment before declaring:

'And for all this,
nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward springs -
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.'

Or with Julian of Norwich (1342-1416?) in the certainty that in spite of evidence to the contrary – ultimately:

'All shall be well; and all shall be well;
and all manner of thing shall be well.'
Is this what is meant by 'the joy of salvation'?

Joy Returns

By Barbara Sampson

Joy returns
after the quaking shaking breaking
not in great gushes
or bucket loads
but in gentle drops
like rain on newly sown carrot seeds
or tears of welcome over a new baby

Joy comes
just a glimpse
a glance
a sudden lifting of hope
like an old familiar friend
awaiting my return
even as I wait and long for her

Christchurch, December 2011

Guard my words as your most precious possession.

*Write them down, and also keep them
deep within your heart. Proverbs 7:2-3*

I touch these words tenderly
stroking them with love
Soft gold gentles my heart
as they invite themselves
deeper

A sigh breaks the silence
as peace weaves through me
the kiss of your presence
holying this moment
with joy's deep
stillness

Anna Johnstone

Unexpected joy

by Holly Walton

I brought communion to you
and this time you were awake for my visit.

Once upon a time you would have greeted me
at the door of a home filled with family.

You would have sat me down,
poured me tea.

Now home is your chair and
your door remains open. Public.

Resigned, you indicate a chair in the corner
with an unseeing glance.

It is hot and you are uncomfortable,
tugging at clothes chosen for you
when the day was still cool.

As the small talk around health and heat grows boring
we bow our heads.

The body of Christ given for you:
a small square of bread placed
carefully in your soft palm.

The blood of Christ shed for you:
my hand encircles your
crooked and bony fingers to
gingerly lift the cup to your lips.

Silence.

Holy Ground
where pain and life
and love and age
and death and resurrection
intersect.

Holy Ground
tinged with the first tell-tale
shimmers of hope
the celebration of life,
of faith
and the sharing of love.
Unexpected joy.

Awakened to joy

By Maggie Quinlan

O God, I have found joy!
It's been there all the time,
but it's taken a lifetime to realise it.

I am loved.

I am made in your image.
I gaze into your eyes and see it
-your absolute devotion to me;

Not just the good me,
But the one that fails and makes bad decisions.

There is forgiveness.
I don't need status, qualifications or achievements.

I am free to be what I was created to be.

I can let go of all my strivings,

And just enjoy You.

Live life to the full,

Whatever the circumstance.

You are my everything.

I wake up in the morning to a new dawn.
New things to learn.

The birds sing and I join them in their praise.
The river of your love bowls me over,
And I float in your arms.

I fly with the butterflies,
And swim with the dolphins.

I dance in the breeze,
And smell the perfume of the flowers.

I taste the sweetness of the honey,
And see your beauty in me and around me.

I am truly blessed.

I have eternity to embrace,
And to be embraced.

O, my Lord,

Everyone needs to know of this joy beyond measure.
Enable me to share it.

Breathe in Joy

by Lesley Ann Farmer

I was battling chronic insomnia. I was so frustrated, when praying, reading, counting backwards from 100, listening to praise and worship music all failed to induce sleep.

I suddenly discovered a new tool to relax.

I began by lying as relaxed as possible on the bed,
I focused on my breathing and began to
repeat the following in time to my breath in – and my breath out:

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| I breathe in the Holy Spirit | I breathe out every fear |
| I breathe in love | I breathe out hate |
| I breathe in contentment | I breathe out resentment |
| I breathe in peace | I breathe out busyness |
| I breathe in calm | I breathe out distraction |
| I breathe in stillness | I breathe out restlessness |
| I breathe in security | I breathe out fear |
| I breathe in kindness | I breathe out selfishness |
| I breathe in trust | I breathe out frustration |
| I breathe in joy | I breathe out sadness |

I breathe in the Holy Spirit, my healer, my teacher, my guide my strength, my JOY.
I surrender. I let go all control.
In you I entrust my life.

Dear Lord, fill each breath with your unquenchable love. Please let it saturate my every pore and every cell, my very DNA with your likeness, radiating your spirit in love, in peace and in Joy unshakeable.

Let the laughter come, saturated in joy and contentment.
Resting in your arms. My furrowed brow smoothed, at peace.
Just as I am, loved by you, just as I am.
Thank you, my dearest shepherd,
your clever potter's hands holding and molding me.

My rest, my peace, my soul's delight.
And here is the JOY inextinguishable, unshakeable....
flooding me.

My smile broadens and the joy bubbles over in childlike delight.
My spirit laughing, dancing in the dead of the night.
Now your perfect peace brings me sleep.

Psalm 58:11 Then everyone will at last know...

by Anna Johnstone

I take a deep sigh and imagine
the collective sigh of
this whole earth when
truth is known at last
by every single soul

Simultaneous opening
of eyes, of minds
of hearts

Darkness disappearing
light flooding in
bathing everything
and everyone with
head-to-toe joy

My insides are jumping
up and down
with excitement
at the thought of it

I can't wait and wonder
how you can, Holy Ones
If it does this to me
how on earth can
you stand it?

I'd be wanting to bring
forward the date
forget about waiting
any longer

Let's have Joy-day now

You just smile

I don't see you
rushing to give the signal
to get the final show
on the road

Patience, you whisper
not too long now

Stormy tears engulf me
then your comforting
Wait with me
gentles them

I'm stilled, wrapped in
the cosmos of heaven
alight with the presence
of Love

SGM News

One of the enjoyable things we do at SGM Workgroup meetings is toss around future topics for *Refresh*. Last year, Diane suggested 'Joy' for our 2019 Winter Edition – which we all enthusiastically affirmed.

Little did we know *Refresh* would go to print against the dreadful backdrop of the Christchurch and Sri Lanka terrorist attacks. At our March meeting – only one week after Christchurch – we had to consider how appropriate it was to continue with 'Joy'. However, in the spirit of the extraordinary way our whole country sought to respond to tragedy with love and peace – we are choosing in our small way, to ponder joy.

Isaiah poetically reminds us that we can find beauty instead of ashes, joy instead of mourning, and praise instead of despair. We cling to our contemplative practices of prayer, attentiveness, stillness, peacemaking, and looking for life and beauty in people and things about us.

Spiritual Growth Ministries has been rather busy this year offering various training events. In May, we held a week of Supervision training plus two Retreat Event training days under our new initiative *Behold*. In June, a day of Professional Development was held with Dr Peter Fitch called *Fully Alive*. We have over 40 people going through our *Spiritual Directors Formation Programme* from a wide mix of Christian traditions. We are so very blessed to have Fran Francis as the programme coordinator – ably assisted by David Crawley.

Speaking of 'staff', sadly our wonderful administrator Joanne Garton has decided it's time to step aside after seven years in this vital role. We'd love to hear from anyone with administration and financial skills who'd be interested in this work and ministry. Please do check out the www.sgm.org.nz or the advertisement in this *Refresh's* insert.

And so, in the preciousness and precariousness of life, we proudly offer you this edition on *Joy* and we especially thank you Diane for your editorial fabulousness.

May the Spirit of God enliven your reading and reflection everyone.

Warmly,

Jane Wilkinson (SGM Workgroup Convenor)



© Jamie Askham

Books

Finding Quiet: My Story of Overcoming Anxiety and the Practices that Brought Peace

by J. P. Moreland

Publisher: Zondervan (May 7, 2019)

In May 2003 prominent philosopher, author and professor J. P. Moreland awoke in the middle of the night to a severe panic attack. Though often anxious by temperament and upbringing, Moreland had never experienced such an incident before. Thus, began an extended battle with debilitating anxiety and depression.

More than a decade later, Moreland continues to manage mental illness. Yet along the way he's moved from shame and despair to vulnerability and hope. In *Finding Quiet* Moreland comes alongside fellow sufferers with encouragement and practical, hard-won advice. New Zealand is experiencing a mental health crisis. Our Directees and people in the pews are not immune. Moreland explores the spiritual and physical aspects of mental illness, pointing readers toward sound sources of information, treatment and recovery.

Bracing and honest, *Finding Quiet* will validate the experiences of people with mental illness, remind them they're not alone, and provide reassurance they can not only survive but thrive again.

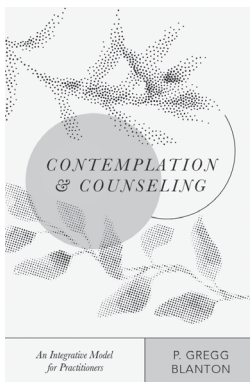
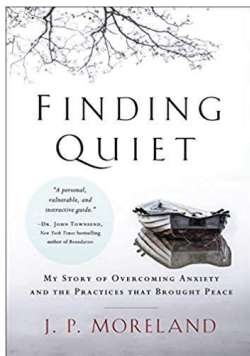
Contemplation and Counseling: An Integrative Model for Practitioners (Christian Association for Psychological Studies Books)

by P. Gregg Blanton

Publisher: IVP Academic (April 2, 2019)

Interest in mindfulness and contemplative thought is growing among Christians, and it's time to consider the place of contemplative prayer within the field of counseling. Can contemplative prayer be integrated into therapeutic work? Can it, in fact, serve as a foundation on which to build a new approach to counseling?

In *Contemplation and Counseling*, Gregg Blanton presents a new paradigm for integrating contemplative prayer with counseling practice. He contends that contemplative prayer can illuminate the purposes of counseling and suggests interventions that help us accomplish these goals. This paradigm builds an alliance between science, theology, and Christian contemplative thought to create a dynamic approach to counseling and balance various



dimensions of the human person: emotion, cognition, and action. And by recognizing the power of both words and silence, it harmonizes their functions.

Based on this integrative foundation, Blanton offers eleven fundamental interventions to fit the needs of clients (including silence, empathy, and teaching contemplative prayer) and a practical four-stage process for helping clients change, using examples from his own counseling experience and from the Bible. Ultimately, contemplative prayer leads us to the healing power of love. How we view our clients, the ways that we relate with them, and the strategies that we use to help them change are all informed by our loving search for God in contemplative prayer.

The Sacred Enneagram: Finding Your Unique Path to Spiritual Growth Kindle Edition

by Christopher L. Heuertz

Publisher: Zondervan (September 5, 2017)

How to understand the 'why' behind your enneagram type.

Far more than a personality test, Chris Heuertz writes, the enneagram is a sacred map to the soul. The enneagram offers a bright path to cutting through the internal clutter and finding our way back to God and to our true identity as God created us.

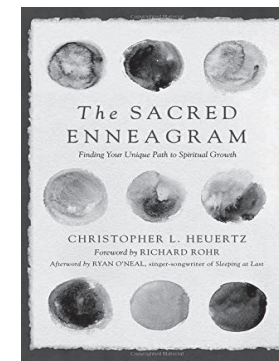
Chris Heuertz' life was forever changed after he learned about the enneagram 15 years ago. Since then he's trained under some of the great living enneagram masters including Father Richard Rohr, Russ Hudson, Marion Gilbert, and Helen Palmer. Today he leads enneagram workshops all over the world. Join Chris as he shows you how this ancient tool can help you awaken to the gifts God has given you, find freedom from your personal patterns of sin and fear, and grow in acceptance of your identity as you grow with God.

The Sacred Enneagram is a trustworthy, richly insightful guide to finding yourself in the enneagram's 9-type profiles, and as you seek to apply this practical wisdom to transform your life.

In conversational style with compelling stories, *The Sacred Enneagram* will show you:

- How to understand the 'why' behind your type, beyond caricatures and stereotypes
- How to align your type with prayer
- How to identify and find freedom from self-destructive patterns
- How to grow in reasoning ability
- How to face your past and step toward healing
- How to awaken your unique gifts to serve today's broken world

Chris' own journey with the enneagram is an accessible introduction and exploration of how the enneagram can change your life, because to the extent that we are transformed, the world will be transformed. The book is used in the SGM formation programme for Spiritual Directors.



The Last Word

Richard Rohr reminds us, 'joy proceeds from the inner realization of union with God, which descends upon us at ever deeper levels as we walk our faith journey. This deepening is the goal of Christian contemplation and the heart of perennial wisdom from every faith. Jesus modeled and taught contemplative prayer. He invites us to 'go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret' (Mt 6:6).

I want to thank all those who contribute their 'inner room stories' to Refresh. As you can tell from the poems and stories in our Winter edition – 'joy' appears to be qualitatively different from 'happiness'. When experienced in the light of our relationship with God, joy seems to be a product of intimate partnership and union. And it's deep – joy lingers. Its residue can be detected even in the darkest of times providing the strength to go on. The muscle memory of joy is not cancelled out by grief but makes it bittersweet.

Bring on the joys of Spring!

Diane

Summer 2020 Refresh theme 'Surrender'

Deadline Sept 28, 2019

While the rest of the world might view 'surrender' as giving up in the face of attack, backing down, not winning, weakness, or allowing ourselves to be dominated – contemplatives know that 'surrender' can be sweet indeed in the context of our relationship with God. How does our contemplative practice enable us to surrender our ego driven selves, even our will and our life to God? 'Surrender' is deeper than 'letting go' of youth, home, dreams, or people; there are no lingering shades of reluctance or hesitancy once our decision is made. What does surrender look like and feel like as we surrender our very selves to the loving embrace of God?

Guidelines for writers – please, please, 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.

Passage

by Margaret Gibson

Once in sunlight I pinned to the clothesline a cotton sheet,
a plane of light
sheer as the mind of God,

before we imagined that mind
creased by a single word.

With my hand I smoothed any rivel,
any shirr, any suggestion of pleat or furrow.

Whatever it was I wanted from that moment,
I cannot say. It failed to edify.
Nor did I bow.

And yet the memory holds,
there is a joy that recurs in me
much as the scent
of summer abides in air dried sheets I
unfold long after,

lying down in them as one might in a meadow,
as one might with a lover,
as one might court the Infinite,
however long it takes.



Passage is the last poem in NOT HEARING THE WOOD THRUSH, published by LSU Press, 2018. It was also included in BEST POEMS OF 2016, guest-edited by Natasha Trethewey.

Contributors

Allister Lane is a Presbyterian Minister serving St John's in the City, Wellington. He's married and has four children, four chickens, one rabbit and a cat. He's also Convenor of the Mission Workgroup for Presbytery Central. Allister enjoys scorched almonds.

Lynne Taylor finds joy in many things including her family and friends; researching and teaching pastoral theology at Otago; ministry at Student Soul; sunshine and sea.

Christeen McKay is enjoying retirement from working as a psychologist for 35 years in the public health system and in private practice. Recently completing SGM's training course in Spiritual Direction, she says, "It's one of the best things I've done in my 70 years!" Currently, God's presence speaks to her most clearly through the exuberance of her grandchildren, the awesomeness of Nature and, of course, the movement of dance.

Margaret Gwynn does yoga and Tai Chi and looks after a labyrinth. She loves to garden, read and dance, and is an active member of the Green Party.

Helen Bathurst enjoys her retirement, her church, her grandchildren, her garden, conservation work and knitting. She is a member of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans and works as part of the formation team.

Ana Lisa de Jong is a contemplative poet living on the verge of Auckland. Producing new poetry almost daily, Ana Lisa's prolific writing shows no signs of slowing down, with her fifth volume of published poetry out later in 2019 – livingtreepoetry.com.

Lesley Ayers lives in Tauranga with her husband John where she enjoys a rich retirement life. She's grateful to be able to walk in our lovely New Zealand bush and takes a keen interest in how we can care for our environment – both here and globally.

Anna Johnstone is deeply grateful for the many joys in her life and loves writing about them. www.annajohnstone.com

Jo Anastasiadis is a spiritual director in Wellington who loves God's creation, and seeing others grow in their relationship with God. She has recently rediscovered the delight of play with her young grandchildren, and the joy of simple moments.

Val Roberts lives on the Kapiti Coast with her husband and two cats. Her passions include creativity and encouraging people on their spiritual journeys. She loves being a first time Grandma and spending more time devoted to her spiritual journey and writing.

Chris E.W. Green is Professor of Theology at Southeastern University in Florida. He's the author most recently of *Surprised by God* and *The End is Music*. Chris is also Teaching Pastor at Sanctuary Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Paul Fromont lives in Cambridge with Gita, his wife. Everyday he's grateful that he lives in *Aotearoa* New Zealand, and for every opportunity he gets to spend walking, sitting, writing, reading and taking photographs on both the East and West coasts, especially in the hour or two before and after dawn and dusk.

Susan Jones serves as minister at St Andrews on the Terrace Wellington. She's a strong social justice advocate and published poet. A trained Spiritual Director, Susan taught Theological Reflection for Otago University's Master of Ministry programme – while serving in congregations in the south.

Diane Gilliam-Weeks has a lively Spiritual Direction and Supervision practice. Loves editing *Refresh* and being part of the SGM Workgroup.

Joy MacCormick finds the privilege of ageing presents both opportunity and challenge to reflect on the discoveries made along life's journey. Her second book of poems and reflections *Against the Dark: poems of resistance, reconciliation and hope*, with contributions from granddaughter Hayley, was published last year.

Barbara Sampson is a published author, spiritual director and retreat giver. She has one husband, two children and eleven grandchildren. Barbara believes in prayer and delights to call herself a contemplative.

Holly Walton lives in Waiake, Auckland with her husband, three daughters and peculiar cat, Rigsby. She works in pastoral care and is a spiritual director. She loves writing, walking, birds and good coffee.

Maggie Quinlan Enjoying a year of Jubilee, a time of rest. Wife to David with two children. Recently welcomed a granddaughter after three grandsons. Loves being a grandma, tramping, animal husbandry, international folk dance, mosaicing, poetry writing, photography, singing, scrap-booking, knitting and felting.

Lesley Ann Farmer has worked in and for the community since becoming a mother 34 years ago. Finds God beside and in the ocean, bush walking, hiking and in his beautiful creative world. Her journey into finding the joy of God afresh, came this year after suffering burnout.

Margaret Gibson is current Poet Laureate of Connecticut, has published 12 books of poems, most recently NOT HEARING THE WOOD THRUSH (LSU Press, 2018). She lives in a wooded area surrounded by land trust, and from this land she draws many of the images for her poems. She is Professor Emerita, University of CT.

Omission from Summer 2019 Refresh Contributors' page In relation to Creation Hymn for the Season of Creation

Vivien Chiu works as Church Music Coordinator at St Andrew's on The Terrace Wellington. In 2009, after experiencing spiritual direction for the first time in the form of a 'Week of Guided Prayer' she began composing tunes for hymns by NZ hymn writers and has continued since that time. Sheet music for In our world – voice with piano accompaniment – may be downloaded by visiting Vivien's website <https://vivienchiu.weebly.com>. Click the tab "Vivien's Compositions" then click on the file you wish to download.

