

# Refresh



Journal of Contemplative Spirituality  
Volume 21, Number 1. Winter 2020

# Good News



Volume 21, Number 1. Winter 2020. ISSN: 1176-3477  
Published by: SPIRITUAL GROWTH MINISTRIES TRUST.  
36 Buller Crescent, Manurewa, Auckland 2102, New Zealand.

Spiritual Growth Ministries is an incorporated trust registered with the Charities Commission on 17 June 2008 (cc 26037). Donations to 03 0166 0198782 000 and on our website <https://www.sgm.org.nz/donate.html>

Spiritual Growth Ministries [SGM] is a network of people from diverse Christian traditions and experience who find depth and meaning through the whole Christian heritage of contemplative spirituality. The Spiritual Growth Ministries Trust aims to enable people to develop spiritual resources for life and work by deepening their relationship with God in Jesus Christ through spiritual direction, training, retreats and other experiences of prayer.

© 2001 Spiritual Growth Ministries Trust

Disclaimer: The articles in this journal are the opinions of the authors, and are not necessarily those of either the Editor or Spiritual Growth Ministries Trust.

SGM Trust is happy for any part of this publication to be duplicated, distributed and used for training or information. Please acknowledge the authors and Spiritual Growth Ministries when using our material. We ask that no part of this publication be changed or altered in any way without permission from SGM or the authors.

### SGM Contacts [www.sgm.org.nz](http://www.sgm.org.nz)

**Admin:** The Reverend Adrienne Bruce, PO Box 33, Dannevirke 4942, Cell 021 432 768  
[admin@sgm.org.nz](mailto:admin@sgm.org.nz)

**Workgroup Convenor:** Jane Wilkinson, [janeinwelly@gmail.com](mailto:janeinwelly@gmail.com)

**Spiritual Directors Formation Programme Coordinator:** Fran Francis, 14 Oruamo Place, Beach Haven, Auckland 0626; 09 4191152; [fran.francis@sgm.org.nz](mailto:fran.francis@sgm.org.nz)

**Desktop Publishing and Printing:** Advocate Print, Rotorua

**Refresh Editor:** Diane Gilliam-Weeks, 32 Kauri Street, Eastbourne, Hutt City, 5013; 0274978374; [dianegw@actrix.co.nz](mailto:dianegw@actrix.co.nz)

**Cover Image:** © Janine Ross-Johnstone <https://www.jphotographic.co.nz> and [www.oldandnew.nz](http://www.oldandnew.nz)

**Find Refresh on Facebook and 'like' us!**

## Contents

Legacy by <i>Leslie Ayers</i>	3
Psalm 139 by <i>Anna Johnstone</i>	5
A week after Easter by <i>Geoff King</i>	7
A bubble theology of God in the everyday by <i>Steve Taylor</i>	7
Protection and Contagion by <i>Sylvia Purdie</i>	9
When birds no longer flee by <i>Joy MacCormick</i>	11
PSALM 16 A <i>Miktam of David</i>	12
Shaken not stirred by <i>Jeanne Wissing</i>	13
The Good News by <i>Ana Lisa de Jong</i>	16
This Is Us and the Good News of human becoming by <i>Paul Fromont</i>	17
Good News in and out of prison walls! by <i>Trish McBride</i>	21
Dyslexia by <i>Liz Maluschnig</i>	23
What is the Gospel? A sermon by <i>Diane Gilliam-Weeks</i>	26
We awaken by <i>Symeon the New Theologian</i>	31
The House of Love by <i>Maggie Quinlan</i>	33
Corinthians 13 by <i>Ana Lisa de Jong</i>	35
The good news of God's call to be one by <i>Marg Schrader</i>	36
From detachment to attachment by <i>Bruce Nicholls</i>	38
Longing for good news by <i>Barbara Sampson</i>	39
The Good News about Contemplation and Parkinson's by <i>Tim Roberts</i>	40
SGM News	44
Books	45
The Last Word	46
Gifts along the way by <i>Sandy Neal</i>	47
Contributors	48

## Legacy by Leslie Ayers

*In bleak and difficult times, you must always keep something beautiful in your heart.*

Blaise Pascal

I first started working on this article BC – Before Covid 19.

Even then I worried what the world would be like for our grandchildren's generation.

I was already concerned about climate change and where it was taking our precious planet.

I marched with schoolchildren during a Climate Strike. I examined my own lifestyle.

I'd already decided, among other changes, long distance air travel was no longer an option for me. It wasn't that easy letting this go. I may have found those long flights daunting as I got older, but I love travel and I have family and friends around the world. And the media is full of enticing travel destinations.

**Now, in a horrifying  
blink-of-an-eye,  
everything has changed**

Big decision? How ironic!

Now, in a horrifying blink-of-an-eye, everything has changed. I grieve for little children, wondering what their childhood will be like. For older ones making career decisions. I grieve for their lost hopes and dreams and for the unknown future they face.

Today it seems more urgent than ever to consider what kind of life legacy I leave my grandchildren. And what, from my reflective faith, might help them face whatever is to come?

I've always walked with the young ones. Sometimes we collected wild grasses and flowers on the roadside or found shells on the beach. In the garden we put our noses deep into fragrant blooms, carefully avoiding the bees enjoying them too.

The children have taught me as well. Through their eyes I see just how exquisite the small daisy is, how silky and golden the petals of dandelions. We've drawn the grasses, the feathers, the shells. I'm no artist, yet focusing on these things I'm amazed at their intricacy – their true beauty. Some of my older grandchildren are into photography – yet another way of looking – of observing. I encourage them.

I've talked to them about how amazing is God's creation.

I hope this has given them a sense of wonder to last their lifetime, and that they may develop a deep sense of gratitude for each day.

What more can I do now, in this time of isolation? I decided to take a photo of something beautiful each day and send it to them. One shows the glory of dawn light – another sunlight filtering through fern fronds. Perhaps autumn fruit in my garden next.



*Playing guitar © Clem Onojeghuo on Unsplash*

I'll tell stories of special 'God moments' when I experienced a glimpse of *Kairos*, God's time, breaking through into everyday life. May these stories open their eyes and hearts to the wonder of God's care and presence.

Something like this happened to me late last year, just before the first reported cases of Corona virus in Wuhan. The grandchild who was with me may not remember it as she gets older, but I'll write it down for her – so she can read it again and again. This story of God with us.

It was a warm November day. I was sitting at the bus stop outside our village with Lucy, our four-year-old granddaughter. While we waited for the bus, Lucy – a thoughtful child – told me the world is spinning round, spinning so fast we can't see it going round.

We were standing high on a hill looking out over a wonderful view of the harbour's silver waters and over trees and fields. I told her God holds our beautiful planet in place, spinning in space.

Right then I saw a young man coming up the hill. He had long brown wavy hair, wore sandals, and a guitar slung over his back. As he came near, I asked him, 'Have you got a tune for us?'

Now I'm **definitely not** in the habit of asking total strangers to sing for me!!!! But it seemed so natural at the time.

The young man smiled and said he'd make up a song just for us. Perched on a stone wall nearby he started strumming his guitar. At first the lyrics were comical about our village, Greenwood Park. But then he began to sing about how much God loved us, about how he, the singer, loved us and about the hope we have in God.

It felt like an amazing song of blessing and joy and reassurance.

I was overwhelmed and blown away.

I just had time to thank him and ask God's blessing on him, before Lucy and I climbed on the bus. The last we saw of him – he was walking off down the road.

The memory is a precious gift, something 'beautiful to keep in my heart' through these dark days.

## Psalm 139 by Anna Johnstone

Your hand will guide me  
your strength support me  
whether I'm flying to the  
farthest oceans  
or staying home  
during Covid-19 level 4

Fear travels freely  
in our land  
delighted to take  
prisoners

I resolve to turn away  
whenever its cold fingers  
reach out to touch me  
to grab me  
to invade my life

Like a watchman  
on the wall  
my eyes fix on you  
Holy Love

In you I live and move  
and have my being

Every breath is measured  
every heart-beat counted

Guarded in the security  
of your heart  
I am held in joy  
and peace



Sunshine © Barbara Lee @leewayimages.com

## A week after Easter

by Geoff King

No longer a preacher, yet still strangely enthralled  
by this timeless mystery that none can explain.

No prayers or sermons this year,  
just a muddled mosaic of random words and images:

A happy face flying from a suburban flagpole.

A rainbow's arc gracing the pavement below.

A voice of hope ringing out from a deserted Italian Cathedral,  
bringing together millions  
to 'hug this wounded Earth's pulsing heart'.

Meanwhile in Aotearoa

the Student Volunteer Army mobilises

to shop for the vulnerable,

and heartfelt messages of thanks to essential workers  
replace ads for things that we no longer really need.

Neil Finn sings 'better be home soon' on national television  
as pictures of people missing loved ones fill the screen...

A week after Easter.

No longer a preacher, yet still strangely persuaded  
that truth cannot be killed, not even by this virus:

*Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*

Wherever kindness and love are found,  
God is there.

## A bubble theology of God in the everyday

by Steve Taylor

I am sour dough, he said;

Yeast from a young mother

Aroma that dances in your kitchen,

Scents every dinner table

Sacrament.

Encircling every domestic dwelling

## Protection and Contagion

by Sylvia Purdie



*Covid*

We know  
of course, we know  
that faith is not hand sanitiser  
that Christ's purchase of blood<sup>i</sup>  
does not buy us health insurance.  
But into our fear of disease – Psalm 91 promises:

'You who live in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,  
will say to the Lord,  
"My refuge and my fortress,  
my God, in whom I trust."  
For he will deliver you from the deadly plague.  
You will not fear the terror of the night,  
or the pestilence that stalks in darkness.' (Ps 91:1-6)

Loving God, our refuge and our home,  
just what exactly is it you promise us?  
For we know we're just as likely to catch this virus as anyone else.  
Just as likely to die of it, gasping for breath.  
So how, exactly, will you deliver us from it?  
Covid cares not a whit for national pride, status or pretention,  
wishful thinking, faith, goodness or optimism.

'Those who love me, I will save;  
I will protect those who know my name.  
When they call to me, I will answer them;  
I will be with them in trouble,  
I will show them my salvation.' (Ps 91:14-16)

Jesus, my friend, hold my hand.  
I know your name, and you know mine.  
Jesus, my Lord, I trust you with this life of mine.  
I trust you with this church of yours, this family and this earth.  
You are with me. What could I possibly fear?

<sup>i</sup> Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 1:18



Black robin © Janine Ross-Johnstone <https://www.jphotographic.co.nz>

## When birds no longer flee

by Joy MacCormick

When birds no longer flee at my approach,  
but turn to look,  
then carry on about their own affairs;  
When rabbits, in their grazing, merely pause,  
and then resume – sensing no threat or danger –  
then, then I know I've shed the cloak  
of busyness, unfocussed energy,  
and have come home -  
home to deep tranquillity.

I know and love this gentle inner space.  
I long to dwell here.  
But I am called, once more, to journey on  
into the known yet unknown  
mystery of God.

We live in a culture dominated by the passage of hands across the face of a clock; days marked off in calendars and in diaries. We're driven to fill every moment with productivity lest we be accused of wasting time. Like ships ploughing through the ocean, we plough through life setting up great bow waves of energy, disturbing everything in our path and leaving it tossing in our wake.

We forget that long before humans captured time and imprisoned it in clocks, people were aware of a different rhythm – the breathing of the universe, the rhythm of life itself.

If, and when, we choose to step aside from our busyness, intensity and distractions, we can discover ourselves in harmony with all creation – no longer a threat to all that lives. If we open ourselves to the rhythm of God's spirit breathing into us and through us, we may find ourselves in that 'peaceable kingdom' of which Isaiah writes (Isaiah 11:6-9). Elijah also experienced God's presence in stillness, in 'a sound of sheer silence' rather than in the activity and power of wind, earthquake or fire. (1 Kings 19:11-12) Such times can also be moments of awe, and of fear of what might be asked of us.

Take some time to read and reflect on the above passages or on the words by J. G. Whittier from his hymn 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind'

Drop thy still dews of quietness  
Till all our strivings cease;  
Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
And let our ordered lives confess  
The beauty of thy peace.<sup>i</sup>

Can you remember a time when you knew this peace and stillness? Do you know it now? How might you encourage its growth in your life?<sup>ii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> 184 Hymns Ancient and Modern Revised 1991

<sup>ii</sup> First published in *Moments of Grace* BRF 2013

**PSALM 16**  
A Miktam of David

Preserve me, O God, for in You I take refuge...  
...I have set the Lord before me always;  
because He is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

Therefore, my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices;  
my flesh also dwells secure.  
For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol,  
or let Your holy one see corruption.

You make known to me the path of life;  
in Your presence there is fullness of joy;  
at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

**Shaken not stirred**  
by Jeanne Wissing

I think you'll agree – so far 2020 has been a strange, surreal year when our lives seem to be shaken every month by new challenges. I certainly feel thrown a little off-balance by the immense changes we've experienced – and I know I'm not the only one.

Though we live in uncertain times – we are loved by a certain God.

What better time than to turn to the Bible with the help of one of the coolest cucumbers in the world – 'James, James Bond' and his famous 'shaken, not stirred'.

Pierce Brosnan may be my favourite Bond, but I always read those words in Sean Connery's voice. Though I think Bond would've been a much cooler cucumber if he'd chosen 'stirred, not shaken'.

But this isn't about cocktail making – it's about something much deeper: how we as children of God approach life with all its challenges, especially the current situation. Psalm 16, one of my favourite promises, because God is at our right hand, we're not shaken, but we *are* stirred. These words were such an exciting find for me, especially because it ties in with our very current topic of lockdown stress.

I've been reading Kelly McGonigal's, *The Upside of Stress*.<sup>i</sup> You can find a TED Talk by her on this topic, too.

For many years as a health psychologist, McGonigal used to warn people about the dangers of stress. Then she ran into a study which revealed it wasn't the stress that was so harmful, but the way you think about it.

'In 1998, thirty thousand adults in the US were asked how much stress they experienced in the past year, and whether they believed stress was harmful to their health. Eight years later, researchers scoured public records to find who among the thirty thousand participants had died.

'Let me deliver the bad news first. High levels of stress increased the risk of dying by 43%. But – and this is what got my attention – that increased risk applied only to people who believed stress was harming their health. People who reported high levels of stress but didn't view their stress as harmful were not more likely to die. In fact, they had the lowest risk of death of anyone in the study, even lower than those reporting experiencing little stress.'

How fascinating is that? It makes a difference whether you view stressors as a challenge or a threat – and not only to your mental and spiritual resilience, but to your body.

McGonigal continues, 'In a typical stress response, your heart rate goes up, and your blood vessels constrict – that's why chronic stress is often associated with cardiovascular

**Because God is my refuge, even  
if my body trembles in fear, my  
spirit dances in joyful trust.**

<sup>i</sup> The Upside of Stress: Why Stress Is Good for You, and How to Get Good at it by Kelly McGonigal, Avery Press 2016



disease. It's not healthy to be in this state all the time. But when study participants viewed their stress response as helpful, their blood vessels stayed relaxed. Their hearts still pounded but with a healthier cardiovascular profile – looking more like what happens in moments of joy and courage.'

McGonigal concludes, 'The goal is no longer to get rid of your stress but to get better at stress. Hopefully, the next time your heart is pounding from stress – you're going to think, "this is my body helping me rise to this challenge". And when you view stress in that way, your body believes you, and your stress response becomes healthier.'

You become more resilient when you don't view stress as harmful.

'Yeah nah, that is easy to say,' you cry, 'but McGonigal didn't know about COVID-19 when she did her research' and 'what does this have to do with James Bond and Psalm 16?'

I've set the Lord before me always.  
Because He's at my right hand, I shall not be *shaken*.  
Therefore, my heart is glad, and my tongue *rejoices*.

Well, the Hebrew root for 'shaken' means to waver, shake, slip or totter. But the root for 'rejoice,' means to spin or tremble under violent emotion – reminding me of being stirred to such emotion I'm twirling or dancing with joy. Look how David danced in front of the Ark of God!

Two words with roots in movement: one unstable with fear, the other spinning with joy.

We've all experienced these contrasting sensations before. If you're nervous, it feels like all the cells in your body are vibrating with tension. But if you're in love or euphorically happy, all your cells vibrate with a delicious sense of joy!

When you're anxious about public speaking, your stomach rolls and tightens. But if you're excited about it, you have happy butterflies in your stomach.

When you are scared, you get cold chills and goose bumps. But enjoy a piece of awesome music – those chills and goose bumps are a sign of deep appreciation.

Similar responses to different stimuli – but what they mean is wildly dissimilar.

If our bodies respond almost exactly the same to fear *and* excitement, stress *and* love, dread *and* appreciation – and the difference is mostly in our minds – then how can we use that to our benefit? How can we harness this to navigate this current stress, this uncertainty and insecurity, when we feel so unstable?

Well, we have incredible security as children of God – to hold uncertainty and faith in both hands. Fear and joy. Worry and trust. Falling and balancing.

It is like dancing. There's a sense in which dancing is all about being unstable, moving yourself off-balance into positions that require you to rebound and recover, stretch, leap, fall, turn, land again. Your heart rate goes up, you sweat, you exert yourself.

And we think dancing is a beautiful thing! We clearly don't see it in the same light as teetering and tottering or being thrown off-balance by fear. So, what's the difference?

In dancing, we embrace the instability, we allow our bodies and spirits to be stirred by the music and the movement. But in fear, we resist our life being thrown off-balance. We don't want life to be like this; we fight it and we hate it.

Kelly McGonigal reminds us simply the way we view a situation can make all the difference to our response. We can see it as a challenge and adventure, or as a threat.

So, let us dance with our beloved! That's what Psalm 16 means to me.

Because God is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. But I am stirred!

Because God is in me and with me and holds me, I don't need to view today's challenges as a danger or a crisis. I can view the present moment as a safe space – in God's hands! – to grow my faith and develop my resilience. Because God is my refuge – even if my body trembles in fear – my spirit dances in joyful trust.

So how do we transform a stressful, scary experience into a blessing and a source of spiritual growth? How do we live stirred but not shaken – whether our current state of emergency, or cancer, or a devastating earthquake? How do we make it meaningful?

I found a handy acronym in COVID.

**COMPASSION:** Allow for greater self-compassion, as a loving parent would a child. Accept you're stressed or going through a hard time. Only when we learn to be gentle with ourselves can we give compassion to others. See yourself through the tender eyes of our Beloved.

**OUTWARD:** Remember, no matter how difficult your life, you're rich because you have something to give: a smile, a prayer, a quick check-in text, a trip to the shops. Open up to others in acts of lovingkindness. You're not helpless – you have light and love to give.

**VIEWPOINT:** Remember, it's all in the eye of the beholder. If pruning produces more fruit, and weightlifting stronger muscles, then positive stress produces more resilience and capacity! It's your choice to see stress as life battering you or God growing you. If you struggle to see the light, please ask for help. Sometimes we need someone else's perspective to see the positive in our lives.

**INWARD:** Become still, come back to God in trust. Bring your pain and fear to God. Remember the amazing things God has done, God's tender love. Pray: 'I don't know what to do with this, but I bring it to You, because You know, and therefore I thank You.'

**DAILY:** Create a daily rhythm – a rule of life – holding space for yourself to pray, to review what's going on and what you really need. Be kind to your body and your spirit. Take it day by day or hour by hour if you need to. There's comfort in predictable routines especially when life's unpredictable.

I have a feeling you'll see this acronym quite a lot in the coming months!

As people of faith, we have this incredible opportunity right now to show the world – that though we may be human and vulnerable – we do have a purpose: to spread God's light and gentle love to ourselves and to others.

May you be stirred by joy, instead of shaken by fear.

## The Good News

by Ana Lisa de Jong

Have you heard the good news?  
Have you heard how it's all good?  
How the good news underpins the bad,  
supersedes it,  
overarches it,  
surrounds it in one great promise,  
as the sky does the circling earth.

That the bad may be contained and  
transformed bit by bit  
by the light that gets in –  
so it becomes something else,  
something which,  
while not meant for good,  
has lost its power to harm.

Have you heard the good news?  
It's enough to believe  
when the bad presses in,  
that the good is the wide outer expanse,  
and the bad can be outshone,  
outlasted, and made benign  
by a persistent faith that believes.

## This Is Us and the Good News of human becoming

by Paul Fromont

I've been 'bingeing' season one of the US TV series, *This Is Us*<sup>i</sup> – described by critics as 'heartstring-tugging family drama.' To me – an exploration of relationships, family, identity formation, emotional health and psychological growth.

While *This Is Us* story lines aren't explicitly Jesus-shaped, it is about the struggles and joys of being human. And being an interiorly free and authentic human being isn't easy – because we have to work within the realities and limitations of being flawed, imperfect, and in various ways, broken. Similarly, the 'good news' of Jesus flows from my recognising my own dependency upon the Spirit, just as Jesus did.

I've been moved by two story arcs in *This is Us* – one central, the other peripheral – both profoundly impacting other characters. The latter features actor Ron Cephas Jones who plays William 'Shakespeare' Hill, the *biological* father of core character, Randall Pearson.

Hill is a wise, soulful, sensitive presence – weathered but made more humane by the adversities of life.

He has a literary-musical bent, and a gentle way of being with people. By all external measures, his life would be deemed a sad failure. Nonetheless he inspires.

In Hill we encounter the harsh realities of life and the possibilities – latent in us all – of becoming more human and a conduit for life-giving, life-enlarging expressions of relationship. William Hill humanises rather than de-humanises others.

This is surely a 'good news' story in a world where fear of the 'other' feels rampant – where relationships are increasingly fraught and transactional in nature, where loneliness and unwanted social isolation are profoundly damaging. Where being *beautifully* human – especially for the young – is often reduced to a shallow focus on physical attractiveness and reluctance to stand *for* values and behaviours that humanise rather than dehumanise.

But the central story is about Jack Pearson, husband to Rebecca, biological father of twins Kate and Kevin, and adoptive father of [Hill's *biological* son] Randall.

Jack's character deeply resonates with me, especially as I regularly ponder what it means for my humanity to be a *good* man, son, brother, uncle, husband, and father. When so much works *against* that goodness. When being good is often a painful, lonely, difficult road to tread – marked more by setbacks than successes, by bad news than good news.

Jack Pearson makes a real intergenerational difference. He represents the heart, the wisdom, the fight, and the determination to do the right thing – to be more than his past

Jesus is formed and shaped by  
the Holy Spirit in the midst of  
life, not apart from it, and that  
feels to me like good news.

i *This Is Us* premiered on US television in September 2016.

or his circumstances. While the impact on others isn't always positive – and despite his own flaws, frailty, and brokenness – Jack brings real and lasting transformation in the lives of those he loves.

When the New Testament talks of 'good news' it mostly uses the Greek noun *evangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον) which we translate as 'gospel' and attach the meaning: 'good news'. This 'good news' is centered on Jesus and his place within the covenantal arc of what Israel's God *has* been and *is* doing within history.

The Jesus stories of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have always felt to me, at the very least, to be about what Jesus – as good news – makes possible for our *becoming* more wholly and holily human.

Often we find it easier to talk about Jesus as divine, '...true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father...', but what does it mean to talk about Jesus as fully human? Was he in fact human just as we are, or wasn't he? Did he stand in relation to God, and his own experiences of *being* human, just as we do?

In the early nineties, I read a fascinating essay by Alan Spence<sup>ii</sup>. It journeys with me to this day and particularly as I reflect on what might be 'good news' from a contemplative perspective. One that helps me work with my own humanity in the midst of the ordinary and the everyday – individually, relationally, communally, and environmentally. A view that promotes my own spiritual formation, my human *becoming*, my psychological well-being, and my emotional health.

The central question of Spence's essay is whether the life experience of the man, Christ Jesus, was the same as our own. Did he pray, face temptation, depend on divine strength and encouragement, grow in knowledge and grace? Did he struggle to live a life of obedience just as we do?

Spence's conclusion – which really feels like 'good news' to me – is that Jesus' experience of God, like ours, wasn't immediate but indirect by means of the Spirit. 'There were no aspects of his activity', Spence writes, 'where God, or the divine nature, replaced the normal operation of his humanity'. Jesus' humanity, like ours, was formed and developed as he grew in his experience of himself, the world, and of God'.<sup>iii</sup>

Spence suggests as a fully human being, Jesus is formed and shaped 'in the mundane experience of his historical existence' – marked by fears and trials, faith, doubt, and hope – all the while being continually strengthened, comforted and enabled by the Spirit of God. Through suffering and temptation 'he sought, in loving obedience, to accomplish the will of the Father.' Jesus stood, just as we do, as a creature totally dependent on his God and this is reflected in his openness to and reliance on the Holy Spirit. Jesus acted

ii *Christ's Humanity and Ours: John Owen* published in *Persons, Divine and Human*, edited by Christoph Schwobel & Colin Gunton.

iii Think about this in relation to the practice of spiritual direction, or practices of imaginative prayer (using the gospels), or the Jesuit practice of the 'Spiritual Exercises'.

and responded in a fully human way, from within his experience of the enabling of the Spirit. Being wholly and holily human was precisely how Jesus glorified God.

Look at the Jesus stories again. So many are about *how* he is in relation to others – gentiles, tax collectors, prostitutes, priests, drunkards, gluttons, the rich, the deformed, the powerful, the sick, his relatives, the blind. Some stories show the *outflowing* of his primary relationship with, and ongoing orientation toward God. While others reflect *how* Jesus experiences the everyday realities of being human – suffering, pain, being loved and loving, grief, his need for solitude, being obedient, making choices.

Jesus is formed and shaped by the Holy Spirit in the midst of life, not apart from it, and that feels to me like good news. It feels hopeful, it feels doable.

Not that I can imagine my own perfection – but nonetheless I'm encouraged by the knowledge that God is quietly and actively at work in my becoming *more*, not less human. God is achieving this in me as I live out my relationships with others and myself, as I work, and as I care for the environment. In my struggles, failures, successes, sickness, grief, tiredness, and hurt – God is working!

Thomas Merton exhorts us to 'pray for [our] own discovery'<sup>iv</sup>. And I do. But at the same time I recognise 'discovery' occurs when I discern and join in on God's invitations<sup>v</sup> and God's quiet work – in the midst of the ordinary and the everyday.

Mike, one of my closest friends, is a man not dissimilar to Jack Pearson and William Hill. He's a true inspiration to me. Over the last few years, he's been to hell and back. Mike and those closest to him have been deeply impacted by unforeseen loss, suffering, and pain over which they've had no control. I asked him how he'd describe 'good news'.

Mike's response feels deeply human: 'Despite it all, I have an entirely irrational and undeserving sense that I am held and nurtured – that the ground of my being is loved.'

All this encourages me that the 'good news' of our becoming more wholly and holily human is, at its heart, about love. About each of us discovering, often surprisingly, that we're gently held by a love that is unbreakable and secure, one which is without condition or limit – a cruciform love, imparted through the Spirit, inviting us to allow that transforming 'God-is-love' love to work in us – as we become more and more Jesus shaped<sup>vi</sup> and more and more human.

And I don't know any other way to become more human – than a Jesus-shaped human becoming. And that feels both hopeful and realistic.

iv See his *New Seeds of Contemplation*, New Directions paperback edition, pp. 37-46.

v Ignatian Spirituality has been vitally important to me in this respect. For those unfamiliar with practices of discernment etc within the Ignatian tradition I'd recommend two books, both aimed at a more general, albeit Christian readership: *Landmarks: An Ignatian Journey* by Margaret Silf. The US-edition is titled *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality*, but it lacks the helpful drawings and illustrations included in the British edition, *Landmarks*. Secondly, I'd recommend *Seek God Everywhere: Reflections on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* by Anthony De Mello.

vi Cf. Mark 12: 28-31.

## Good News in and out of prison walls!

by Trish McBride

So many of our young people have been subjected to neglect and often poverty-related abuse and violence from childhood. No wonder they self-medicate with alcohol and drugs.

I've been privileged for the last couple of years to be a tiny jigsaw piece in an amazing transformative programme which is Good News for everyone involved – the Drug Treatment Programme at Arohata Women's Prison in Wellington.

Groups of ten to twelve women at a time are selected for each three-month programme.

These overlap – Group 1 begins in the programme as Group 2 begins the 6 weeks leading up to graduation.

As well as support from Corrections Officers and other staff, the women have intensive therapy, and input/support from a range of volunteers. They learn yoga, quilting (finishing one to take home), attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings working the 12-steps, and a grief course. They learn public speaking skills at the fortnightly Toastmasters meeting – where I've recently been privileged to fit in.

There's a wise saying about  
'hearing people into speech', and  
this is what we do.

There's a wise saying about 'hearing people into speech', and this is what we do. We coach them all in both listening and speaking, as well as in managing formal meeting procedures. Just as in the outside world, Toastmasters dynamics work even for the shyest and most nervous. Lots of praise and encouragement, and perhaps a suggestion towards developing the next speech. It's a delight to hear these women gain confidence and skill over the three months. And they're always so grateful for the time we spend there.

In their speeches, usually three to five minutes long, many tell heart-breaking stories of horrendous violence and sexual abuse, gang affiliation and homelessness – of self-medicating with alcohol or drugs to ease the pain, leading to offending, and so to prison.

They have differently complex backgrounds. Some begin their speeches in te reo for their mihi. Some give well-researched self-help speeches on topics like co-dependence, social anxiety and gratitude. We hear stories of faithfully supportive families, children they're going home to as better mums – hopes and plans after release.

There are inspirational speeches – significant talent and wisdom now freer to emerge. Some speeches are hilariously funny and have all of us uproariously laughing. Letters of farewell to drugs that both sustained and captured them, are very moving.

The culmination of their course learning comes at the six-weekly graduation ceremonies. Volunteers, staff and clinicians are welcomed by rousing kapa haka onto their marae for the occasion. Wonderful energy, style and mana!



*From Devil to Angel*  
Jill Bowman's striking 3-panel quilt recently exhibited in Wellington.

*Her description: 'Many women in prison have backgrounds of addiction, violence, unemployment and homelessness. With support, I'm optimistic many will transition from "devil to angel" as one prisoner described it. I dedicate this quilt to the women I taught to quilt in the Drug Treatment Unit at Arohata Prison.'*

Group 1 chooses one of their number to welcome manuhiri – noting their contribution in te reo Māori and Pākehā. To her own group, then those graduating, a recent speaker included these words used with her permission:

'He Wāhine, He Wāhine toa. On behalf of Group 1, we thank you for allowing us the insight and privilege of seeing your journey, for walking beside us as we began ours, for imparting all your wisdom and knowledge to each and every one of us, for all your support.

'You are all true role models and leaders, which leaves really big boots to fill!!

We wish you the best of luck when you leave, and courage as you further put your learning into practice.

Choose to live by choice, not chance.

Choose to be motivated, not manipulated.

Choose to be useful, not used.

Choose to make changes not excuses.

Choose to excel, not compete.

Choose self-esteem not self-pity.

Choose to listen to your inner voice, not to the random opinion of others.

Remember knowing is not enough, for we must apply it.

Wishing is not enough, for we must do!'

She then calls on each of those graduating strong women, wāhine toa, to give a speech. A brief introductory karakia isn't unusual. All express heartfelt gratitude: to Corrections Officers for their respect and compassion, to therapists, to each group of volunteers, for their learnings from the programme, their newly found self-respect, their hope, and their intentions for the future. And the women are grateful to each other for the love and nurture they shared as a group.

Every single speech is inspirational, particularly considering the increased confidence we've observed. Most women actually look different – softer, more relaxed. They're much more in touch with their own self-hood, and with plans for a good clean, sober future. Boxes of tissues are supplied and frequently used by graduates and visitors. Certificates and hugs received.

Then others are invited to speak. Corrections Officers are mind-blowing in their loving compassion for each woman in their duty of care – not remotely the stereotypical image of what goes on in prisons! More waiata to finish, including a sung version of the Serenity Prayer in te reo and English:

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

Then we share kai.

Each graduation ceremony has its own flavour. Transformation metaphors flow. We see tight buds opening out to beautiful flowers, formerly earthbound caterpillars stretching their wings after chrysalis confinement, Easter resurrections out of terrible pain, New Life for spirits once crushed into hopelessness. And in real terms, some are repeating the programme and not all of them are going to make it this time.

It's crucial there's adequate support when they're released – accommodation and a job – and sufficiently soon for the learnings still to be accessible.

It's the Love that does it! God at work in these women's lives and the lives of all who work with them. Love from therapists, Corrections staff, volunteers – and from each other – as they learn compassion for themselves and others.



## Dyslexia

by Liz Maluschnig

I have a dog  
Her name is God  
And she LOVES Me!  
completely  
delightfully  
lickingly  
abundantly  
continuously!!!  
When I am home  
God never roams  
She FOLLOWS me!  
Lovingly  
Dotingly  
Hopefully  
Trippingly  
Companionably!!  
Her eyes they plea  
I'm the One she sees  
God's WATCHING Me!  
Imploringly  
Persuasively  
Earnestly  
Beseechingly  
Doggily

When there's a noise outside  
God leaves my side  
she PROTECTS me!  
howlingly  
Growlingly  
decisively  
importantly  
confidently  
When I go out  
God waits about  
Then she WELCOMES Me  
Uncontrollably  
Desperately  
Slobberingly  
Enthusiastically  
Adoringly!!  
She is my BESTEST One  
letting me know over and over  
and over again  
that I am absolutely  
deliciously  
intently  
waggingly  
madly  
LOVED!



## What is the Gospel? a sermon by Diane Gilliam-Weeks

I have a sneaking suspicion...we haven't done a crash hot job explaining to our own people what the Gospel is...

Oh sure...most people know the word means...good news...but wouldn't it be nice... if we're going to proclaim it...or even whisper it wouldn't it be nice... if we knew what the Gospel was?

Or if a reporter from the Radio New Zealand walks up and asks you... 'Soooo...what IS the Gospel?'

Today I want you to join me... in a little experiment just take a moment in silence and make a note or two on what you think the Gospel...or the Good News actually is.

[Pause]

'Good news' appears abundantly in the Old Testament using the Hebrew word **בשורת** Wasau.

The New Testament...uses the Greek word **εὐαγγελιον** Evangelion ...or in English 'Gospel'...

Both evangelion and gospel mean good news in the form of a public announcement or a proclamation.

The Caesars used the word too... When Rome did something great... Caesar would send heralds out... into the cities of the empire... to proclaim Rome's 'good news'.

And early Christians...used this word 'gospel'... as shorthand for their first century biographies of Jesus – you know Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

During his three years as a rabbi...as a teacher... Jesus' own gospel – Jesus own public proclamation of the Good News would have sounded like this to me...

The Kingdom of God is at hand...God's beloved community is all around us it can even be in your heart. God's kingdom is visible... in time and space...not separate from it

God's kingdom isn't about what happens when we die; It's right here – and most visibly – in the person of Jesus himself.

The Kingdom of God is at hand...when God's will... is being done

We hear this in Jesus' prayer: "Your kingdom come: your will be done ...on earth as it is in heaven" [pause]....

During his ministry, Jesus lives out the good news... in his teaching, his healing, and by restoring people to community.

What Jesus says and does... demonstrates God's kingdom at work.

And it could be said...the movement Jesus begins and the way they challenged religious, cultural and Roman injustice... can still be seen at work whenever unloving, unjust and unequal structures are opposed.

And there's a cost to this work...

Jesus met his death as a result of his kingdom work,

And I believe...his resurrection confirms our Creator's full involvement...in Jesus and his mission

But Jesus' death and resurrection...aren't the Gospel.

And even though two thousand years have gone by since Jesus' own gospel proclamation... we can still hold to...John the Baptist's summary of Isaiah 61 at the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

A voice cries, 'Prepare in the desert a way for Yahweh. Make a straight highway for our God across the wastelands. Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be levelled, every cliff a plateau, every escarpment a plain. Then the glory of Yahweh will be revealed and all humanity will see it together, for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.'

You see, in Jesus the Christ... God's kingdom—does draw near.

In Jesus...the Creator of the universe has entered into all it means to be human including our pain and our suffering... and our death...

Why?!!!

Because God...loves...us...

Oh my... that is good news...

God is for us...God is for you!

Good News...God is not...a retributive punishing God...

God wants...God's relationship with us...to be healed...

I think that sounds like very good news!!!!

Just imagine if you were a poor pilgrim in 1st Century Jerusalem

and the exploitative sacrificial system at the temple...

is taking everything you have...

telling you...you must earn...or buy God's favour and forgiveness!!!

That's not good news is it?

Imagine you were a sinner – like me...

and people told you God didn't love you

because you were unclean!

That doesn't sound like good news to me.

That's not grace.

But Jesus' message and Jesus' actions

even from the Cross...speaking forgiveness...

even in the face of his enemies...

reveal God's ways...

The ways that demonstrate to the world...

that costly love...

is...the only way to save the world...

The good news that the Creator of all that is...

offers love...not punishment!

And in the first century or today...

if your view of God

is of a wrathful punishing father...

who withholds love when you make a mistake or don't obey...well

the good news of Jesus is.....that's not true!

And if...in the first century or today...

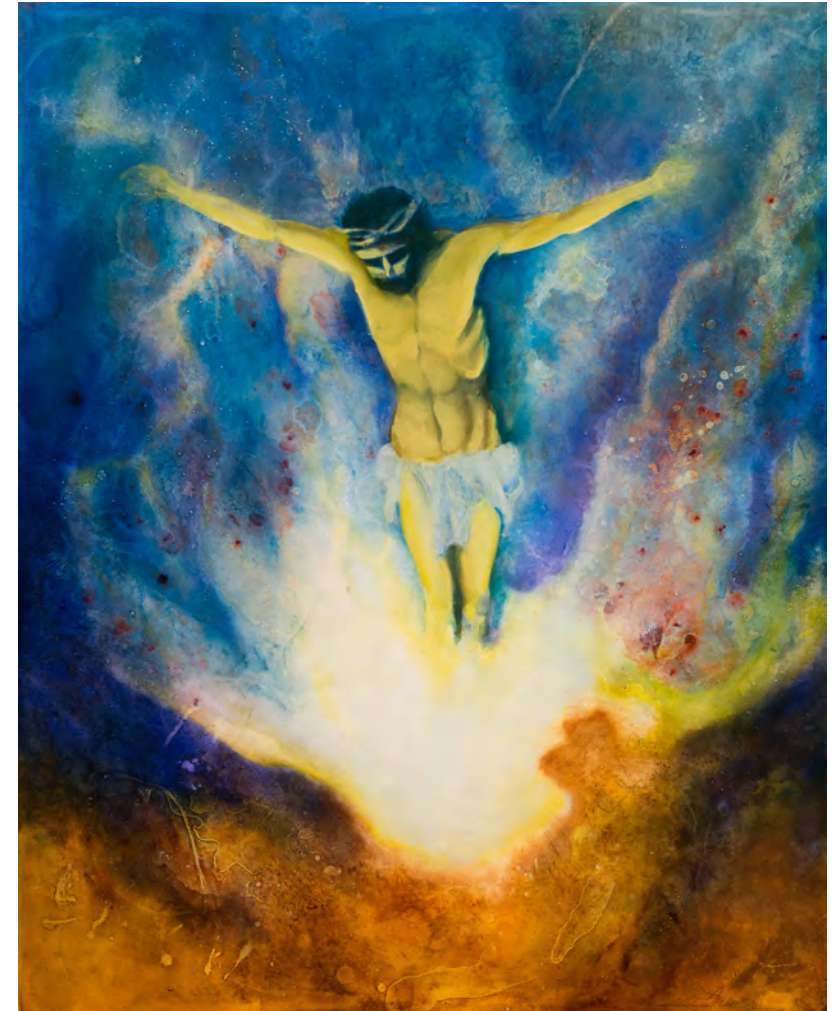
your view of God ...

is of a fearful distant judge...

then just listen to Jesus' words...at the Last Supper...

'Love one another as I've loved you.

Greater love has no one than to lay down their life for their friends.'



© Bette Lynn Dickinson

[www.bettedickinson.life](http://www.bettedickinson.life)

Liquid Acrylic on Claybord

*'It is Finished' is a part of a larger body of work on the story arc of Scripture entitled 'What Breathes Beneath Our Story' commissioned for Grand Rapids Theological Seminary in 2010. To view this work, go here.*

*Dickinson is a prophetic artist, writer, and speaker who invites audiences to connect with God through metaphors and images of the spiritual life.*

*As a gifted communicator and spiritual formation practitioner, she seeks to unveil the eternal realm, allowing her audience to ponder the unseen through her work.*



And later that night...as Jesus prays...  
for those in the future  
who will come to believe through his disciples' proclamation of the good news...  
long after he's not visible in time and space...

'Father I pray that all of them may be one...  
just as you're in me and I'm in you.  
May they also be in us...  
Then the world will know you sent me  
And that you love them...even as you loved me.'

That is...in my humble opinion...the Gospel:

God loves us...God loves you...you don't have to do this alone...  
God will give you the strength to endure by God's spirit within you...  
God will enable you to show sacrificial love...from within you...

no matter who you are...  
God loves you and does not condemn you...

We are beloved...we are to be love...

Why wouldn't we shout this good news from the roof tops...  
or whisper it over a cup of coffee with a friend...or a stranger!

I think apostle Paul got it...  
'From now on therefore...  
we regard no one from a human point of view...  
in Christ...God was reconciling the world to himself.'

Those who follow Jesus...continue God's work of reconciliation...  
not division...

Where those who've been rejected...are re-connected...  
the gospel is breaking out.  
Where mercy is offered and justice breaks through,  
God's kingdom is on the loose.

And if we're all children of a loving Creator,  
then every human being...is our sibling  
and we don't want to hurt them...or hate them...

much less be silent...  
in the face of war, starvation, racism, sexism,  
injustice and environmental destruction.

about this amazing grace...

Proclaim that!

## **We awaken** by Symeon the New Theologian<sup>i</sup>

We awaken in Christ's body  
as Christ awakens our bodies,  
and my poor hand is Christ,  
He enters  
my foot, and is infinitely me.

I move my hand, and wonderfully  
my hand becomes Christ, becomes all of Him  
(for God is indivisibly whole, seamless in His Godhood).

I move my foot, and at once  
He appears like a flash of lightning.  
Do my words seem blasphemous? — Then  
open your heart to Him

and let yourself receive the one  
who is opening to you so deeply.  
For if we genuinely love Him,  
we wake up inside Christ's body

where all our body, all over,  
every most hidden part of it,  
is realized in joy as Him,  
and He makes us, utterly real,

and everything that is hurt, everything  
that seemed to us dark, harsh, shameful,  
maimed, ugly, irreparably  
damaged, is in Him transformed

and recognized as whole, as lovely,  
and radiant in His light  
He awakens as the Beloved  
in every last part of our body.

<sup>i</sup> 949-1022 saint and mystic revered to this day by Eastern Christians, English version by Stephen Mitchell

## The House of Love

by Maggie Quinlan

How happy and secure I am.

Safe in the arms of my Shepherd.

Over the years you've taught me the depth of your love.

As I spend time in your presence, you whisper words of endearment to my heart.

I love you Lord.

I so much want to be like you.

You reached out to the needy and marginalised –

I want to share the enormous blessings you've given me with just such people.

Your Good News, your love, salvation, hope, peace, joy and compassion.

So many rich are really poor.

They cover themselves with layer upon layer of possessions, power and status.

To conceal the emptiness inside.

No meaning or purpose in life.

The comfort and security they are trying to find

Is not where they're looking.

Only You can fill that void.

Take me, Lord, to these people.

I want to be your voice.

There are the materially poor – no food, no home, no clothing.

They feel non-existent, valueless and humiliated.

Ignored. Judged.

They're poor because of the greed of the rich,

Who take no responsibility – or even notice.

Show me where and how to share the many riches you have poured into my life,

That I might assist the dehumanised to recover their humanity.

I want to be your heart.

Many are sick – physically, mentally and spiritually.

No-one to love them; no-one to care.

In isolation.

People rushed through the medical system.

Caught up in all the technology.

Care depersonalised.

Patients treated like things.

May your love shine through me.

Help me to listen, Lord.

Help me to care.



© Janine Ross-Johnstone <https://www.jphotographic.co.nz>

**Love is the house of God and you are living in that house.**

Rumi

Fearful people.

Fearful children, fearful students, fearful patients, fearful employees.  
Fearful parents, fearful ministers and fearful believers.

Fear of death.

Real issues, but... perfect love casts out all fear.

Jesus says, don't be afraid.

Come and follow me; see where I live.

Hear the Good News; the Kingdom of God is at hand.

There are many rooms in my Father's house.

Come, make your home in me,

As I make mine in you.

A call to intimacy,

So that Christ's joy might be in you,

And your joy may be complete.

May I be your hands and feet, in taking the Gospel to your people.

Addictions are not the answer.

Gives you a high for a short time,

But no real happiness.

Only God is the source of deep-seated joy,

As you spend time with him, and realise how much he loves you,

And wants to fellowship with you for eternity.

Enable me, Lord, to point the way.

Such pressure on young people.

Peer pressure to achieve; sport and partners; no real soul-mates.

No meaning in life; rootless, lost.

Conflict in homes.

Loneliness at university; separated from friends and family.

No sense of belonging; no community.

May I pass on your message, O Lord.

Share the sacred story of my life.

The amazing difference you made in my life, in my teens.

Forgive me, Lord, for my numbness and indifference

To poverty, injustice, exploitation and suffering.

Here I am. I am listening.

I will go where you take me.

To bring others into the House of Love.

## Corinthians 13

by Ana Lisa de Jong

Let me recall how to love  
though I'm hardly good at it.

Love is kind, and patient,  
which means long suffering.

Love, a mirror, that in our peers  
we see ourselves -

the good and not so gentle  
to the eye -

that we might ask ourselves,

'what grace is this that covers me  
that I cannot extend?'

And love is not jealous,  
burning envy.

Love, is a gift we give ourselves  
that others are a blessing besides,

and not the ends of all our needs,  
the source of our sustaining -

without which

we awaken thirsty  
and live with hunger self-consuming.

And love is not irritable, defensive,  
keeping score.

Love is the list at the end of the day  
that absolves itself by morning.

Has returned again in gracious measures  
to us ever undeserving -

that in the space excised by pain

is a well mined  
for the filling.

And love is just and honest,  
ever giving us a voice.

That we're not asked to hide  
downtrodden,

defending ourselves from wraithlike  
fear -

but, with the mouthpiece of heaven,

can claim a place  
sheltered in peace,

with fairness our common ground.

Living Tree Poetry March 2020

'Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.  
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.

Love doesn't strut,  
Doesn't have a swelled head,

Doesn't force itself on others,  
Isn't always "Me first,"

Doesn't fly off the handle,  
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,

Doesn't revel when others grovel,  
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,

Puts up with anything,

Trusts God always,

Always looks for the best,

Never looks back,

But keeps going to the end.'

1 Cor 13: The Message

## The good news of God's call to be one

by Marg Schrader

The earth's deep breathing and I am part of it.  
Lying flat on the solid ground, feeling myriads of life forms moving around me,  
under me, about me, above me.  
Feeling the trees swaying, the birds singing, the wind gently blowing.  
Seeing the beautiful blue sky with the fluffy cumulus clouds  
So lovely. Stretching out to north and south and east and west.  
Noticing arid deserts  
Snow-capped mountains  
Wooded fields  
Beautiful lakes.  
The shining gems of people working to call us back to fullness of life.  
  
The places we devastated - the land, the seas, the lakes, the forests.  
The wars, the killings and lethal devastation over religion, over land,  
over our rights and not yours.  
  
The Trumps and the Putins and the Johnsons. Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-un.  
Those who follow because it suits them best.  
  
Those of us who cry with pain and frustration.  
Those whose lives have been devastated by others.  
Those who give their lives and their love and their breathing for others,  
for peace, for the saving of the earth, for the unity of Spirit.  
  
And the earth still breathes  
And I am part of it for good and for evil.  
And God is: whether called Yahweh or Allah or Attah or Vishnu or Ganesh or...  
  
May we meet together to breathe in unison for the sake of our planet and all the people  
in it, delighting in our differences.  
And exploring them together.  
Determined to be a small part  
in the wholesome healing, breathing of this beautiful planet.  
  
And we remember and are grateful for Buddha and Mohammed, and Jesus and Ghandi  
and Martin Luther King and Emily Pankhurst and Thich Nhat Hanh and Mother Theresa  
and  
Greta Thunberg and Whina Cooper.  
And the greenies and those who work for refugees and crippled children  
And all those who teach and nurture and love and give themselves for others.  
  
And we pray in our own way  
'Give us the sight to see you in everyone  
To see their beauty, their love, their loss.

To let go of our need to be superior  
and comfortable and have it all.  
So we become love like you  
Servants like you  
Bringers of peace like you

Until we see all others as our neighbours, as our family, as one of us.

So we all, the mountains and the rivers, the seas and the lakes, the forests and the cities,  
the rich and the poor, the able and the disabled, the old and the young all breathe  
together with you in the deep rich breathing of the earth.'

I write this at the end of my 80th year.

Just after my birthday the scripture was, 'What does the Lord require of you: to do  
justice love mercy and walk humbly with the Lord your God.'

I thought, 'Okay God, I know it's time to smell the flowers and read the novels', but I  
facetiously asked God, 'What do you want?'

As clear as a bell deep in my heart was the word 'interfaith'.

Since then a few God incidents. People coming across my path quite unexpectedly. Now  
we're setting up a Kapiti Interfaith group.

One of my sons teaches at Wangapeka, a beautiful retreat centre in the South Island  
on acres of land run by the Buddhists. I go there frequently for silent retreats. The  
teaching is mainly on loving kindness and compassion. There, I've had a number of deep  
experiences of God which confirm the 'interfaith' call.

Let me share them with you.

One day I sensed I needed to read Ephesians 3: 'For this reason I kneel before the Creator  
of the Cosmos, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.'

These words resounded in the depth of my being.

What more could I want!

On another amazing night – again I had this deep sense of being above the earth looking  
down and seeing groups of people praying all in their own way.

I'm aware that this feels quite brave for me as I've had a little bit of 'anti' from people  
who are really concerned at my going to a Buddhist retreat.

Nevertheless, I have a deep sense there is one God who calls us all – Christian, Jew,  
Buddhist, Muslim, Hindus, Baha'i – to be one people.

## From detachment to attachment

by Bruce Nicholls

The sight of the trumper with his heavy red pack – traversing the valley between two mountain ranges (*Refresh* Summer 2020 p.33) - challenged me to meditate on the meaning of life and the paths to contemplative spirituality.

The photo brought back memories of my own tramping days in the South Island, and wonderful mountain walks in the Himalayan foothills with Kathleen and our three young ones while the children studied at Woodstock, an international school 6000 feet above the North Indian plains.

As I walked the mountain paths of the great religions during my forty years in India and South Asia, I sought to understand the Christian path. I go back to the *Aryan rishis* or holy men of North India who, 3500 years ago, so stilled their minds through meditation and yoga that they saw truth as if it were the peaceful reflection on a perfectly calm lake. At the same time, they believed in a supreme god and the need to find forgiveness of sin.

Then very much later the great Hindu philosopher, Shankara, searched for the Brahman, the One Ground of Being and its unity with Atman, (the Soul or Self). For Shankara, the phenomenal self was *maya* or unreal. He sought to surrender to the Ultimate Reality which is impersonal and eternal, with no beginning and no end.

Then in 560 BC, Siddhartha Gautama burst on the human scene. He believed all of life is suffering caused by *tanka* – desire and ignorance. Under the Bodhi tree he meditated in singleness of purpose until he attained Enlightenment, seeing Reality as it really is. He called himself the Buddha, the Enlightened One. He taught that freedom from all desire could be achieved by following eight paths to nirvana – the state of final emptiness and peace.

But since Siddhartha had no experience of the divine, he had to follow this path alone. Today many secular people in search of spirituality gravitate to Buddha.

In contrast to these well-worn mountain paths, those who follow the monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam walk a different route - one that begins with the assumption the Creator God exists and rewards those who seek after him – only to discover that he has taken the initiative.

Each of these faiths has its own distinct way to detachment and attachment to God. They each traverse from confession to surrender to faith. Their poets from the Psalmists to Rumi have contemplated the spiritual wonder of nature and of the human soul. *Refresh* is at home among them.

I've walked these several paths because they're all with us in emerging New Zealand.

And we need to build relationships of understanding with them if we're to traverse from one mountain path to another – provided we do it on God's terms. As a disciple of Jesus,

I – along with you – have experienced the truth and joy of his dictum: 'If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed'. Our contemplative relationships with each other are both personal and communal – the joy of being members of his earthly church family. This is good news indeed!



One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,  
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD  
and to seek him in his temple.

*Psalm 27:4*

## Longing for good news

by Barbara Sampson

Like David I long  
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord  
look into the face of a child  
and see a divine masterpiece  
read God's signature  
in a young man's story of transformation  
touch the holy in a moment of worship  
Some days it happens

Then there are days  
when a gaze is but a glimpse  
a back turned  
the sound of footsteps retreating  
whiff of a fragrant memory  
clouds of angel wings dispersing  
wake of a vessel just gone from sight  
conversation stopped mid-sentence  
the sound of silence falling

Whether a gaze or a glimpse  
God speaking or silent  
I still come  
asking seeking knocking  
carry the longing as my prayer

# The Good News about Contemplation and Parkinson's

by Tim Roberts

Life is a precious gift from a loving creator and that's a perfect reason for me to give myself totally to contemplation and this moment. I'm 55 and I was diagnosed with Parkinson's four years ago.

The diagnosis was wounding and the prognosis terrifying. My family and I grieved as we adjusted to the loss of a future, we'd taken for granted. I tried to slow down the disease's progress and reverse its symptoms, but my body steadily got worse. I'd assumed Parkinson's was the worst thing to happen in my life.

But it wasn't – I'd lost touch with my heart and become alienated from myself. Over the years there were warning signs – but I ignored them. Consequently, periods of my life were rudderless and numb. I was stuck in excessive thinking and worked too intensely.

I'd been tentatively exploring meditation and contemplation for many years – but since the diagnosis I practise as though my life depends on it – because it does.

Contemplation is a life-cherishing force that shapes us to live in sacred relationship and be astounded by life. Powerfully centering, it switches on circuits of calm and gratefulness, even amid anxiety and despair. The more I contemplate, the more I feel washed by living streams of wonder, humility and generosity.

I still try to recover, but now it comes from a kinder more gracious space within.

I don't have any answers – I'm just a beginner. Fear, anger and aggression still show their faces, but less frequently. I'm consoled by what monk, Wayne Teasdale, wrote, '...suffering, when rightly understood and embraced generously, is ultimately a path to spiritual, moral, even psychological transformation...It helps in the long run as we awaken to the ultimate goal of intimacy with the Divine, with boundless consciousness.'

Thinking about the future is overwhelming. But – however life turns out – I pray I may be a healing presence in the world, and this gives me meaning and purpose. Contemplation is my path and I try to remain open and receptive.

John Main, quoting the Upanishads, fills me with hope: 'The spirit of the one who created the universe dwells within the human heart and is silence and loving of all.'

I'm determined to rekindle this heart connection – but haven't known how till now. I was trying to solve the problem intellectually – symptomatic of the loss of heart connection. That won't work because the heart doesn't respond intellectually. The heart's language is being, feeling, sensing – through beauty and intuition.

I was thrilled to learn Shiva Nataraja, the god of creation and destruction, dances in our heart. Catholic mystic, Bede Griffiths, says, 'We must find the Lord who's dancing in our hearts, then we'll see the Lord dancing in all of creation.'

To me this is amazing! I enjoy listening *to* the heart and *with* the heart – now more than I

ever – and trust it. If we want to help heal others and the Earth, we have to heal our own heart connection first. And this entails deep listening. One of my favourite poets, Kabir, advises us to listen to God continually, 'Listen to the secret sound, the real sound, which is inside you.'

One powerful way to the heart is through wonder – a matter of how we choose to pay attention. Things may seem repetitive, separate, and mechanical or wonder-filled, interconnected and part of the mystery. It's our choice.

'Wonder' has become devalued. To wonder is to be surprised by life, to feel the energy of aliveness in our body. We can all reclaim wonder by consciously choosing it – trusting in our depths something vital, and part of our birthright is stirring. Any toddler can give us a master class in how to be wonder-filled.

Today the Psalms carry a deeper appeal. I empathise with their raw vulnerability. For example, Psalm 31:12, 'I've become like broken pottery.' (NIV), or 'I've become like a broken vessel.' (KJV and ESV).

People with chronic disease may see themselves as broken. But I'm trying to live the values of the Japanese art of kintsugi or golden repair – the craft of fixing broken pottery with golden lacquer. No longer is a damaged vessel cast aside – but fractures to its wholeness lovingly repaired with gold. The same pot valued for its imperfection and revered for its beauty. A form of loving kindness. Imperfections welcomed as part of the object's story. The vessel once more considered whole though in a different way – not so much restored as reclaimed.

Kintsugi is a way of loving and I want to love more. It reminds me of spiritual acts of healing and transformation and echoes the Gospel. With great insight, Gerald May wrote, 'The only way to own and claim love as our identity is to fall in love with love itself, to feel affection for our longing, to value our yearning, treasure our wanting, embrace our incompleteness, be overwhelmed by the beauty of our need.' Here contemplation – especially heart-centred listening – is invaluable.

Closely connected to Kintsugi is to welcome life with kindness. Part of my practice is to host Parkinson's with kindness instead of trying to destroy it. That would only inflict violence on myself. Parkinson's isn't separate from me and I refuse to attack myself. It's painful to be divided against yourself. Contemplation expands us so we can hold our suffering in kindness moment by moment – and this is healing.

People with Parkinson's may experience tension, rigidity and tremor which make their body uncomfortable or painful. This proves distracting for meditation and other conventional contemplative approaches.

I'm exploring different practices more suitable for now. This is a profound learning experience. I'm amazed at the richness of life that offers itself up for contemplation.

I practise contemplation as though my life depends on it – because it does.

Mary Oliver entitled one of her poems, 'The real prayers are not the words, but the attention that comes first.' How we pay attention affects how we inhabit what she called 'our one wild and precious life.' Our awareness of what we're attending to fascinates me. Awareness is always pure, it is never angry, grieving, desolate, sad, depressed, anxious or lost. Our awareness holds our thoughts and emotions as they arise, stay a while and go.

Contemplative practice creates emotional stability and spaciousness. Even the most highly charged emotional states dissolve. Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh, instructs us to be mindful of our in-breath and out-breath. To hold our emotions tenderly as they arise, stay a while, and go. Don't resist or condemn them – which only strengthens their grip on us. Smile to our emotions because smiling soothes our nervous system. Practising like this has freed me from years of anxiety.

I enjoy a form of Yoga Nidra called iRest – tuning into your body through sensation. This leads to awake, alert awareness. In iRest, we contemplate through all five senses and our thinking. We gently ask: 'Who's aware of these senses?' 'Am I my thoughts – my emotions?' We come to know we aren't. We're pure awareness. Everything, including our bodies, arises in awareness.

This is liberating and I found it gave me confidence. Richard Miller explains, 'We discover we're Vastness that is infinite, joyous, loving, kind, compassionate and always present, even in the greatest difficulty...Whatever you're willing to be with, you go beyond. Sensory impressions, and habit patterns you neither resist or get involved in – expand and pop, dissolve and disappear.'

One of my favourite practices is contemplative listening – especially birdsong before dawn, insects during the day and rain at night. I love the simple, direct practice of attending to sounds moment by moment as fresh, vivid and alive.

I feel like I'm drinking in life force through sound – being led further into the mystery where my teachers include the silence, the cicada, the cricket, and the tui.

I was astonished to realise the silence between notes in the tui's song was the sound of the universe. John Main notes, 'The silence we encounter isn't just the silence of our being quiet. It's the silence of divine energy.'

Creation is magnificent. The other day, I was watching God, dressed as a green and gold cricket singing the cosmos alive. It was an awesome encounter. I notice my awareness embraces every sound with equanimity no matter how near or distant, how loud or quiet. I dwell on these questions: How big is this awareness? Where does the awareness end and the sound begin? Does everything arise in this awareness? Is this awareness even mine?

Contemplative smelling is marvelous, simply open yourself to all the smells that surround you, accepting them without judgement. Notice aromas, fragrances and scents. Observe variations in smell, textures of scent – even the energetic charge some

fragrances have. Smells reach us, increase in intensity and then dissipate.

A favourite place to practise is a track lined with Kānuka. As the undulating path dips and rises, temperature changes. Fluctuations in light and shade produce a vast array of scents. It's an olfactory treat.

Another contemplative practice is turning *into* the pain and discomfort. At first, I found this counter intuitive. For several hours most days it's too uncomfortable for me to sit, or lie down or stand. Walking is difficult so I lurch from door frame to door frame. Inspired by *kintsugi* my attention turns toward the pain and discomfort.

This is what Pema Chodron calls 'the wisdom of no escape'.

I can't flee – so I either choose denial and dissociation or an open-hearted welcoming of what's already here moment by moment. It's like applying gold to a broken pot – the gold is contemplative awareness and the compassion it activates.

At first, I resisted because opening to the rigidity in my body increased my discomfort. But I soon understood resistance itself increased the discomfort because it comes with so many negative expectations.

Attending this way is a radical act of hospitality to reclaim our wholeness. Parkinson's is something I don't want. But I won't deny it, condemn it or alienate it because it *is* me, my body, my mind, and my consciousness. I'm actually determined to love it. This is a conscious choice. I don't know if I can do it every day – but I'm trying.

Contemplation taught me if we aren't living consciously – we may not really be living at all. It's too easy to numb out and blame it on difficult circumstances. The past no longer exists, the future doesn't yet exist. This is freeing for someone with a prognosis like mine. Billions have gone before us, but we're alive now in this moment, and there's much healing to be done. The world is beautiful. Let's live this moment in full recognition of how precious it is and how transient we are. What a privilege! Who could ask for more!

#### References

- Bede Griffiths in Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart*  
Kabir, *Selected Poems*, Translated by Robert Bly  
John Main, *Fully Alive*  
Gerald May, *The Awakened Heart*  
Richard Miller, *Yoga Nidra*  
Mary Oliver, *New and Selected Poems Volume 2*  
Wayne Teasdale, *The Inner Monk*  
Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart*



© Kintsugi Repair Art Studio NZ

## SGM News

A great number of contemplatives I know managed extremely well in lockdown - thrived in fact! SGM, as with other 'providers' in contemplative spirituality, has a special role suggesting that Good News can be especially so in a time like this. Contemplatives unsurprisingly use Good News words like 'reset, slow down, reflect, and simplify' alongside all the new words we have all taken on - 'PPE, modelling, zoom, bubble, essential and Covid'!

SGM remains in good heart. Thankfully the Featherston retreat snuck in before lockdown and went well, as did March Workgroup. We now have ten members with the recent addition of Vicki Roberts from Tauranga. Vicki is Nga Ruahine (Taranaki), a Treaty Educator, and a Mum (in many forms). Grace, peace and patience in this winter season.

*Jane Wilkinson, Convenor SGM Workgroup.*

### Spiritual Directors Formation Programme

Dancing on a moving carpet. Barely had the formation year got underway than we're shifting workshops online. Adapting to the Covid-19 environment meant decisions that seem reasonable one day were the next - utterly naive.

How long ago those days seemed and how proud I am of the robust yet nimble entity which is the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme. We flexed with the changing situation - delivering meaningful training experiences to participants. Supervisors, presenters and markers kept both Year 1 and 2 cohorts tracking well. The silver lining to online work is overseas participants can join us live at the cost of several hours of sleep.

Many participants had significant extra loads drop - unexpectedly home-educating children and reimagining faith community life. I can't help wonder if they've been called by God into spiritual direction 'for such a time as this'. Please keep them in your prayers.

The Spiritual Directors Formation Programme is flavoured by visionaries who brought it into being over thirty years ago (I am so grateful to them), by the unique culture of Aotearoa - our whenua, tāngata and tikanga - and the support of the contemplative community (hat tip to you!). New voices are emerging in the contemplative world. Their influence can be seen in increased applications from people reading Sharon Garlough Brown's Sensible Shoes series, rising interest in liturgy, retreats and meditation brought about by the New Monastic movement and leadership of compassionate contemplatives across the Church in Aotearoa.

I'd love it if you'd keep your eyes skinned for anyone you think has the 'right stuff' to become a spiritual director. Tell them so and then point them in our direction!  
[www.sgm.org.nz](http://www.sgm.org.nz). Simple as that.

*Fran Francis, Coordinator, SGM Spiritual Directors Formation Programme*

## Books

### *What I learned in My Cell: Taking a Contemplative Stance During a Time of Pandemic*

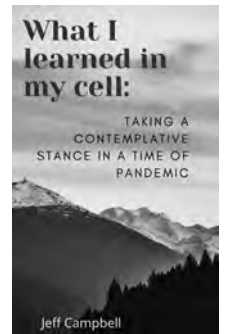
Author Jeff Campbell

Format Kindle April 21, 2020

'Sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything.'

These words are hundreds of years old. And yet, we find ourselves in a situation where they take on a fresh resonance.

The Global Pandemic has unleashed devastation, but there are lessons here, too. While these historic events can be more deeply understood through a contemplative lens, it is equally true that this time in our history will also shape how we experience silence itself. Part memoir, part musing on the nature of spiritual practice, this book also includes step-by-step instructions to guide readers into several different styles of meditation and contemplative practice.



### *Surrendering into Silence: Quaker Prayer Cycles*

Author David Johnson, Editor Charles H Martin

Format Kindle

Publisher Inner Light Books April 4, 2020

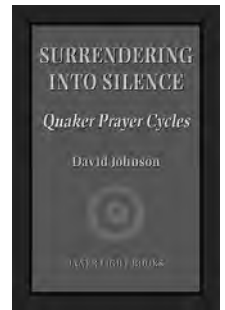
Quaker spirituality is at its core a contemplative practice which is based on the path taught and lived by Jesus. The traditional Quaker experience is that the Spirit of God communicates directly to each and every person, especially when we spend time in silence, and is experienced mainly as an Inward Light in the conscience.

Further, as this Inward Light is followed, we're granted more light and greater purity of heart or holiness, and we become reborn inwardly as the Spirit of God (Christ) takes hold of our lives.

Many of the quotations in this work are deliberately sourced from the first Quakers, whose remarkable spiritual strength opened a unique vision of Christianity and changed the world around them. The language of the 1600s may sound foreign to our ears until it becomes familiar.

Readers are urged to sit and feel for the underlying spiritual message of these written experiences of our Quaker ministers and elders as well as of the selected excerpts from the Scriptures.

The Quaker experience and understanding are that God is always ready to guide and lead us and goes before us, though we may be called upon to wait till we have been inwardly prepared. 'Way will open' in God's time rather than in our own time frame.





## The Last Word

When the SGM workgroup and I decided on 'good news' as the theme for our Winter Refresh, we were living in the innocent Spring of September 2019.

Since that time Aotearoa New Zealand has formed a healthy bubble in a world full of despair-coloured bathwater. Regardless of how well we're doing, it hurts to see such large-scale suffering overseas. Many contemplatives have remarked how they took to lockdown like a duck to water – and that's a welcome grace at such a time. As I write, we're moving from level three to level two with much relief and anticipation.

I was surprised and delighted when a rush of COVID-19 related reflections and poems came pouring in around the March deadline. Good news still shone through.

I hope you find some fellow travellers in the pages of this Refresh.

May good news find you,  
Diane

### Summer 2021 Refresh

Theme 'Practice'

Deadline September 28, 2020

Tim Roberts' beautiful contribution to this Winter's good news theme is a hint at the kind of exploration of practice Refresh is seeking for our Summer 2021 edition. What is your rule of life, what does your contemplative practice look like, and where do you find it easiest? Who were your spiritual mentors? How has your life in God become deeper and more intimate with practice over time? How has your contemplative practice informed your life in action? How best do you 'hear' 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.

## Gifts along the way

by Sandy Neal



© Sandy Neal

As I started my walk this morning  
a fantail chanted the karanga for me.  
Midway along the path  
two stones invited me to pick them up,  
hold them,  
feel them,  
admire their shapes and colours and surfaces,  
to listen to what they could tell me  
and kindly allowed me  
to bring them home for a while.

As I approached the turning point  
a tui called out a challenge  
and flew with his mate 'across my bow'  
to ensure I heard and obeyed  
the message to turn for home.

As I chose my way  
amongst the different surfaces of the  
road construction site  
two pigeons jeered at my inability  
to simply soar with them above the earth  
and closer to the sun.

Finally,  
I encountered some early morning coffee drinkers  
as they prepared for another day of work  
caring for the elderly and vulnerable around them.

My two stone visitors  
are now safely settled with the others  
which make up my temporary 'pilgrim's cairn' at home.  
They remind me I am on a journey,  
day by day,  
and to take the time  
to appreciate the wonder of every moment  
and the gifts along the way.

## Contributors

**Lesley Ayers** lives in Tauranga with her husband John. Photographing something beautiful each day in this time of Covid19 has opened her eyes to the wonder, the complexity, the variety and the ever changing nature of creation.

**Anna Johnstone** is deeply grateful for the many joys in her life and loves writing about them. [www.annajohnstone.com](http://www.annajohnstone.com)

**Geoff King** After 20 years in a variety of roles including school and military chaplaincy and parish ministry in Dunedin and Christchurch during the earthquake period, Geoff King completed a Master's degree in counselling in 2013 and has since 2016 worked as a counsellor at Burnside High School.

**Rev Dr Steve Taylor** is Principal, Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, New Zealand. He is married to Lynne, who is teaching him to knit. Together they enjoy walks, cups of tea and carving a garden out of bush at the back of their Otago Harbour property.

**Silvia Purdie** is a Presbyterian minister living with her army chaplain husband at Burnham. She is currently doing post graduate theology through Otago, with a focus on Eco Mission. She is co-convenor of A Rocha Christchurch. Her extensive work on worship, psalms, music and ministry is available at: [www.conversations.net.nz](http://www.conversations.net.nz).

**Joy MacCormick** is well aware of the devastation caused throughout the world by the current pandemic, yet on a personal level is enjoying and valuing the opportunity to retreat into her own little bubble and having time for reflection and contemplation. As some wise person said "Remember, you were born for this time."

**Jeanne Wissing** lives in the heart of Wellington and worships and serves at Island Bay Presbyterian Church. The relationship between darkness and light is as much a source of fascination, learning and adventure to her as discovering the holy in the everyday, and digging deeper into the treasures of the Word through the study of Biblical Hebrew.

**Ana Lisa de Jong** is a contemplative poet, known for her prolific writing. She is inspired by the power and wonder of words, art and the myriad of ways it speaks to us, and the eternal threaded through the natural world. She enjoys connecting with readers and creating collections to gift to others. Read more of Ana Lisa's words at [livingtreepoetry.com](http://livingtreepoetry.com)

**Paul Fromont** lives in Cambridge with Gita, his wife. Everyday he's grateful that he lives in this amazing country, one which wanders and explores far and wide. He's grateful too for his children, close friends, books, films and a rich variety of music, food, wine and conversation.

**Trish McBride** is a writer and an appreciator of so much Gospel-oriented work done by so many organisations in our communities. She loves walking in the bush and noticing tiny things, delights in finding common ground with her good Muslim friend, and is looking forward to seeing her 21 grand-children again when it is allowable.

**Liz Maluschnig** is a Spiritual Director, counsellor and celebrant living on an eco-friendly lifestyle farm in Wanaka with her husband Steve and fur baby Beau.

**Diane Gilliam-Weeks** is editor of Refresh. Lives by the sea with Reg. Her current calling is spiritual direction and supervision, but is doing a stint as Moderator of Presbytery Central in the PCANZ. Really loves hearing God at work as others share their stories.

**Maggie Quinlan** is a part-time GP with a passion to be God's hands, feet, voice and heart to reach the needy and marginalised. She has a husband David, two children and four grandchildren. She spends a lot of time happily with the grandchildren. Otherwise loves singing, photography, scrap booking, knitting, mosaicking and tramping. Together with her husband, she manages a menagerie of alpacas, sheep, cows, donkeys and two dogs!

**Bruce and Kathleen Nicholls** spend their working lives in India and South Asia as educationalists, researchers, authors and publishers, TV producers, and church pastors. Bruce's recent book, *Building Bridges from Asian Faiths to Jesus in the Gospels*, published by Regnum, Oxford, is available from him ([brucejnicholls@gmail.com](mailto:brucejnicholls@gmail.com)), cost \$25 including postage in NZ.

**Tim Roberts** wanted to be a poet but ended up a policeman. Then he wanted to be a priest and ended up a university lecturer. Then he wanted to be a storyteller and ended up a facilitator and coach. He lives on the Kapiti Coast with a wonderful family and a nutty dog. He finds contemplative practice to be life-sustaining and he is happy and inspired (usually). [Tim.d.roberts88@gmail.com](mailto:Tim.d.roberts88@gmail.com)

**Sandy Neal** is a wife, mother, grandmother and an Anglican priest involved in chaplaincy and parish ministries. Sandy enjoys walking, playing with photography, reading sci-fi/fantasy and watching movies.

