

“Bridges”



Reflections for the Seasons of Advent and Christmas
2017-2018

The West Virginia Institute for Spirituality
1601 Virginia Street East
Charleston, WV 25311

December 17, 2017

“The heavens proclaim the glory of God.” (Psalm 19:2)

Reflection

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day pours out the word to day, and night imparts knowledge. (Psalm 19:2)

Prayer Practice

The PRAYER WALK is experiencing a revival. Instead of just going on a walk for cardio fitness, many people are incorporating prayer with their cardio walk. What better way is there to improve our human heart than to combine a cardio walk with prayer to make it a Prayer Walk?

- Weather permitting try to do two, 20 minute PRAYER WALKS today.
- Before you begin EACH of your two prayer walks, the suggested OPENING PRAYER is “The heavens proclaim the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.” (Psalm 19:2). Amen.
- The suggested time of the FIRST prayer walk should be during the DAYLIGHT hours.
- In addition to the OPENING PRAYER, the SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL PRAYER for the FIRST PRAYER WALK should be: “Day pours out the word to day.” “Lord! pour out your word to me during our FIRST PRAYER WALK today. Amen.” Then walk and listen.
- The SECOND Prayer walk should be in the EVENING hours.
- In addition to the OPENING PRAYER, the ADDITIONAL PRAYER for the EVENING PRAYER WALK should be: “Night imparts knowledge. “Lord! Pour out your knowledge to me during our SECOND PRAYER WALK this evening. Amen.” Then walk and listen.
- Last record in your journal or include in the prayers you say before you go to bed, any insights you experienced during your two PRAYER WALKS.

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December 18, 2017

I Corinthians 9:22-23 *“To the weak I became weak, to urge the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings.”*



BUILDING BRIDGES
“The Art of Neighboring”

In meditating on the series title, I am reminded of returning to my retirement community after hurricane Matthew’s devastation. Damage to our grounds/covered walkways/bridges/some 1st floor buildings, listening to returning resident’s stories, all had a dramatic effect.

Our normal activities program was expanded. For the most part, a servant spirit was developed, personal preferences were set aside and outreach activities were stressed. Compassion encourages bridge building.

Those who were able, assumed in-house visitation especially in our care facility, emphasis was on evangelism, helping food banks, local mission programs and holiday outreach activities in general.

This I Corinthians passage presents a model image of discipleship for all people in building bridges. We share with the Apostle Paul who saw the need and was moved into action. He preached the Word, and in that sense, saved people. The gain of even “some” is worth the expenditure of “all means”. He conformed himself to the feelings of each in the several classes, that out of them all he might gain some. Let us do the same.

DAILY PRAYER PRACTICE: When we travel through our day...walking, running, driving...invite the Spirit to help us see people as He does. “Lord, open my eyes to see the people around me the way you do. In Jesus name I pray, Amen”

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December 19, 2017

In my Father's house are many mansions” John 14:2

“I am all at once what Christ is . . . immortal diamond.”

Gerard Manley Hopkins *“That Nature is a Heracleatean Fire”*

We build bridges in everything we do. We connect things, form chains of concepts, sequences of love and understanding. Today's readings provide two love stories: Samson and Delilah and Zachariah and Elizabeth.

.Delilah's audacity, Samson's courage: I seem to hear him think “in this I redeem myself from her betrayal of me and my betrayal of my people.”

.”Zachariah,“ I imagine Elizabeth saying “and I, we're old, People think we're nothing; but within my body, my son lives.” I feel her joy; I admire her strength.

We prepare for Christmas. Last year people celebrated, gathered, sang, and responded to the excitement of approaching joy. We form bridges of time that way. And time too bridges us. Last Christmas, I remember, friends and family no longer here were here. And I'm different too. In the same way, my roof left in the last hurricane. Now I'm looking forward (making a bridge, expecting) the new one. Can I do that with more important things? Can I bridge what strikes me as false, ugly, and atrocious? Can I imitate Jesus with ordinary awareness?

Practice: Do something simple for someone troubled. Expect the lifted spirits your gesture of love starts. Bridge the gaps you see.

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December 20, 2017

“Ask for a sign from the Lord, your God, let it be deep as the nether world, or high as the sky! Ahaz answered, “I will not ask! I will not tempt the Lord! The Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall name Him Emmanuel”.

Is 7: 10-14

There are many times where I would so have liked a sign that God is truly with me. I am reminded of those times of sorrow, or confusion when that aloneness takes over and I wonder, where are you God? And yet I often remember two beautiful images of God: one where he is reaching out to me as a child who represents trust and unconditional love, and the other where Christ is always holding his arms out waiting for me to know He is there, and there for me. During this Advent time I often reflect on God’s gift of so many, many signs of his presence during my day. A kind word, an insight that is so helpful at the moment, the beauty of swirling snow or the presence of joy in another person. I pray that I can be aware that God is present, is sending so many signs, even as I look to today as well as look back on how he has taken care of me.



Practice: May I reach out today and **see** the signs of Gods’ care and goodness to me in my life, for He sends his son not only on Christmas but every day to each of us.

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December 21, 2017

Hark! My lover-here he comes springing across the mountains, leaping across the hills. My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. SG 2:8-14

That beautiful description from *Song of Songs* paints for me a God who springs from my heart, teaching love. I conjure a connection between Advent and goodness.

Lately I've been toying with the notion that there's a greater goodness in every human being – something I shared at a recent A.A. meeting. We talk a lot about deeper goodness in our fellowship. The experience of deeper goodness naturally evolves through the spirituality of Twelve Step recovery and growth.

The bridging of Advent and goodness. Seems to be a no-brainer. The heralding of ultimate goodness! A season of anticipation and cleaning. An opportunity to empty more space. The Gazelle waits to leap and lead us over the hills!

Making sense of it in words is a challenge. There is an invitation to beautiful metaphors, pensive paradox, vivid imaginings of mountains and hills beyond our wildest dreams. Perhaps even some happy hyperbole in the confidence that all shall be well. Like an actor rehearsing for a Christmas play who feels inadequate to describe the experience.

Prayer Practice

Take your own notion of greater goodness to God. Allow the Creator to create the metaphors, paradox, imagination, and hyperbole. We are inadequate for the challenge. But God can do it if He is sought.

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Friday, December 22, 2017



“the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name”.

Luke 1: 49

I don't have any specific memories of learning the prayer: Hail Mary, but I know my parents taught it to me as a child and it was reinforced through praying the rosary as a family. I definitely remember a 4th grade Christmas pageant where a number of us were dressed in white robes and were praying The Magnificat through sacred gestures. These ancient prayers, passed down from generation to generation, helped forge my relationship with Mary.

Today the first reading and the responsorial psalm are taken from the first book of Samuel, Chapters 1 and 2. We hear Hannah, proclaiming that the Lord heard her prayer and granted her a son, Samuel. She sings her praise to God as she presents her child at the temple saying that he will be dedicated to the Lord.

Is it possible that when Mary was growing up she heard and prayed the Cantic of Hannah? When she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, did these words spontaneously spring up in her heart as she sang her song of praise? Both Hannah and Mary glorified God with their songs of praise. Both Hannah and Mary are women who listened and trusted in God's promises to them.

In a spirit of humility, we sing/pray with Mary: “the Almighty had done great things for me, and holy is His name”.

Prayer Practice:

Pray the Magnificat. What words or phrases speak to your heart?

Write/Sing your own Magnificat

Reflect/journal on the “great things” God has done for you.

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December 23, 2017

*Your ways, O Lord, make known to me;
teach me your paths,
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my savior. (Psalm 25:4-5)*

As a disciple of Christ, I am aware of the invitation to know the truth, become the truth and to share it with others. The truth becomes the light; a bridge that connects the darkness to light. I am aware how easy it is to want to know the latest news and hope for the truth. Yet, there are all kinds of external noise. The real truth begins in the silence of my conversation with God. The deeper question that arises from my prayer is what shall I do with God's truth? How shall I become the bridge that connects to others?

Recently, I drove to Pittsburgh from St. Louis to plan for a reflection day in 2018. As the planning committee pondered how to create a day of spiritual renewal, we were graced by the realization that truth and wisdom happen when our own minds, hearts and wills are open to God's path. Becoming a bridge for others by providing others with a safe environment to question, dialogue and discover the truth over time is our invitation.

How open am I to hear the voice of God in a disciple that I would rather ignore? How willing am I to let go of my own thoughts that I have deemed the truth to hear another speak of God's ways? Or do I burn the bridge between us so that I am justified in my own thoughts and actions.

Prayer Practice: Listen to Simon and Garfunkel's song, Bridge Over Troubled Water. Ponder the lyrics and the hope. How are you a bridge for others in troubled times? Journal and share with a trusted friend what it means to be disciple of God's truth.



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