

LIFE STORIES

A 40-DAY DEVOTIONAL
ON MADELEINE L'ENGLE'S
A CIRCLE OF QUIET

...INTRODUCTION...



The Bible's library is full of stories: ancient writers remembering, reflecting, wrestling, trying to make sense of life with God in the midst of creation. And the point of preserving and passing down this library, of course, is to invite us into the storytelling – so we might remember, reflect, and wrestle with our lives, too. Taking stock of how far we've come. Reconnecting with where we are. And turning the page toward the future, catching sight of what God is calling us to do next.

In this 40-day devotional, we set out on a pilgrimage, the stories of Scripture in one hand and the wisdom of Madeleine L'Engle in the other. In *A Circle of Quiet*, the first volume of her *Crosswicks Journals* series, L'Engle reflects on her life, her family, her writing career (including the struggle and success of *A Wrinkle in Time*), and through it all, her evolving faith. Over the next seven weeks, we will do the same, as biblical passages and L'Engle's insights illuminate each other, inviting us into our own practice of retelling the stories of our lives.

Key movements in the Christian symphony will frame the journey: life, suffering, and resurrection. Key themes in L'Engle's work will lead the way: joy, love, and mystery. And as we go, each week includes simple, accessible practices you can try yourself, with your family or friends, or with your congregation.

All you'll need is your favorite Bible and this devotional; passages from *A Circle of Quiet* are reprinted here by permission. Day by day, week by week, we'll make our way into the heart of the Christian story, the heart of our life stories: the astonishing, gracious love of God, the Author – the Storyteller! – of heaven and earth.

MADELEINE L'ENGLE



A LIFE

Madeleine L'Engle was the author of more than sixty books, including fiction for children and adults, poetry, plays, memoirs, and books on prayer. Her beloved classic, *A Wrinkle in Time*, won the Newbery Medal in 1963, and has since been turned into a graphic novel, an opera, and two feature films. Since its publication, it has never been out of print.

L'Engle was born in 1918 in New York City, the child of two artists – her mother a pianist and her father a novelist, journalist, and music and drama critic. She studied in Switzerland, in South Carolina, and at Smith College, where she graduated with honors in English.

After graduation, L'Engle moved back to New York and began work as a stage actress, playwright, and fiction writer. She met the actor Hugh Franklin on set; they married in 1946. Looking for space and stability away from the city – and mindful of Cold War anxieties – Madeleine and Hugh bought Crosswicks, an old farmhouse in Goshen, Connecticut. They eventually moved to Crosswicks permanently and spent a decade there, raising three children and running the local general store, before returning to New York City. Hugh ended up starring in *All My Children*; L'Engle as a librarian and writer-in-residence at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, a position she held for three decades.

The family often returned to Crosswicks over the years, and these visits inspired L'Engle's *Crosswicks Journals*, including *A Circle of Quiet*, the first volume in the series. In 2004, L'Engle was awarded a National Humanities Medal, one of the highest honors an American writer can receive. She died in Connecticut in 2007, at the age of 88.



WHAT IS SPIRITUAL ... AUTOBIOGRAPHY? ...

Spiritual autobiography is the ancient practice of retelling the story of your life from a personal, spiritual perspective, reflecting on God's companionship through the twists and turns of your pilgrimage so far.

The practice goes back as far as the fourth century CE, when the north-African bishop Augustine of Hippo wrote his *Confessions*, widely considered one of the first autobiographies ever written. For Augustine, "confession" didn't only mean confessing his errors; it also meant confessing his faith, describing his struggles and insights along the way, and praising God's grace and generosity. Variations on the practice have followed ever since, including a flurry in seventeenth-century England, when both Quakers and Puritans picked it up as a strategy for reflecting on personal adversity and devotion, charting a path for others to follow.

A Circle of Quiet is a modern version of this ancient tradition, continually returning to spiritual themes and thinkers, braiding them together with down-to-earth stories from everyday life. And please note: her account isn't strictly chronological, but rather takes shape as a kind of mosaic of memories and reflection. In this 40-day devotional, we imagine L'Engle inviting us – challenging us! – to retell our life stories in a similar style, the better to deepen our understanding, strengthen our faith, kindle our joy, and take our next steps along the Way.





WEEK ONE

BUT WHEN YOU GIVE ALMS, DO NOT LET YOUR LEFT HAND KNOW WHAT YOUR RIGHT HAND IS DOING... + MATTHEW 6:3

READ

MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-21



FROM A CIRCLE OF QUIET

BY MADELEINE L'ENGLE (PART ONE, SECTION 3):

The concentration of a small child at play is analogous to the concentration of the artist of any discipline. In real play, which is real concentration, the child is not only outside time, he is outside *himself*. He has thrown himself completely into whatever it is that he is doing. A child playing a game, building a sand castle, painting a picture, is completely in what he is doing. His *self*-consciousness is gone; his consciousness is wholly focused outside himself.

I had just witnessed this in Crosswicks, observing an eighteen-month-old lying on her stomach on the grass watching a colony of ants, watching with total, spontaneous concentration. And I had played ring-around-a-rosy with her; we skipped around in a circle, grandparents, parents, assorted teenagers, wholly outside ourselves, holding hands, falling in abandon onto the lawn, joining in the child's shrieks of delighted laughter.

And with her we were outside self and outside time.

When we are *self*-conscious, we cannot be wholly aware; we must throw ourselves out first. This throwing ourselves away is the act of creativity. So, when we wholly concentrate, like a child in play, or an artist at work, then we share in the act of creating. We not only escape time, we also escape our *self*-conscious selves.

The Greeks had a word for ultimate self-consciousness which I find illuminating: *hubris*: pride in the sense of putting oneself in the center of the universe. The strange and terrible thing is that this kind of total self-consciousness invariably ends in self-annihilation. The great tragedians have always understood this, from Sophocles to Shakespeare. We witness it in history in such people as Tiberius, Eva Perón, Hitler.

I was timid about putting forth most of these thoughts [to my students], but this kind of timidity is itself a form of pride. The moment that humility becomes self-conscious, it becomes hubris. One cannot be humble and aware of oneself at the same time. Therefore, the act of creating – painting a picture, singing a song, writing a story – is a humble act? This was a new thought to me. Humility is throwing oneself away in complete concentration on something or someone else.

I remember learning to skip rope. It's not too difficult when you hold the rope yourself. But then there's learning to jump into a rope swung by two other children, learning to jump in without breaking the rhythm and tripping over the rope. It can't be done unless you have that special kind of creative courage which is unself-conscious: the moment you wonder whether or not you can do it, you can't...

The kind of unself-consciousness I'm thinking about becomes clearer to me when I turn to a different discipline: for instance, that of playing a Bach fugue at the piano, precisely because I will never be a good enough pianist to play a Bach fugue as it should be played. But when I am actually sitting at the piano, all there is for me is the music. I am wholly in it, unless I fumble so badly that I perforce become self-conscious. Mostly, no matter how inadequate my playing, the music is all that matters: I am outside time, outside self, in play, in joy. When we can play with the unself-conscious concentration of a child, this is: art: prayer: love.

REFLECT

Jesus challenges us to give, pray, fast, and treasure in ways that aren't paraded out in public for all to see, but rather take place "in secret" – hidden even from ourselves ("do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing"). His warning boils down to how self-consciousness can corrupt even our most noble acts: first, when we self-consciously hope others will notice and admire those acts; and second, when we self-consciously glance in the mirror, so to speak, noticing and admiring ourselves.

Either way, our acts of giving, praying, fasting, or valuing become distorted into acts of self-aggrandizement. What should be single-minded (your "right hand" doing something) becomes double-minded (your "left hand" admiring what the right hand is doing). "The moment that

humility becomes self-conscious," writes L'Engle, "it becomes hubris." Oh, my – look how humble I am!

In this passage from *A Circle of Quiet*, L'Engle applies this fundamental insight to the fabric of human life: how we create, play, and love. What would it look like to be truly single-minded, to live such that our "left hand" doesn't know what our "right hand" is doing? A first example: a child at play. In her concentration, she is fully conscious – but she is not *self*-conscious in a double-minded sense. A second example: a family at play, falling into the grass, shrieking with laughter. A third: skipping rope. A fourth: playing music.

The provocative invitation here is to live our whole lives in this playful, concentrated, single-minded way, outside time, outside self – a mode of being L'Engle equates with genuine joy, art, prayer, love.

PRAY



God of playful love and light, let us be single-minded today. Let us give, and ask, and refrain, and treasure – with the unself-conscious concentration of a child at play. Let us learn to be your children again. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRACTICES

LIGHT

This week begin each day by lighting a candle of joy and play, playing the prayer above.

JOURNAL

Start a 40-day journal in which you will retell the story of your life. Begin with childhood: what moments do L'Engle's examples of playful concentration bring to mind? When do you remember being "outside time, outside self, in play, in joy"? What were you doing? Who were you with? How did it feel, look, smell, taste, sound?

SABBATH

Choose a day (or a part of a day!) that will serve as your weekly sabbath during this 40-day pilgrimage. Sunday is a classic option, of course, but Saturday works, too. Many Jews observe the Sabbath from sundown Friday

to sundown Saturday. And others set aside a section of a day each week (say, an evening, or an early morning). Above all, sabbaths are for joy, for being outside time, for being with loved ones, for laughter and music and play and delight!

PLAY

Make time to play a favorite game (or two!) this week!



DISCUSS

- When was the last time you got so absorbed in something that you lost track of time?
- What activities help you feel most single-minded, most unself-conscious?
- Do you agree with Jesus' warning that ostensibly "noble" actions can easily become distorted into self-aggrandizement? Have you noticed that kind of distortion in your own life?
- Is it possible to act admirably without that kind of distortion (without hoping others admire you, or without admiring yourself)?
- What would it look like in your life if you let those distortions go, and instead acted with what L'Engle calls "the concentration of a small child at play"?



WHEN WE CAN PLAY WITH
THE UNSELF-CONSCIOUS
CONCENTRATION OF A CHILD,
THIS IS: ART: PRAYER: LOVE.

+ MADELEINE L'ENGLÉ



... WEEK TWO ...



THEN JESUS WAS LED UP BY THE SPIRIT INTO THE WILDERNESS...
+ MATTHEW 4:1

READ

MATTHEW 4:1-11



FROM A CIRCLE OF QUIET



BY MADELEINE L'ENGLE (PART ONE, SECTION I):

Every so often I need OUT; something will throw me into total disproportion, and I have to get away from everybody – away from all these people I love most in the world – in order to regain a sense of proportion...

My special place is a small brook in a green glade, a circle of quiet from which there is no visible sign of human beings. There's a natural stone bridge over the brook, and I sit there, dangling my legs and looking through the foliage at the sky reflected in the water, and things slowly come back into perspective. If the insects are biting me – and they usually are; no place is quite perfect – I use the pliable branch of a shadblow tree as a fan. The brook wanders through a tunnel of foliage, and the birds sing more sweetly there than anywhere else; or perhaps it is just that when I am at the brook I have time to be aware of them, and I move slowly into a kind of peace that is marvelous, "annihilating all that's made to a green thought in a green shade." If I sit for a while, then my impatience, crossness, frustration, are indeed annihilated, and my sense of humor returns.

It's a ten-minute walk to the brook...across a high ridge where there are large outcroppings of glacial stone, including our special star-watching rock. Then the path becomes full of tussocks and hummocks; my legs are etched by the thorns of blackberry brambles and wild roses. Earlier this summer the laurel burst from snow into fire, and a few weeks later we found a field of sweet wild strawberries. And then there are blueberry bushes, not very many, but a few, taller than I am and, to me, infinitely beautiful.

The burning bush: somehow I visualize it as much like one of these blueberry bushes. The bush burned, was alive with flame and was not consumed. Why? Isn't it because, as a bush, it was perfect? It was exactly as a bush is meant to be. A bush certainly doesn't have the opportunity

for prideful and selfish choices, for self-destruction, that we human beings do. It is. It is a pure example of ontology. Ecology – ontology – the words fascinate me. Ontology is one of my son-in-law's favorite words, and I'm apt to get drunk on words, to go on jags; ontology is my jag for this summer, and I'm grateful to Alan for it – as for so much else. Ontology: the word about the essence of things; the word about being.

I go to the brook because I get out of being, out of the essential. So I'm not like the bush, then. I put all my prickliness, selfishness, in-turnedness, onto my isness; we all tend to, and when we burn, this part of us is consumed. When I go past the tallest blueberry bush...I think that the part of us that has to be burned away is something like the deadwood on the bush; it has to go, to be burned in the terrible fire of reality, until there is nothing left but our ontological selves; what we are meant to be.

I go to the brook and my tensions and frustrations are lost as I spend a happy hour sitting right in the water and trying to clear it of the clogging debris left by a fallen tree.

REFLECT

Jesus' temptations in the wilderness all come down to fear and trust. God's declaration at Jesus' baptism is still ringing in his ears – "This is my Child, the Beloved" (Matthew 3:17) – and so the tempter zeroes in on that declaration: *Are you really God's Child? Are you really Beloved? Look at you: you're hungry. If you're God's Child, why not turn these stones to bread – and feed yourself? If you're God's Child, why not provoke the angels to come and save you from a fall – and see for yourself, just to be sure? And come to think of it, if you're God's Child, you should have something to show for it: why not bow down to me and thereby seize all the power and glory in the world – for yourself?*

The tempter is luring Jesus into what L'Engle calls "disproportion," an out-of-balance, out-of-tune state of trying to be something he's not. For Jesus really is God's Child, God's Beloved, a fully human being in God's nurturing care. There's no need to turn stones to bread; instead, Jesus trusts the Holy Spirit to teach and sustain him, just as God taught and sustained the ancient Israelites with manna in the wilderness – and so Jesus responds to the tempter by quoting that ancient story (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Likewise, there's no need to test God's care by throwing himself into peril, or to doubt God's care by pursuing the supposed security and status

of worldly power. Instead, Jesus rests assured in who he really is: God's Beloved Child.

And like the ancient Israelites, he develops these muscles out in the wilderness, away from the press and stress of society. For L'Engle, her "circle of quiet" in creation was "a small brook in a green glade" a short walk from her farmhouse. She goes to the brook, she says, to return to her true being, her true *isness* – and to let the parts of her that are "out of being, out of the essential," burn and fall away, like the burning bush Moses encountered in the wilderness. She goes to the brook, in other words, to rest assured in who she really is, and who she's meant to be.

PRAY

God of love, deepen our trust in you. Deliver us from temptation, from disproportion, from letting ourselves turn inward in fear or self-absorption. Help us find circles of quiet, open outward, and become again the beloved children we are. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRACTICES

LIGHT

This week begin each day by lighting a candle of trust and praying the prayer above.

JOURNAL

As you continue retelling the story of your life: What are your earliest memories of fear, distrust, or falling into "disproportion"? Did you seek out a special place, a real or imagined "circle of quiet," where you felt safer, steadier, or more yourself? If so, describe that place and how it made you feel; and if not, focus on a place you found later. Do you resonate with L'Engle's idea of reconnecting with your true "*isness*," your true being, and letting what is inessential burn and fall away? If so, what might you need to let fall away now?

FIELD TRIP

Choose a special outdoor spot in your life (close enough to visit!) that can serve as your "circle of quiet" during this 40-day pilgrimage. A peaceful place where you can have "a green thought in a green shade," as L'Engle puts it, quoting Andrew Marvell's poem, "The Garden." Make plans to spend

some time there this week, and in the weeks ahead. Follow L'Engle's lead: take careful note of the landscape, the plant life, the "isness" of the creatures and features around you. Keep a sharp lookout for a "burning bush" or two, neighbors who are exactly as they're meant to be. And then let yourself become one, too, as the inessential burns and falls away.

ECOLOGY

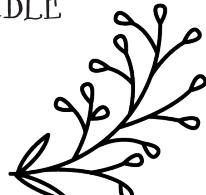
In your circle of quiet, zoom in on one creature or feature – a tree, a rock, a bubbling brook – and do some online research to find out more. How does that tree live, and what lives on and in it? How did that rock form, and when? Where does that brook begin, and where does it go? Share your amazement with a friend or family member.

DISCUSS

- What fears have you in their grips today? What temptations, what disproportions, what distrust do they provoke?
- What in your life would change if you more deeply trusted in God's graceful love and care?
- Where in creation have you experienced "a circle of quiet," a place of being restored to your true self?
- Have you had different go-to "circles" at different times in your life? If you could visit one tomorrow, which one would you choose, and why?

MY SPECIAL PLACE IS A SMALL BROOK
IN A GREEN GLADE, A CIRCLE OF QUIET
FROM WHICH THERE IS NO VISIBLE
SIGN OF HUMAN BEINGS.

+ MADELEINE L'ENGLE



••• WEEK THREE •••

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD... + JOHN 3:16

READ

JOHN 3:1-17

FROM A CIRCLE OF QUIET BY MADELEINE L'ENGLE (PART ONE, SECTION 16):

Cynthia, one of our Crosswicks family this summer, is thirteen... We had been discussing, down by the brook, how nothing really important in life is in the realm of provable fact. Cynthia is pragmatic; she had her doubts.

"What about love?" I asked her as we were crossing the big meadow on the way home. "Can you prove anything about love?"

She held down an old strand of barbed wire for me. "I guess not."

"What is love?"

"A feeling."

"No," I said, "a feeling is something love is not." Cynthia didn't like this; neither do I, lots of the time.

"Why not?"

I asked her, "You love your parents, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Aren't there some days when all your feelings about them are bad? When you're furious with them, and all you feel is anger, or that they've been unfair?"

"Yes."

"But you still love them, don't you?"

"Yes."

We were silent for a while because we were picking daisies to make daisy wreaths for the babies. Cynthia was much more diligent about it than I was; I was thinking more about our conversation than about daisies, or even the babies.

Love can't be pinned down by a definition, and it certainly can't be proved, any more than anything else important in life can be proved. Love is people, is a person. A friend of ours, Hugh Bishop of Mirfield, says in one of his books: "Love is not an emotion. It is a policy." Those words have often helped me when all my feelings were unlovely. In a summer household as large as ours I often have to act on those words. I am slowly coming to understand with my heart as well as my head that love is not a feeling. It is a person. It also has a lot to do with compassion, and with creation.

There are educationists (as jargon has it) who think that creativity itself can be taught, and who write learned, and frequently dull, treatises on methods of teaching it. It is rather as though they were trying to eat air, with the usual result. The creative impulse, like love, can be killed, but it cannot be taught. What a teacher or librarian or parent can do, in working with children, is to give the flame enough oxygen so that it can burn. As far as I'm concerned, this providing of oxygen is one of the noblest of all vocations.

REFLECT

The world is full of wonders – and also of ruins: injustice, cruelty, indifference, contempt. And yet, Jesus comes "not to condemn the world," but to save it (John 3:17). It's worth noting that the most famous verse in this passage doesn't say, "For God so loved the Christians," or even, "For God so loved the humans," but rather, "For God so loved the world," the whole world, in all its wonder and ruin. God's mission is to heal the world, to restore the world's wellbeing – remembering that the word "salvation" comes from the Latin, *salvus*, "health."

And this divine love isn't merely a feeling God has; it's an action God does, and is doing; indeed, it's the action God *is*! L'Engle puts it this way, quoting a friend: "Love is not an emotion. It is a policy." Policy, from the Greek, *polis*, "city" or "community." Love is the action God is and does for the sake of a healthy community – calling us to join in.

None of this can be "proved," L'Engle contends, or "taught," or pinned down with a fixed definition once and for all. For love is a living, breathing thing; not a feeling but a person. When we devote ourselves to love, we devote ourselves to God, despite whatever "unlovely feelings" we may or may not have on any given day. Loving God and neighbor, we shine like the burning bush, becoming fully who we are. For if God is love, and we are created

in God's image, then when we love, we come alive: celebrating wonders, repairing ruins.



PRAY

God of grace, help us to love the world the way you do, rejoicing in beauty, repairing the broken. Give us the strength and wisdom to do the work of love no matter how we feel. For as we walk in love, we walk with you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRACTICES

LIGHT

This week begin each day by lighting a candle of love and praying the prayer above.

JOURNAL

As you continue to retell the story of your life: Which loving relationships helped make you who you are today? The people who raised you, friends who shaped you, partners who accompanied you, teachers who inspired you, and so on. Create a little gallery of written portraits, featuring a handful of formative figures in your life so far. Boil it down to specifics: What gifts have they given you? How do you hope to emulate them? What anecdotes come to mind, epitomizing their ways of being? How have their stories shaped the story of your life? And once you're finished, consider this: if the person is still with us, send them a copy of the written portrait in a card or love letter – with a word of thanks!

LOVE IN ACTION

In the famous verse, "For God so loved the world..." (John 3:16), the Greek word translated as "so" is *houtōs*, "in this way." The emphasis, then, isn't on the extent of God's love, but rather the *manner* of it, as if to say: "For God loved the world in this way..." What way? Giving a precious treasure ("God's only Son") for the sake of others. This week, set out to do likewise. Think of it as strengthening a muscle, your God-given ability to love. Send a donation to two organizations – one near, one far – doing inspiring work in the world. Devote an hour to cleaning up a public park. Make peace with an opponent. Reach out to someone who might be lonely. Get those reps in – and strengthen your capacity to love!



DISCUSS

- Do you agree with L'Engle's provocative claim that love "certainly can't be proved, any more than anything else important in life can be proved"? How so – or how not?
- Do you resonate with her claim that love, at its core, isn't a feeling, but rather a "policy," a course of action? If love really is a "policy," what kind of community would we become if we took that seriously?
- Which specific actions most exemplify love, in your experience?
- How would you like to strengthen your ability to love (think both personally and communally)?
- Love, compassion, creativity – can these things be "taught"? L'Engle says they need "oxygen" to burn; what gives you oxygen (rest, beauty, silence, movement, friendship)?



I AM SLOWLY COMING
TO UNDERSTAND WITH MY HEART
AS WELL AS MY HEAD THAT LOVE IS
NOT A FEELING. IT IS A PERSON.

+ MADELEINE L'ENGLE



••WEEK FOUR••

WHERE DO YOU GET THAT LIVING WATER? + JOHN 4:7

READ

JOHN 4:5-42

FROM A CIRCLE OF QUIET
BY MADELEINE L'ENGLE (PART ONE, SECTION 14):

In another conversation, [a friend] and I discussed the peril of falling into the trap of intellectual elitism. The older I grow, the more this insidious form of snobbery seems a snare and a delusion. We probably have more scientific knowledge at our fingertips today than ever before, and yet we are incapable of handling this knowledge creatively; we cannot avoid mutilating diseases, devastating wars, or control earthquake or tornado; and we are in grave danger of destroying our planet entirely because we cannot control what our intellect has unleashed, from cobalt bombs to polluting laundry detergents.

More personally, my intellect is a stumbling block to much that makes life worth living: laughter; love; a willing acceptance of being created. The rational intellect doesn't have a great deal to do with love, and it doesn't have a great deal to do with art. I am often, in my writing, great leaps ahead of where I am in my thinking, and my thinking has to work its way slowly up to what the "superconscious" has already shown me in a story or poem. Facing this does help to eradicate do-it-yourself hubris from an artist's attitude towards his painting or music or writing. My characters pull me, push me, take me further than I want to go, fling open doors to rooms I don't want to enter, throw me out into interstellar space, and all this long before my mind is ready for it.

There's a reason for that, chaps!

While Alan was in school, his science teacher was an inept young man who kept blowing things up, remarking through the stench of chemical smoke and the crashing of broken glass, "There's a reason for that, chaps."

I must be willing to accept the explosions which take place deep down in the heart of the volcano, sending up an occasional burst of flame into the daylight of consciousness.

With my naked intellect I cannot believe in God, particularly a loving God. My intellect is convinced that any idea of the person's continuing and growing after death is absurd; logic goes no further than dust to dust. Images, in the literary sense of the word, take me much further. Without my glasses I can see nothing but a vague blur. When I put them on, I become functional. But who is doing the seeing? The lenses of the spectacles are not. I am. There is an essential, ontological me – that part of me which is not consumed in the burning – which is (to use imagery again) that which I was created to be, the imaginative Adam and Eve as they were in the pre-history days of the Garden. Some of our children talk about going back to the garden; we can't do that; but we can travel in the direction which will lead us to that place where we may find out who we really are.

REFLECT

In this conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well, Jesus speaks of "living water" that quenches a need deeper than physical thirst (John 4:10). A little while later, Jesus speaks of "true bread" that nourishes a need deeper than physical hunger, a "bread from heaven" that "gives life to the world" (John 6:32-33).

As he so often does, Jesus is speaking artfully here, transforming conventional meanings of "water" and "bread" in order to help us taste deeper, higher aspects of reality. This is Jesus as the Divine Poet, using familiar terms as starting points, springboards into new ideas. It's an intellectually engaging strategy, even as it calls attention to the limits of the intellect – and even dares to reach beyond those limits toward truths we can *feel* more than merely *rationalize*. At their best, this is what the arts can do (poetry, music, painting, storytelling): engage the world intellectually, and also emotionally, intuitively, humbly, wisely.

L'Engle lived an avid life of the mind – and along the way she developed a healthy appreciation for the limits of "naked intellect," as well as a feel for the complex, mysterious structures of "the mind" itself. Writing stories, her characters often led the way, pushing her farther than she originally wanted to go, with her conscious thinking only later catching up to what her

“superconscious” had already revealed. Again, this is what the arts can do: tapping into aspects of experience that “naked intellect” can’t reach.

Which is why, when it comes to spiritual life, the best ideas often take poetic forms: images, figures, parables, stories, and more. “Logic,” L’Engle insists, “goes no further than dust to dust.” Images go further: “living water,” “true bread.” In fact, L’Engle goes so far as to suggest that if we use the most artful images as “spectacles” to look through, we’ll not only see the world more clearly – we’ll be able to live in the world more clearly, more functionally, more imaginatively, and so ever more closely to “who we really are.”



PRAY

God of beauty, Poet of heaven and earth, help us to think and feel in new ways, coming closer to you, to our neighbors, and to who we really are. Give us that living water and true bread, so we might grow, and learn, and imagine. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

PRACTICES

LIGHT

This week begin each day by lighting a candle of beauty and praying the prayer above.

JOURNAL

Think of “beauty” as a golden thread running through your life story. What experiences of beauty have been pivot points along the way, “stitches” where that thread plunged down into the fabric, or re-emerged to take your breath away? Which moments, places, people, works of art, or turns of events have served as beautiful “images” in your life story so far, engaging your intellect but also reaching further than naked intellect can go?

Or, to shift the metaphor: the word *stanza* is an Italian word for “room.” If your life so far were a poem with multiple stanzas, what would they be? And which glimmers of beauty would stand out in each stanza, each room of your life? And finally, how have these encounters with beauty expanded or transformed how you think and feel, awakening or stretching your mind and heart in new directions? How have they affected how you think and feel about God?

THE ART OF LIVING

Seek out experiences of the arts this week, both as an enjoyer and as a creator. Attend a performance or exhibition. Revisit a favorite poet or short story writer. Gather some friends who love to sing. Take a walk with an eye toward appreciating architecture and garden design. Dust off that old paintbrush – or try painting for the first time! Check in with a friend or two to get some recommendations. Challenge yourself to have at least one adventurous taste of the arts each day this week, and pay close attention to how the experiences make you think and feel, reaching further than intellect alone.

DISCUSS

- When Jesus speaks of “living water” and “true bread,” he’s naming our deepest thirsts and hungers. What are you most thirsty or hungry for right now – personally, communally, or in the wider world?
- What works of art have helped name or nourish a hunger or thirst in your life?
- If you could experience one work of art in person right now, what would it be, and why?
- Has any work of art ever changed how you see the world or softened your heart?
- Following L’Engle, what images do you want to “look through” in order to see and live more clearly?

THE WATER THAT I WILL GIVE
WILL BECOME IN THEM
A SPRING OF WATER GUSHING UP
TO ETERNAL LIFE.

+ JOHN 4:14



••• WEEK FIVE •••

ONE THING I DO KNOW, THAT THOUGH I WAS BLIND, NOW I SEE.

+ JOHN 9:25

READ

JOHN 4:5-42

FROM A CIRCLE OF QUIET BY MADELEINE L'ENGLE (PART ONE, SECTION 5):

*In her thirties, L'Engle wrote many books, all of which were repeatedly rejected by publishers. As her fortieth birthday approached and a major publisher considered her novel, *A Lost Innocent*, she hoped her fortunes would change...*

On my birthday I was, as usual, out in the Tower working on a book. The children were in school. My husband was at work and would be getting the mail. He called, saying, "I'm sorry to have to tell you this on your birthday, but... [the publisher] has rejected *The Lost Innocent*."

This seemed an obvious sign from heaven. I should stop trying to write. All during the decade of my thirties (the world's fifties) I went through spasms of guilt because I spent so much time writing, because I wasn't like a good New England housewife and mother. When I scrubbed the kitchen floor, the family cheered. I couldn't make decent pie crust. I always managed to get something red in with the white laundry in the washing machine, so that everybody wore streaky pink underwear. And with all the hours I spent writing, I was still not pulling my own weight financially.

So the rejection on the fortieth birthday seemed an unmistakable command: Stop this foolishness and learn to make cherry pie.

I covered the typewriter in a great gesture of renunciation. Then I walked around and around the room, bawling my head off. I was totally, unutterably miserable.

Suddenly I stopped, because I realized what my subconscious mind was doing while I was sobbing: my subconscious mind was busy working out a novel about failure.

I uncovered the typewriter. In my journal I recorded this moment of decision, for that's what it was. I had to write. I had no choice in the matter. It was not up to me to say I would stop, because I could not. It didn't matter how small or inadequate my talent. If I never had another book published, and it was very clear to me that this was a real possibility, I still had to go on writing.

I'm glad I made this decision in the moment of failure. It's easy to say you're a writer when things are going well. When the decision is made in the abyss, then it is quite clear that it is not one's own decision at all...

During those difficult years I was very much aware that if I lost my ability to laugh, I wouldn't be able to write, either. If I started taking myself and my failure too seriously, then the writing would become something that was mine, that I could manipulate, that I could take personal credit – or discredit – for. When a book was rejected, I would allow myself twenty-four hours of private unhappiness. I'm sure I wasn't as successful in keeping my misery from the family as I tried to be, but I did try. Our house fronts on a dirt road – we didn't have the land with the brook, then – and I would go down the lane to do my weeping. I found that I could play games with the children during dinner (Buzz and Botticelli were our favorites), but I couldn't listen to Bach. But perhaps what was most helpful – and still is – is a white china laughing Buddha which sits on my desk in the Tower. He laughs at me, never with ridicule, but lovingly, tolerantly: you are taking yourself seriously, aren't you, Madeleine? What matters is the book itself. If it is as good a book as you can write at this moment in time, that is what counts. Success is pleasant; of course you want it; but it isn't what makes you write.

No, it's not. I found that out on the morning of my fortieth birthday.

My white china Buddha is an icon. He has never become an idol.

REFLECT

Ostensibly a story about Jesus restoring physical sight, this is also a story about spiritual insight and the lack of it – including how we often overlook the truth, even when it's right in front of us. The religious authorities, for example, get bogged down in debates over reality and rule-following (*He healed on the Sabbath!*). And the disciples, for their part, get distracted by the question of whose sin caused the man's blindness in the first place.

Jesus dismisses their premise out of hand (*Sin had nothing to do with it!*), reframing the situation instead as an opportunity for God's grace to shine through. It's as if he says: *Don't look to the shortcomings of the past to*

explain the challenges of the present. Instead, look to the future, and recast obstacles as occasions for God's works of healing and restoration.

Imagine seeing the world in this way: not just physical obstacles, but mental, relational, and communal ones, too, even the difficulties that tempt us to despair. After a decade of rejection, the letter L'Engle receives on her fortieth birthday seems to be the last straw of failure, a "sign from heaven" that she should give up writing. And yet, part of her is already beginning to work out a novel – about failure! The scales fall from her eyes: though of course she'd welcome conventional success, that's not the reason she's writing; she's writing because she's born to write. The difficulty itself becomes an occasion for insight, for self-knowledge, for seeing more clearly who she is and what she's meant to do.

And for L'Engle, this new line of vision depends on having a sense of humor, a mode of joy that both pursues her goals and holds those goals lightly, avoiding the trap of "taking myself and my failure too seriously." For after all, too much seriousness – letting despair overtake us, for example, or obsessing over sins and rules – is a recipe for missing the good news, the call to see and live in new ways. As a reminder of this insight, L'Engle kept a laughing Buddha on her writing desk, not merely an "image" but rather an "icon" – a glimpse of reality – of what she learned on her fortieth birthday. As the old hymn has it: "was blind, but now I see."

PRAY



God of wisdom, help us to see your grace more clearly, around us, among us, and within us. Where possible, help us to reframe difficulties as occasions for grace. Give us the insight to see – and become – who we are born to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRACTICES

LIGHT

This week begin each day by lighting a candle of wisdom and praying the prayer above.

JOURNAL

Inspired by L'Engle's laughing Buddha, experiment with writing "My Life in Five Icons." Choose five iconic objects (a ticket stub, a book, a garment, a game, you name it; put them on your work surface if you can!), and write a

paragraph on each one, describing it in detail, including the world, insight, or episode it reminds you of when you see it or touch it. What or who does it help you connect with? How does it relate to your life's pilgrimage? How does it help you see?

And from another angle on that laughing Buddha: Have you ever been so discouraged that you almost gave up something important to you? What pulled you back from the brink? Have you ever been told to "stop this foolishness," or given up something that you'd now like to revive or revisit? What have you missed? What do you hope to recapture?

AMAZING GRACE

All of us have blind spots – set out this week to discover some of yours. Visit a part of town you rarely frequent. Volunteer at a shelter. Ask a friend to lunch who's active in a cause or part of the community you don't know much about. Help out at a nursing home, after-school program, or kids' sports league. Seek out intergenerational experiences. Patronize an immigrant-owned business. People-watch at a coffee shop, intentionally imagining what others' lives – their struggles and joys – are like. Invite someone to a meal with whom you differ politically, and find some common ground. Weave these various experiences into your prayers, expanding your field of vision and care.



DISCUSS

- If you were setting up a workspace on a desert island, what "icons" would you put on your desk, and why?
- What iconic objects are in your home, and what glimpses of reality do they allow you to see?
- Have you ever had a setback that ended up being an occasion for an epiphany?
- What activities would you continue to pursue even if conventional "success" never came, simply because you were born to do them?
- What healing – physical, emotional, or otherwise – have you experienced, and what did you learn along the way?
- Where do you sense God inviting you, coaxing you, challenging you to see or live differently right now?

... WEEK SIX ...

JESUS SAID TO THEM, "UNBIND HIM, AND LET HIM GO!"
+ JOHN 11:44

READ

JOHN 11:1-45

FROM A CIRCLE OF QUIET BY MADELEINE L'ENGLE (PART FOUR, SECTIONS 8 AND 20):

One night after dinner a group of us were talking about the supernatural, and one of our dinner guests said that when the electric light was invented, people began to lose the dimension of the supernatural. In the days before we could touch a switch and flood every section of the room with light, there were always shadows in the corner, shadows which moved with candlelight, with firelight; and these shadows were an outward and visible sign that things are not always what they seem; there are things which are not visible to the mortal human being; there are things beyond our ken.

One of my favorite theologians is Albert Einstein. He writes, "The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. He who knows it not, who can no longer wonder, can no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle"...

I had talked with several Congregational minister friends about my intellectual doubts. I was eager to be converted – I didn't like atheism or agnosticism; I was by then well aware that I am not self-sufficient, that I needed the dimension of transcendence. They were eager to convert me. But they explained everything. For every question I asked, they had an answer. They tried to reach me through my mind...

[They] gave me all kinds of theological books to read, mostly by German theologians. The more I read, the further I was shoved away from any kind of acceptance. I would read logical explanations of the totally mysterious scandal of particularity and think: if I have to believe all this bunk, then Christianity is not for me. One line in the Book of Common Prayer made sense to me: the mystery of the word made flesh. If only my friends would admit that it was a mystery, and stop giving me explanations! I wrote in my journal: "I talk to people – oh, people I respect, people I like – and yet I

never feel any sense of terrific excitement in their own lives about Jesus, in the way that the early Christians must have been excited so that they were transfigured by Jesus. In no one, no one, no matter how loudly they talk about salvation being possible only through Jesus, do I find this great thing showing in them, glowing in them, lighting their lives, as it must if it is to make any sense today at all." I was, I am sure, less than fair; nevertheless that was what reasonable explanations did to me.

Canon Tallis did not explain anything. He listened to my doubts in silence. I think he thought they were really very unimportant. As far as my specific, daily problems were concerned, I found that I could take them more lightly, could laugh more easily...

Then something happened, something so wounding that it cannot possibly be written down. Think of two of the people you love most in the world; think of a situation in which both are agonizingly hurt and you are powerless to do anything to help. It is far easier to bear pain for ourselves than for those we love, especially when part of it is that we cannot share the pain but must stand by, unable to alleviate it.

Canon Tallis hardly knew us at all, then. But he stepped in. What he did is involved with all that I cannot write. The point right now is that this was the moment of light for me, because it was an act of love, Love made visible.

And that did it. Possibly nothing he could have done for me, myself, would have illuminated the world for me as did this act of love towards those I love. Because of this love, this particular (never general) Christian love, my intellectual reservations no longer made the least difference. I had seen love in action, and that was all the proof I needed.

REFLECT

Jesus raises Lazarus in this story – but the key line is what he says to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). Resurrection isn't just something Jesus does, or something he makes happen for Lazarus. Resurrection is part and parcel of who Jesus is. Like new wildflowers springing up through the decay on a forest floor, Jesus' modus operandi is resurgence, renaissance, resurrection. No bonds of death can hold him. When Lazarus emerges from the tomb, he's still wrapped in bandages of death – and Jesus cries out, "Unbind him, and let him go!" (John 11:44).

These ideas defy logical, reasonable explanations; they are, in L'Engle phrase, a "totally mysterious scandal." If we aren't taken aback by stories of resurrection, we aren't paying attention: the whole point of these stories is that they're astonishing, incredible, contrary to what we think we know of death. There are at least two ways to miss a miracle: to simply reject it, as if astonishing things never happen; and to accept it too easily, as if it isn't astonishing at all. The middle way, keeping the astonishment alive, is to proclaim the miracle as, well, miraculous, scandalous, mysterious through and through.

Can we stake our lives on a mystery? That is precisely what "faith" is: "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). For L'Engle, the brilliant ideas that love will have the final word, that there is a resurrection at the heart of reality, and that Jesus not only proclaims but also is that resurrection – these ideas cannot be proven. But they can be felt. They can be glimpsed – not seen, but glimpsed – through the iconic moments of our lives. When Canon Tallis declines to explain away the mysteries of faith, and later intercedes in L'Engle's life with loving kindness, she is at last moved to conversion. Her intellectual struggles remain, but she has seen the liberating, healing power of "love in action" – and for her, that living icon, "Love made visible," is more than enough.

PRAY



God of new life, help us take part in your resurrecting work: life in the midst of death, hope in the midst of struggle, faith in the midst of mystery. When we are struck down, let us rise. When we are captives, unbind us, and let us go. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRACTICES

LIGHT

This week begin each day by lighting a candle of resurrection and praying the prayer above.

JOURNAL

As you continue to retell the story of your life: "Canon Tallis" is a pseudonym L'Engle uses for her friend and spiritual advisor at St. John the Divine in New York City, Canon Edward West. Who have been your spiritual

mentors on your pilgrimage, either those you've known personally or those you've admired from a distance? How have they been living icons in your life? What have you learned from them? What moments stand out? How have they helped you wrestle with questions and keep the mysteries of faith alive? Choose at least three of these mentors and write brief profiles of each of them, focusing on how they shaped your life story.

NEW LIFE

Resurrection takes many forms, and once we start to look for it, we'll find it everywhere. Take a walk this week, in solitude or with family or friends, and look for signs of resurrection, new life coming into the world – not only in forests and gardens, but also in human communities, too (new businesses, for example). Celebrate what you find, and share the news far and wide. And pay attention to yourself, too, fasting from activities that leave you drained or unwell (divisive conversations, unhealthy habits) and embracing what brings you back to life (exercise, good food, vibrant relationships, loving kindness).

DISCUSS

- What kinds of resurrection do you see in the world around you? What kinds do you long for?
- Do you resonate with L'Engle's emphasis on mystery, and her impatience with supposedly "reasonable explanations"?
- Have you witnessed "Love made visible" in a way that deepened your faith?
- What resurrection is currently in process in your life? What bonds are still holding you back?



THE FAIREST THING WE
CAN EXPERIENCE IS THE
MYSTERIOUS.

+ ALBERT EINSTEIN

• WEEK SEVEN •

"BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!"
+ MATTHEW 21:9

READ

MATTHEW 21:1-11

JOHN 13:1-17; 18:1-19:42

FROM A CIRCLE OF QUIET BY MADELEINE L'ENGLE (PART TWO, SECTION II):

We turn to stories and pictures and music because they show us who and what and why we are, and what our relationship is to life and death, what is essential, and what, despite the arbitrariness of falling beams, will not burn. Paul Klee said, "Art does not reproduce the visible. Rather, it makes visible." It is not then, at its best, a mirror but an icon. It takes the chaos in which we live and shows us structure and pattern, not the structure of conformity which imprisons but the structure which liberates, sets us free to become growing, mature human beings...

A year ago I taught a seminar in writing practices at the General Theological Seminary in Chelsea... We started out discussing the structure of some of the great novels and plays, and went on to structure in poetry, moving from the rhythmic structure of "free" verse to the incredible obedience to structure demanded in the sonnet. The sonnet, as I discovered during the writing of *Wrinkle*, is for me the perfect analogy of the structure which liberates. Meg is to return to the evil planet, Camazotz, in a final attempt to free her little brother from the grip of the rigid structure which imprisons. Mrs Whatsit, one of the extraterrestrial beings who befriend her, says,

"I cannot pretend that we are doing anything but sending you into the gravest kind of danger. I have to acknowledge quite openly that it may be a fatal danger. I know this. But I do not believe it. And the Happy Medium doesn't believe it, either."

"Can't she see what's going to happen?" Calvin asked.

"Oh, not in this kind of thing." Mrs Whatsit sounded surprised at his question. "If we knew ahead of time what was going to happen, we'd be – we'd be

like the people in Camazotz, with no lives of our own, with everything all planned and done for us. How can I explain it to you? Oh, I know. In your language you have a form of poetry called the sonnet."

"Yes, yes," Calvin said impatiently. "What's that got to do with the Happy Medium?"

"Kindly pay me the courtesy of listening to me." Mrs Whatsit's voice was stern, and for a moment Calvin stopped pawing the ground like a nervous colt. "It is a very strict form of poetry, is it not?"

"Yes."

"There are fourteen lines, I believe, all in iambic pentameter. That's a very strict rhythm or meter, yes?"

"Yes." Calvin nodded.

"And each line has to end with a precise rhyme pattern. And if the poet does not do it exactly this way, it is not a sonnet, is it?"

"No."

"But within this strict form the poet has complete freedom to say whatever he wants, doesn't he?"

"Yes." Calvin nodded again.

"So," Mrs Whatsit said.

"So what?"

"Oh, do not be stupid, boy!" Mrs Whatsit scolded. "You know perfectly well what I am driving at!"

"You mean you're comparing our lives to a sonnet? A strict form, but freedom within it?"

"Yes," Mrs Whatsit said. "You're given the form, but you have to write the sonnet yourself. What you say is completely up to you."

Well, there it is: an analogy.

To speak analogously is to admit that you can't say it directly; you really can't say it at all; it's outside the realm of provable fact. But it is not a coincidence that some of the greatest poetry in the English language is in the form of the sonnet.

REFLECT

At the heart of Christian life is a distinctive choreography, a week-long structure that liberates, setting us free to become growing, mature human beings. It begins with celebration, with welcoming Jesus to Jerusalem with shouts of joy and hope. It moves toward struggle, confronting death-dealing powers, fear, and suffering. It kneels in love, as Jesus washes the feet of his friends, calling us to do likewise. It steps into shadows: betrayal, desertion, despair, death. And yet: Love prevails, rising again out of the grave. The hosannas at the beginning of the sonnet give way to hallelujahs at its end!

We rehearse this pattern year after year, day after day, not to impose it onto reality, but rather to remind ourselves and each other that this pattern is the very heart of reality: that love does prevail, that no matter how grim the night becomes, joy will come in the morning.

And we also rehearse it, like a troupe of stage performers, in order to strengthen our skills as we walk through the pattern in our own lives: joy, struggle, suffering, resurrection. To give us more poise amidst turbulence, more hope amidst despair, more freedom amidst the twists and turns to come. In other words: to help us become growing, mature human beings.

That's what the sonnet is for. It makes reality visible, thanks be to God. It's an icon we can live through, a structure that liberates, a work of art that helps us be – and become – who we are.



PRAY

God of freedom, Poet of heaven and earth, be with us as we live in and through the Sonnet of creation, writing the sonnets of our lives. Help us to rejoice, to marvel, to mourn, to forgive – and to rise again with you on Easter morning, and on every morning. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRACTICES

LIGHT

This week begin each day by lighting a candle of freedom and praying the prayer above.

JOURNAL

As you continue to retell the story of your life: If the story of Holy Week – Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday – reveals the pattern at the heart of reality, how would you organize the seasons and experiences of your life so far under those “days” or movements?

Don’t worry about chronology; these “days” repeat and overlap, at various levels of scale. When was a vivid Palm Sunday moment in your life, a time of anticipation, celebration, and fervent hope? When was a Maundy Thursday moment, when you were humbled or inspired by an act of loving service? A moment or season of sorrow and loss, evoking Good Friday? Of uncertainty or numbness, recalling Holy Saturday? Or of Easter’s renewal and new life, a renaissance, rebirth, or second chance? Which “day” or “days” are you experiencing now? Which do you long for? Which do you need to revisit or reclaim, in order to continue to grow?

FREEDOM

Mrs Whatsit’s analogy invites us to experience our lives in new ways, day to day, moment to moment. Even the most apparently fixed “forms” our stories take can’t stop us from tasting freedom; indeed, those structures often make the freedom possible! “You’re given the form,” Mrs Whatsit says, “but you have to write the sonnet yourself.” Seen from this angle, virtually everything we do – every relationship, every task – can be done in a liberated, liberating spirit.



DISCUSS

- L’Engle writes of two kinds of structure: one that imprisons in conformity, and the other that liberates us toward maturity. What instances of these two kinds of structure have you experienced? How do we tell the difference?
- What’s most important to you about the “Holy Week” pattern at the heart of Christian life?
- Is there a particular “day” (or two) in Holy Week you connect with most? If so, why?
- Which movements in Holy Week’s symphony resonate at this time in your life?

So this week, follow Mrs Whatsit's lead. Carry out each day's work as a form of play, of creativity, of poetic freedom. You're given the form – now what will you make of it? Focus especially on activities you might otherwise conceive as chores or mindless duties. "Okay – I have to wash these dishes (or have this unpleasant conversation, or feel these difficult feelings); what sonnet will I write? How can I infuse each day this week with a sense of liberty, with a taste of freedom? With Palm Sunday's hope, for example, Maundy Thursday's tenderness, Good Friday's empathy, Holy Saturday's stillness, or Easter Sunday's joy?"

...THE WEEKS TO COME...

AFTER THE SABBATH, AS THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK WAS DAWNING,
MARY MAGDALENE AND THE OTHER MARY WENT TO SEE THE TOMB.

+ MATTHEW 28:1

READ

MATTHEW 28:1-10

FROM A CIRCLE OF QUIET
BY MADELEINE L'ENGLE (PART FOUR, SECTIONS 21 AND 22):

In our bedroom there is a large old rocking chair which was in the attic of Crosswicks when we bought it. It seems to have been made especially for mothers and babies. I have sat in it and nursed my babe in the middle of the night. I have sung innumerable lullabies from it...

This summer I sit in the rocking chair and rock and sing with one or other of my granddaughters. I sing the same songs I sang all those years ago. It feels utterly right. Natural. The same.

But it isn't the same. I may be holding a baby just as I used to hold a baby, but chronology has done many things in the intervening years, to the world, to our country, to my children, to me. I may feel, rocking a small, loving body, no older than I felt rocking that body's mother. But I am older bodily; my energy span is not as long as it used to be; at night my limbs ache with fatigue; my eyes are even older than the rest of me...

Chronology: the word about the measurable passage of time, although its duration varies: how long is a toothache? how long is standing in line at

the supermarket? how long is a tramp through the fields with the dogs? or dinner with friends, or a sunset, or the birth of a baby?

Chronology, the time which changes things, makes them grow older, wears them out, and manages to dispose of them, chronologically, forever.

Thank God there is kairos, too: again the Greeks were wiser than we are. They had two words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*.

Kairos is not measurable. Kairos is ontological. In kairos we are, we are fully in isness, not negatively, as Sartre saw the isness of the oak tree, but fully, wholly, positively. Kairos can sometimes enter, penetrate, break through chronos: the child at play, the painter at his easel, Serkin playing the *Appassionato*, are in kairos. The saint at prayer, friends around the dinner table, the mother reaching out her arms for her newborn baby, are in kairos. The bush, the burning bush, is in kairos, not any burning bush, but the very particular burning bush before which Moses removed his shoes; the bush I pass on my way to the brook. In kairos that part of us which is not consumed in the burning is wholly awake. We too often let it fall asleep, not as the baby in my arms droops into sleepiness, but dully, bluntingly.

I sit in the rocking chair with a baby in my arms, and I am in both kairos and chronos. In chronos I may be nothing more than some cybernetic salad on the bottom left-hand corner of a check; or my social security number; or my passport number. In kairos I am known by name: Madeleine.

The baby doesn't know about chronos yet...

I'm off to the brook again. Summer is almost over; the golden rod is aflame. The bush burns with the red of autumn. The family has scattered, is scattering, to England, Mexico, Florida, California, to the big house across the lane and up the road. I've already started moving things back to New York. We are having a deep, gentle, September rain, which the land, the trees, the brook need thirstily. Yesterday I waded downstream for a long time, wet from the waters of the brook itself, from the rain, from the drops shaking from the leaves as I pushed under, over, through the overhanging trees.

The brook, the bush, the sun-warmed rock, as in the song, have seen, felt, touched, healed me.

Gregory of Nyssa points out that Moses's vision of God began with the light, with the visible burning bush, the bush which was bright with fire and

was not consumed; but afterwards, God spoke to him in a cloud. After the glory which could be seen with human eyes, he began to see the glory which is beyond and after light.

The shadows are deepening all around us. Now is the time when we must begin to see our world and ourselves in a different way.

REFLECT

Jesus is risen – hallelujah! But Easter is an outset, not an end. The 40 days of Lent give way to the 50 days of Eastertide; one pilgrimage leads to another. Inside *chronos* we make patterns, icons, seasons to help us see and feel the *kairos* at the heart of everything.

We're off to the brook again. As these seven weeks come to a close, the light of the burning bush shines bright – as does the mysterious cloud beyond it, "the glory which is beyond and after light." Our life stories will continue, filled with flames and shadows, radiance and mystery.

For now, we stand with Mary and Madeleine, pilgrims beside the empty tomb. For now, we tell and retell our stories to ourselves and each other, writing the sonnets of our lives. And as we do, by God's grace, we become who we are, returning whenever we can – in a world so full of sound and fury – to the sanctuary, the stillness, the circle of quiet that makes all things new.



“DO NOT BE AFRAID; GO AND TELL MY
BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO GO TO GALILEE;
THERE THEY WILL SEE ME.”

+ MATTHEW 28:10





... NOTES ...



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