

# #METOORECKONING WORKSHOP

## WORSHIP MATERIALS



### Nelle Morton, *The Journey is Home* (Boston: Beacon, 1985)

*NOTE: We are sharing very brief excerpts here, in hopes that you will fill your library with materials to assist you as you plan worship and other public rituals.*

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The Journey Is Home

the years still disclosed ever new paradigms of reality. These parables Professor Robert Funk described as extended metaphor.

Therefore, the sections of my journal I have selected to include in the appendix are not the result of current research so much as they are the maturation of journal entries: Hearing to Speech, More about Metaphor, and Questioning the Quest.

#### Hearing to Speech

If one can be heard to one's own speech, then the speech would be a new speech and the new speech would be a new experience in the life of the speaker—that is, the one heard to speech. It was so with David, the young son of my colleague. I first met David when he was nine years old. He had been diagnosed as a retarded child when one doctor discovered his deafness. He had not learned to speak a word for he had never heard words. He could communicate only through facial expressions and touch and embrace. David was placed in a school for the deaf—one of those schools that taught children to speak words they had never heard spoken. I was in David's home when he returned for his first holiday. In a broken but understandable fashion he began to tell his parents things he had never been able to tell them before. . . . could never communicate to anyone before. He was able to share his own history. He opened up the innermost part of his life to those hearing most deeply and most anxiously the new knowledge never spoken before. The family, perhaps far more than the teachers, brought David to speech. The silence that had stifled him now yielded his own story. Almost overnight David's entire personality changed from the quiet wistful boy to a shiny-eyed vibrant new kind of family member.

★

Patricia Moore in the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote of special schools for the deaf in which no finger spelling or sign lan-

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guage are taught at first in the hope that the deaf ones learn to recognize the sound of words coming alive out of their own vibrating vocal cords.

What an astounding experience that one can learn to speak words without ever hearing but only with having been heard! It is strange that we have never understood before that this is what often happened among women. It is tied up with telling our stories. When Helen Keller out of the darkness of her life reached out her hands under the water pump and struggled to speak a word she had never heard spoken by another living being it was far more than memorizing a new word. "Wah! Wah!" and again with great effort "Wah! Wah!" It was not just a word or a number attached to an object to designate or signify utilitarian purpose. This word was her own experience. This word opened to her the concept of words—the secret of language—of self-identification—of history—of literature—of connectedness to other human beings. Once the concept dawned it was the connectedness with the other—a special other—she immediately sought. Where was that loving ear, that persistent hearing, that had tried and tried again to break through Helen's silence and hear her to this new world of speaking? When she found her teacher, Helen threw herself into her arms, grateful for the profound gift of herself.

★

During the Seminary Quarter for Women, Grailville, 1976, a folded sheet of paper was placed in my hands by a blind woman student.\* She called it a prose poem, "On Finding Our Stories." I became aware of the endlessness of this kind of hearing—hearing oneself, one's own past, one's own heart beat. Kathi Wolfe's precious gift read in very large, square letters:

We find our stories through the  
hallows of time;

\*Now a minister in New Jersey.

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through the corridors, halls, byways,  
and sidewalks of history.

Our stories jump out at us;  
taken by surprise

in  
their locked up corners;  
chained

to the walls of the past of men.  
They leap to freedom—dancing—  
hopping with joy—at being set free—  
unchained—unlocked.

They leap into presence—  
creating—  
becoming—  
the true (free) past and present  
of women.

We reclaim—see our stories—  
through the cleansing (freeing)  
mirror of women's history.

★

It was in 1971 that I received a totally new understanding of hearing. It came from the lips of a most ordinary woman in a workshop I was conducting in Illinois. I repeat this story for comparison with the one following. I remember well how this woman seemed a loner at first—quiet and almost frightened. Perhaps the idea of women needing to be free was new to her and she did not know what to make of it. Perhaps she was resisting and her silence reflected a subtle hostility or hesitance. As was my custom in such groups I was careful not to push her but wait until her time came and only she could judge that moment. I knew the easy talkers would in time run down and a more realistic, deeper level would emerge. The last day of the workshop, the woman, whose name I do not know, wandered off alone. As we gathered sometime later in small groups she started to talk in a hesitant, almost awkward

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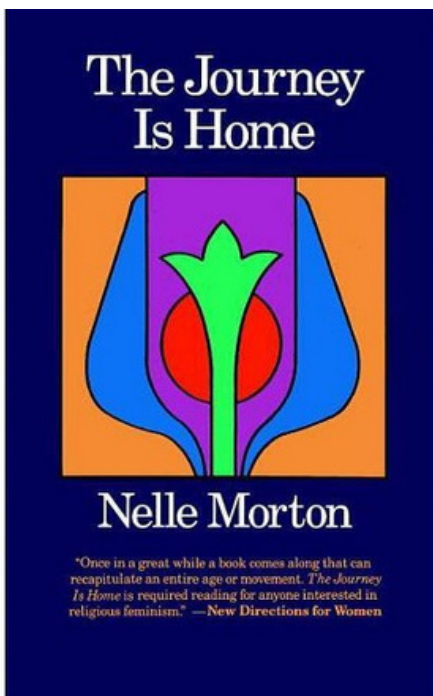
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manner. "I hurt," she began. "I hurt all over." She touched herself in various places before she added, "but I don't know where to begin to cry. I don't know how to cry." Hesitatingly she began to talk. Then she talked more and more. Her story took on fantastic coherence. When she reached a point of the most excruciating pain, no one moved. No one interrupted her. No one rushed to comfort her. No one cut her experience short. We simply sat. We sat in a powerful silence. The women clustered about the weeping one went with her to the deepest part of her life as if something so sacred was taking place they did not withdraw their presence or mar its visibility. Finally the woman, whose name I do not know, finished speaking. Tears flowed from her eyes in all directions. She spoke again: "You heard me. You heard me all the way." Her eyes narrowed then moved around the group again slowly as she said: "I have a strange feeling you heard me before I started. You heard me to my own story. You heard me to my own speech."

I filed this story away as a unique experience. But it happened again and again in other such small groups when we allowed the pain to reach its own depth, or as another woman told me later: "You went down all the way with me. Then you didn't smother me. You gave it space to shape itself. You gave it time to come full circle." It happened to me. Then I knew I had been experiencing something I have never experienced before. A complete reversal of the going logic. The woman was saying, and I had experienced, a depth hearing that takes place before speaking—a hearing that is more than acute listening. A hearing that is a direct transitive verb that evokes speech—new speech that has never been spoken before. The woman who gave me those words had indeed been heard to her own speech.

★

It was in the early '80s that I sat on the floor in a circle of women. Candles burned in the center. We sang a few ritual songs and then sang to each present. As we held hands, one



"Hearing to Speech"

learn more about  
Nelle Morton  
at

[3mmm.us/Episode103](http://3mmm.us/Episode103)

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Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan  
*The Undivided Soul:  
Helping Congregations  
Connect Body and Spirit*  
(Nashville: Abingdon, 2001)

### Chapter 3

## *Faith: Covenant Relationships in Action*

*An eloquence,  
Of joining the many and the few,  
The saved, the lost, and  
The not-so-saved.*

*Perpetual angst and misery,  
Slay sweet peace and place  
Of divine stability.  
Conjoined eternal crossroads  
Of immediacy and distance.*

*God chooses us each day.  
Some days we choose God,  
Other times, we pretend that  
God does not exist:  
A rupture that displaces and jolts us  
Toward apathy or reformation.*

*Covenant invites:  
Honest talk, plain dealing,  
Praise, cross-examination,  
Clarifying real  
Times of possibility when  
There is nowhere else to go.*

**F**aith moves us to active covenantal being and existence. The biblical notion of covenant involves a powerful declaration of intimacy, faith, and relatedness. A covenant in a theological engagement between the Divine and humanity involves promises and commitment on the part of both parties. In the Hebrew Bible, covenant is a grace-filled binding agreement, as God declares, "I will be your God and you will be my

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### *The Undivided Soul*

people," in love. In the New Testament, one key experience of covenant is the revelation or disclosure of God's will. Covenantal faith involves a concept, a process, and a community. Such faith involves the experience of desire and of wanting to be in loving relationship. Collectively, a community embraces a vigorous faith, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to live, work, teach, and learn together. This kind of faith prepares individual and collective hearts to be transformed. Sometimes the mysteries of life seem so overarching that reality does not make sense. These nonsensical moments are the very times when one must hold on to active faith.

### **Meditations**

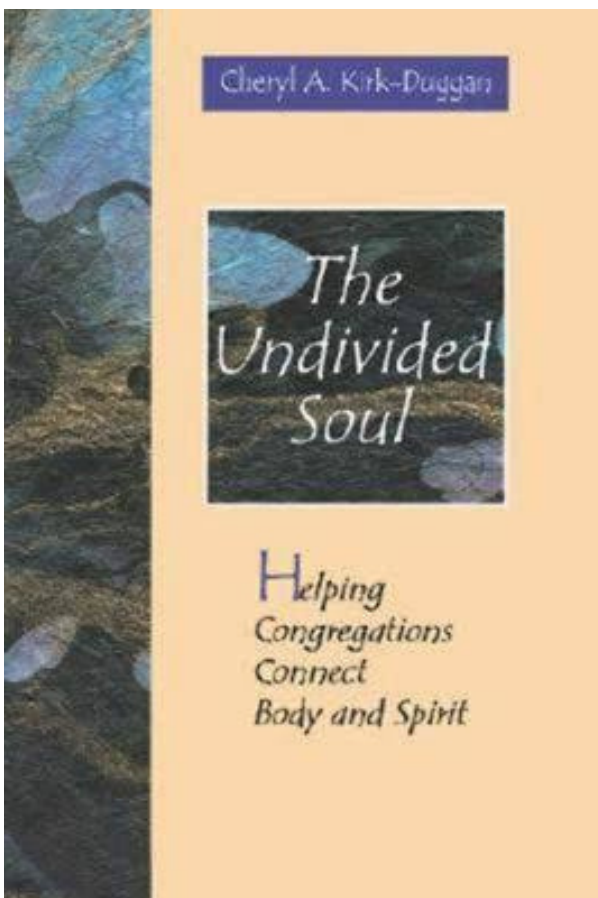
#### **Meditation 1**

*The faithfulness alive in us  
Mirrors ancient hopeful belief,  
Personified in  
The God who sees and knows,  
The I-amness of the God who loves and destroys,  
The courage and cowardice of Abraham,  
The fancy and fear of Sarah,  
The victimage and victory of Hagar.*

*The destitution and dream-vision of Joseph,  
The obstinence and obedience of Moses,  
The enthusiasm and extraneousness of Zipporah,  
The pity and prayerful drunkness of Hannah,  
The stupidity and strength of Samson,  
The seductiveness and gentleness of Ruth:  
These forge our spiritual DNA.*

*We move in the world  
Amid contemplation and contemptuousness,  
Joy and injustice,  
Wondering  
Do we really believe?*

*We need the faith of our communities to nurture, sustain, and  
sometimes shield us from ourselves when we live at the gates*



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### Jan Richardson, *Sacred Journeys: A Woman's Book of Daily Prayer* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1995)

Third Sunday in Lent

## 18 Tender Anger

### Mary and Martha

**Invocation:** *Sustain me, Fiery Power, when I journey through fields of anger. Make me wise to the lessons to be learned here and strengthen me, that my voice may be clear and life-giving.*

**Text:** John 11:1-6, 17-44

**Context:** I approach this story with hesitation. I hesitate because I wonder if I am reading Mary and Martha's anger into the text. I hesitate because I am still learning to recognize and honor Anger's voice. I hesitate because women have much to be angry about—with our sisters as well as our brothers—and precious little safe space in which to let our anger dance.

But here it is. This story may not be so much about Mary and Martha's anger as it is about mine and that of many women I know. And if Jesus' inaction in the face of his friends' pain doesn't make them angry, it does me.

The pain and anger I hear in the words of Martha, which Mary repeats, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died," echo the pain and anger I feel each time persons in power fail to respond to those who cry for help. Their words echo the pain and anger I feel when those who bear the power of life let suffering continue.

The question is never whether anger is right or wrong. Anger—like any other emotion—is, and it is always a sign of something deeper. Given appropriate expression, anger tells us about injustice, loss, grief, and damaged relationships. It tells us about ourselves. Given appropriate space, it opens a path toward change. And as Martha and Mary discovered, it leads to resurrection.

#### MONDAY

The taboos against our feeling and expressing anger are so powerful that even *knowing* when we are angry is not a simple matter. When a woman shows her anger, she is likely to be dismissed as irrational or worse. At a professional conference I attended recently, a young doctor presented a paper about battered women. She shared many new and exciting ideas and

conveyed a deep and personal involvement in her subject. In the middle of her presentation, a well-known psychiatrist who was seated behind me got up to leave. As he stood, he turned to the man next to him and made his diagnostic pronouncement: "Now, *that* is a *very* angry woman." That was that! The fact that he detected—or thought he detected—an angry tone to her voice disqualified not only what she had to say but also who she was. Because the very possibility that we are angry often meets with rejection and disapproval from others, it is no wonder that it is hard for us to know, let alone admit, that we are angry.

—Harriet Goldhor Lerner in *The Dance of Anger*

#### Reflect

- ❖ Why does anger, real or perceived, prompt others to dismiss or ridicule us?

#### TUESDAY

When my younger brother killed himself, nobody talked about anger. We shared our shock, our grief, our despair. Numb, we sat together and wept together and agonized over the violence of his death. But we never spoke of anger—his, with its life-shattering power, or ours at his sudden leaving.

We never spoke of anger. And the anger never went away. Instead, it came back to us time and again, in a dozen clever, wretched forms.

The unspent anger disguised itself as sorrow and its hot tears scarred my mother's face. The unspoken anger disguised itself as hopelessness and my father, another victim, languishes in self-hate. The unacknowledged anger disguised itself as busyness and the workaholic hyperactivity finally ate away at my soul.

—Helen R. Neinast, from "Sacred Anger" in *Wellsprings: A Journal for United Methodist Clergywomen*

#### Reflect

- ❖ What disguises have you seen anger wear?

#### WEDNESDAY

It is not the anger of other women that will destroy us but our refusals to stand still, to listen to its rhythms, to learn within it, to move beyond the manner of presentation to the substance, to tap that anger as an important source of empowerment. . . .

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For women raised to fear, too often anger threatens annihilation. In the male construct of brute force, we were taught that our lives depended upon the good will of patriarchal power. The anger of others was to be avoided at all costs because there was nothing to be learned from it but pain, a judgment that we had been bad girls, come up lacking, not done what we were supposed to do. And if we accept our powerlessness, then of course any anger can destroy us.

But the strength of women lies in recognizing differences between us as creative, and in standing to those distortions which we inherited without blame, but which are now ours to alter. The angers of women can transform difference through insight into power. For anger between peers births change, not destruction, and the discomfort and sense of loss it often causes is not fatal, but a sign of growth.

—Audre Lorde, from “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism” in *Sister Outsider*

### Reflect

- ❖ How can anger be a clue to discovering and transforming our differences—with respect to race as well as other differences?
- ❖ How do you respond to the anger of other women? of men?

### THURSDAY

It is my thesis that we Christians have come very close to killing love precisely because we have understood anger to be a deadly sin. Anger is not the opposite of love. It is better understood as a feeling-signal that all is not well in our relation to other persons or groups or to the world around us. Anger is a mode of connectedness to others and it is always a vivid form of caring. . . .

To grasp this point . . . is a critical first step in understanding the power of anger in the work of love. Where anger rises, there the energy to act is present.

—Beverly Wildung Harrison, from “The Power of Anger in the Work of Love” in *Making the Connections*

### Reflect

- ❖ When has the recognition of your own anger given you the energy to act?
- ❖ How did this change you and/or the relationship that gave rise to the anger?

### FRIDAY

*To a friend who angered me*

I think your most valuable gift to me has been a space—a safe space—to share my voice. Through your willingness to hear, you have helped me to speak. I suspect that some days that may have felt like a mixed blessing to you—days when my voice spoke more pain and sadness and anger than I had ever been able to say and that erupted in ways that felt awfully sloppy and messy to me. There were times lately when I needed to say something just to say it without worrying whether you would hear it as pressure or as a desire for you to change. You heard me far more often than not, however. I remember being struck one time by how well you seemed to understand what I was saying. Then it hit me that your ability to hear so well seemed to coincide with the time that I started sharing more honestly and deeply. Funny how that works. . . .

—Jan L. Richardson, from a letter to a friend

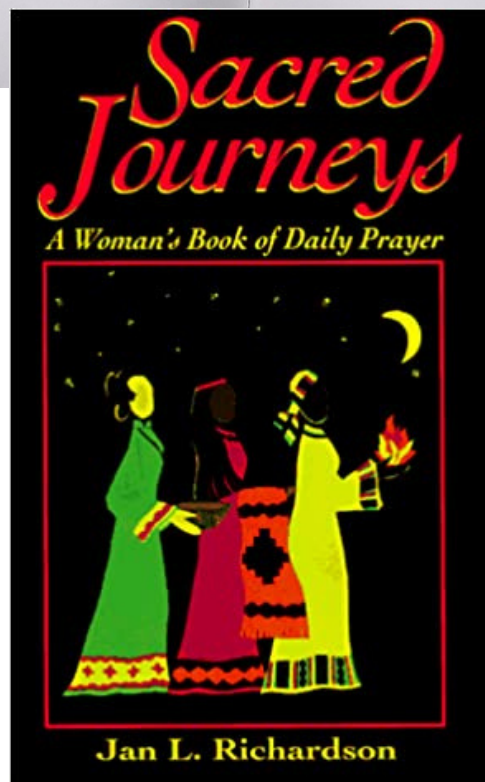
### Reflect

- ❖ When has someone’s honest and caring listening enabled you to express and transform your anger?

### SATURDAY

*At a recent workshop on praying our anger, I invited participants to write their own psalms expressing anger, modeling them on some of the imprecatory psalms. Our purpose was to truly acknowledge the angry, vindictive feelings we had and then to offer them in prayer. We asked whether there were ways in which God was asking us to be part of the healing of the situation calling forth the anger. The following psalm is my own effort, based on Psalm 52:*

You oppressor, why do you practice tyranny  
 against the poor year after year?  
 You inflame hatred;  
 your policies promote injustice,  
 O wrecker of human families.  
 You love segregation more than unity  
 and bondage more than freedom.  
 You cherish superiority  
 O you twister of the truth.



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Oh, that God would destroy your schemes,  
thrust you out of your power structure  
and incarcerate you on Robins Island  
[a prison in which many South African dissidents are incarcerated].  
The disenfranchised shall rise and rejoice,  
they will dance and sing:  
"This is the one who thought God was on his side,  
who placed confidence in white supremacy  
and relied on apartheid."  
But I am like one whose dreams have come true;  
I trust in the Gospel of freedom and life.  
I will celebrate the wonder of God's compassion  
and share liberty with my sisters and brothers for all time.

Often the original context of the psalm is lost to us but not its impact as we discover ourselves in its emotional milieu. I lived for a while in South Africa, and I agonize for those still so cruelly oppressed. At the same time I am called to pray. I pray for courageous leaders like Archbishop Desmond Tutu, for those who have lost their lives in the struggle for justice, and for those who remain incarcerated and silenced. As I pray for oppressor and oppressed, I am also challenged to search out my own collusion with oppressive ways of thinking and acting which so insidiously corrupt the environment in which I live.

—Elizabeth J. Canham, from "Sing a New Song" in *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life*

### Reflect

- ❖ How does it feel to bring your anger before God?

### SUNDAY

"Anger and tenderness: my selves," Adrienne Rich writes in her poem "Integrity," which she records in her book *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*. She speaks of anger and tenderness as strands of the same web being spun and woven from the spider's body, "even from a broken web."

Mary and Martha know this web: the web of passionate feeling, of relationship, of creation from brokenness—the web that connects but does not entrap, that provides shelter but does not ensnare. Mary and Martha are websters, web-weavers. By their care and hospitality, they have established this web of relationship with Jesus.

This web enables each of them to speak out when Jesus finally arrives after Lazarus's death. It enables them to voice their anger, or at least their sharp disappointment, at his absence. In the face of Mary and Martha's pain, Jesus realizes that he has put lessons ahead of relationship. Perhaps Jesus wonders if God's glory can be displayed outside the context of care for his friends.

Mary and Martha's words free Jesus to rediscover his compassion, to remember the depth of their relationship and the strength of their web. In the real, immediate presence of their tears, Jesus realizes the depth of his own loss, a loss that spills beyond the borders of his well-intentioned plan. And he does not merely cry; he weeps. Within the web, within his circle of friends, the holy one's humanity runs down his face.

By their care and their words, Mary and Martha bear the strands of resurrection. With his compassion, with his tears, Jesus weaves them and fashions life anew.

—Jan L. Richardson

### Reflect

- ❖ When has anger brought new life?
- ❖ What lies beyond your anger?

### Meditation

#### *Anger Is a Woman*

Anger is a woman who has learned  
that pleasantness  
is not the way to peacefulness,  
that silence  
is not the way to strength.

Anger is a woman  
who has learned  
to breathe from her belly;  
who waits at your door,  
bringing you offerings;  
who knows your true name  
and gives it back to you.  
She has lived on the streets.  
She knows prisons  
and alleys  
and mud.

She has seen hungry children  
and broken women  
and desperate men  
and spoken to them  
in their own tongues.

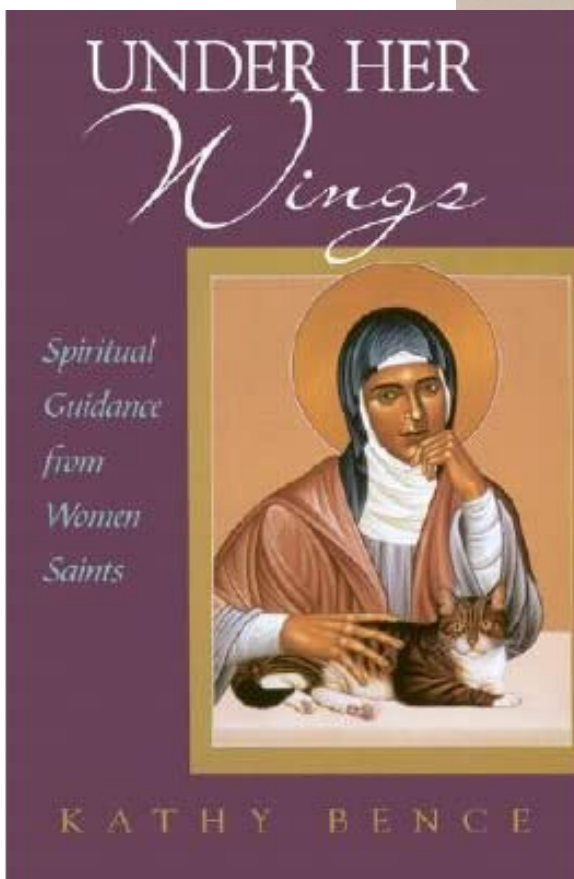
They gave her a song.  
She sings it to you.  
—Jan L. Richardson

**Blessing:** *Blessed are you who journey for a time with Anger, for you will know the resurrection that lies beyond.*

Jan Richardson,  
*Sacred  
Journeys:  
A Woman's  
Book of Daily  
Prayer*  
(Nashville:  
Upper Room,  
1995)

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DAY TWO

### *Love Was the Meaning*



I often desired to learn what was our Lord's meaning [regarding our relationship with God]. And fifteen years after [I began this book], I was given an insight. The Lord said: "Do you want to understand your Lord's meaning in this? Learn it well: Love was my meaning. Who showed it to you? Love. What did your Lord show you? Love. Why did your Lord show you? For love. Hold on to me and I will show you more. But you will never learn it all." Thus I understood: Love was our Lord's meaning.

And I fully understood that before God made us, God loved us; and that love has never lessened, nor ever shall. And in this love God has done all works; and in this love God made all things profitable to us; and in this love our life is everlasting. We were created out of this love which was in God since the beginning. And in this love is our beginning. And through this love is how we shall see God forever.<sup>2</sup>

I am often struck by how slowly God works. We know that a thousand years are like a day in God's sight—which is to say God lives outside the boundaries of time. But still it seems to take the Lord so long to answer our anxious questions. So we are the ones who must adjust to God's timing. But spending fifteen years waiting for an answer? No wonder Julian is considered a saint! For fifteen years she had prayed to understand the meaning of God's relationship with her—and when the answer came, it was so obvious. She had known it all along.

Of course love was God's meaning. God *is* love. What else could God's meaning have been? Love was and is the Lord's purpose in all of creation. We know all the right things to say about God's loving us, and love was the meaning in everything concerning us. But what about:

- a miscarriage? Where is the love meaning then?
- divorce? What does love mean to us then?
- cancer? How do we see God's love then?

We *know* that God loves us—and that our lives are



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undergirded by that love. But what we know and what we feel can be galaxies apart. What happens on those days when we can't feel what we know to be true? How do we access the love of God in affective (emotional) ways?

Julian reminds us that the very air we breathe is love-soaked. The Lord says to her: "Learn it well—Love was [my] meaning."

Love showed her the meaning.


Love was all there was to show her.

Love was God's motivation for answering her.

This begins to sound quite repetitious, but love is precisely the point. The answer to the meaning of our existence is simply love. God loves us—that is the central fact of our existence and the explanation for everything God does. Life may throw at us situations like a miscarriage or divorce or cancer, but none of these situations—*nothing*—can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. God's gracious love is unchanging. It has always been there and always will be.

So how do we reconcile God's all-pervasive love with life's tragedies? We must expand our image and understanding of God. Not long ago on TV, I heard a woman explain the death of her sister in a mass shooting by saying: "God must have wanted her." I longed to call this woman and tell her that God had nothing to do with a deranged man's shooting spree. Who could love such a God? Or who would believe that God loved someone so much that the Almighty sent a deranged killer to take that woman's life so that she could be in heaven with God? No. This action is not of God, nor is it of love. We must carefully separate God's actions from those of sinful humans.

The question we must learn to ask is: Where is God in all of this? Where is God's love in the midst of cancer or divorce or shootings? If God's love is the air we breathe, then that love is present in my situation, no matter how bad it seems. We must learn to look for the meaning—for God's love—as long as Julian did or however long it takes.

Love was God's meaning. Is it also ours? 

Kathy Bence, *Under Her Wings:  
Spiritual Guidance from Women Saints*  
(Nashville: Upper Room, 2001)

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JULIAN OF NORWICH

### *Reflection*

1. What question have you been asking God for a long time?
2. What answers have you discerned so far? What meaning do you see in your painful situation?
3. How do you sense God's love undergirding you in this situation?
4. How could God's love be the meaning woven into your circumstances?
5. What helps you to feel/experience God's love for you?

### *Scripture*

- Jeremiah 31:3
- 1 Corinthians 13:7-8
- Genesis 50:20

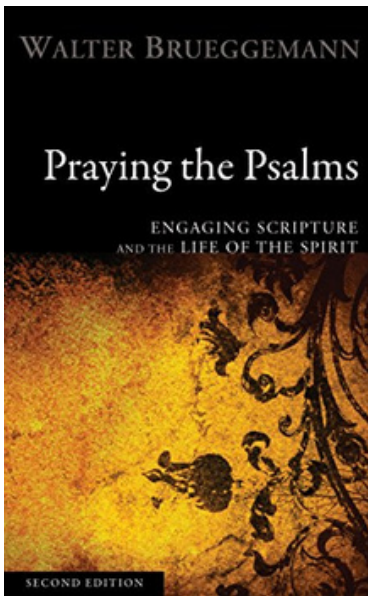
### *Exercise*

Recall a time when you felt God's love in a soul-satisfying way. What were the circumstances? How did you receive it? What was that like? How did it transform you?

Kathy Bence, *Under Her Wings: Spiritual Guidance from Women Saints* (Nashville: Upper Room, 2001)

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### Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit* (Eugene: Cascade, 2007)

40 PRAYING THE PSALMS *Quote*

fact in the pit. But we live in pursuit of our imagination. Thus the use of the Psalm of trust while still in the pit is an act of profound hope which permits new life. Expressing one's trust in God's sheltering wings is a bold assertion that the power of the pit has been broken. Imaginative speech may outdistance actual circumstance. But it is a first gesturing of transformed circumstance.

This Psalm (91) is a remarkable convergence of motifs. In addition to our two images, it offers a variety of war images (vv. 4–8) which can usefully be explored and exploited. It offers animal imagery in v. 13 and speaks in v. 11 that marvelous offer, “He will give his angels charge of you.” It concludes in vv. 14–16 with one of those rare responses of God which utterly transform. The self-assertion of God is a response to the boldness of submission:

- I will deliver
- I will protect
- I will answer
- I will be with
- I will rescue
- I will honor
- I will satisfy
- I will show

Finally concerning this metaphor, we should mention its surprising use in Ruth 2:12, where it is used in a narrative, when Boaz says to Ruth in the field:

May Yahweh reward you for your actions, and may you have a full reward from Yahweh, the God of Israel, under whose *wings* you have come for *refuge*.

*Language Appropriate to a Place*

Here, in communication on a human plane, the same image transforms a social situation.

#### *In the Move from Pit to Wing*

Our lives always move between the pit and the wing, between the shattering of disorientation and the gift of life. That is what our baptism is about—to die and to rise with him to newness of life (Romans 6:1–11).

It remains for those who use this metaphor, like every other, to identify those events and experiences in which hovering wings have cared, in which we have been made utterly safe and so free that life has begun again. Every man, woman, and child of us has been within and shall again face the pit, and this must be brought to speech. Every one of us has the wings assured to us (see Deuteronomy 33:27), and that also must be spoken about.

It is clear that the Psalms, when we freely engage ourselves with them, are indeed subversive literature. They break things loose. They disrupt and question. They open up new possibilities. They create new relationships. Most of all, they give us new eyes to see and new tongues to speak. And therefore, we need not enter the Presence of the Holy One mute and immobilized. We go there to practice our vocation of receiving the new future God is speaking to us. To risk such prayer is to repent of the old orientation to which we no longer belong. It is to refuse the pit which must first be fully experienced for the sake of the wings which may be boldly anticipated.