

Oak Leaves

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FEBRUARY 2021



Our Role in Unity by Parson John

In light of the recent attack on the Capitol, there is conversation among us about finding or working to create unity. This makes sense, but I wonder if we have the understanding, the resources, and the collective will to make this happen. Because religion, so often, has been one more thing that divides us and wounds us, many might be skeptical to hear me say that I believe that religion and spirituality have an essential role to play in helping us to achieve unity.

I am including in this edition of Oak Leaves, an email from Richard Rohr, the founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation, which I think is relevant to our striving for unity. In fact, I encourage you to go onto the website for the Center for Action and Contemplation, and read and sign up for Richard's daily emails. They tend to take on some topic for each week. This week's theme (January 24 – 30) is about what many Christian mystics have called the Cosmic Egg. What is the Cosmic Egg?

It is an image that helps us to understand that the universe is from God and is ultimately one. The great English mystic, Julian of Norwich, who also lived during a deadly pandemic, had a vision from God. This is how she described it: "God showed me in my palm a little thing round as a ball about the size of a hazelnut. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and asked myself: 'What is this thing?' And I was answered: 'It is everything that is created.' I wondered how it could survive, since it seemed so little it could suddenly disintegrate into nothing. The answer came: 'It endures and ever will endure, because God loves it.' And so everything has being because of God's love."

There is the foundation for unity. No doubt, for Julian, this vision was deeply convicting and motivating. What would it be like to emotionally and spiritually really understand the fragility and preciousness of the Cosmic Egg of which we are a part? Perhaps you have seen pictures taken from Voyager 1 as it left the reaches of our solar system. There we see a tiny

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prick of light, which is our home in this Cosmic Egg. Humbling and powerful to see the truth of who we are, both from mystics and scientists!

Richard Rohr is writing this week about what he calls the three domes of our Cosmic Egg: my story, our story, and the story. My story, of course, is our individual story of self, born from our own experiences and backgrounds, our own orientations and preferences. It's a story which easily fascinates and dominates our attention and attachment. It's good, however, only as far as it goes. It's hard to build unity if my story is the only one we know and love. Our story is the familiar way that we orient in a group. Religion, nation, ethnicity, political party, sports team, college or high school, family, community, all serve this need we have to be part of a group. However, like anything which serves our need for identity, our groups can both create unity and threaten it. This is the threshold of where we are standing today—the experience of a greater unity threatened by allegiance to lesser unions. We mistake our part for the whole. The story would be those stories which stretch our hearts and imaginations to understand a unity which supersedes any partial divisions. All of our multiplicity is held in a greater unity. How does this truth become more real to us? I think that this is the job of all true and mature religion and spirituality.

I have more to say about this topic. My recent reading of Jean Gebser is helping me to see with my understanding, as Julian said, that there are various structures of consciousness within us, sort of the archeological inheritance of our human experience, of which we are only vaguely aware. And because we are not aware, these different structures are playing out through us in powerful and destructive ways. Bringing these into awareness and learning how to make them work for us and not against us is one of the most important tasks for our species. There is a hidden wholeness to our consciousness structures which can bring us through our impasse into something life-giving for us all. More about this to come in other communications.

Meanwhile, let's all keep working at connecting deeply to God, from whom all of us come and in whom we all live and move and have our being. See you in church!

Worshipping Together in February



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Note: At this point in time, we are not offering in-person worship. Until further notice, live services will be conducted virtually via Zoom.

Sunday, February 7, 2021 @ 9:45 AM

Sermon: "Action and Contemplation" by Rev. John W. Monroe, III

Scripture: Isaiah 40:21-31 and Mark 1:29-39

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus is depicted as a busy man. Yet, he regularly sought time to be alone in prayer, to connect to Source and to discern what to do next. The Jesus path requires a balance between action and contemplation, prayer and work.

Sunday, February 14, 2021 @ 9:45 AM

Sermon: "When the Veil Drops" by Rev. John W. Monroe, III

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 and Mark 9:2-9

Humans straddle two realms – the physical and spiritual. The veil which separates these in our awareness is thinner than we think. Christ showed us how the spiritual is incarnated in the physical. Through him we see and the veil drops.

Sunday, February 21, 2021 @ 9:45 AM

Sermon: "Animal Guides" by Rev. John W. Monroe, III

Scripture: Genesis 9:8-17 and Mark 1:9-15

God's covenant after the flood is with Noah and the animals. The promise is given to humans and animals, who, on the ark, had been in community. As Jesus receives his call, he is sent to the wilderness, where he was tested. He was not alone. He was with the animals, the wild beasts, and the angels. Apparently, the human journey to God involves animals.

Sunday, February 28, 2021 @ 9:45 AM

Sermon: "More Than We Dreamed" by Rev. John W. Monroe, III

Scripture: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 and Mark 8:31-38

How do we look at the transformation which comes with a call from God? Do we see what we lose, the loss of who we were? Or, do we see how that loss, letting go, and death bring greater life than we ever deserved?

For more services, visit rumsonpresbyterian.org/upcoming-services

Mission News



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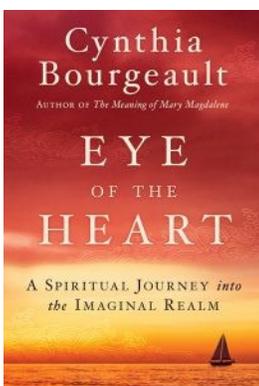
Hearty thanks to the individuals who were able to attend the first Mission Commission meeting of 2021! The group met this past week to begin planning for the new year, beginning with the review of the mission statement as well as the details of the organizations supported through the 2020 endowment budget. Pastor John outlined the sources of the budget and the focus in 2020 on providing more directly for the local communities impacted by the pandemic. The pandemic's devastating impact on food security, health, housing and education illuminated these areas for priority attention. The gift distribution on page 14 of the Annual Report reflects these priorities and includes the most extraordinary provisioning of 127 Chromebooks to support virtual learning for families with children in need.

For 2021, the group recognizes the benefits of deepening relationships with the organizations we support, establishing personal connections (wherever possible) to the leadership and exploring ways apart from donations to support their missions. This is easier to do with the smaller, local organizations, but even with the large, international organizations, designating 'mission champions' / liaisons with each group may illuminate additional pathways for support. With the May mission envelope just a few months away, the Mission Commission will be thinking about best uses for those proceeds.

This group plans to meet every 4th Monday of the month at 7:30pm over Zoom for now. We welcome participants, ideas and energies of any and all!

Anita Waters, **Mission Chair**

Adult Nurture



Wisdom Wednesdays: In our Wednesday Wisdom gatherings, we are looking at Cynthia Bourgeault's latest book, *Eye of the Heart: A Spiritual Journey into the Imaginal Realm*. Following in the lineage of the Christian contemplative tradition, Cynthia provides meaningful maps for those who feel drawn to explore how spiritual realms show up in human terrain. She demonstrates that the spiritual life does not have to be lost in subjectivity and self-deception. There are reliable markers to help sincere seekers of spiritual truth. You are welcome to join us (via Zoom) Wednesday evenings at 7:00 PM.

Church News



Racial Equity : Exploring White Privilege and Anti-Racism



This month our group is watching If Beale Street Could Talk. Please watch the movie and come ready to discuss it at our meeting on February 15 at 7pm via zoom. Please let the Church office know if you want to be added to the email list : admin@rumsonpresbyterianchurch.org .

Giving

GIVEPLUS⁺

YOUR CHURCH GIVING APP

Rumson Presbyterian Church is excited to partner with the Presbyterian Foundation and Vanco Payment Solutions to bring you our GivePlus Online Giving page (<https://rumsonpresbyterian.org/giving/>).

We are also listed in the GivePlus Mobile App, which can be downloaded to your smartphone, making Online Giving even easier. This YouTube video explains how to get and use the App. In addition, here are links to two more documents about the service and the App: “Vanco GivePlus Church FAQs for Donors” and “Vanco GivePlus Church How it Works”.

Note: 2% of your GivePlus donation will be retained as an administrative fee by the Presbyterian Foundation.

Community News



Early Risers



If you want to stop drinking call: 1-908-687-8566
or (toll free from NJ area codes): 1-800-245-1377
24 hours a day / 7 days a week.

For a list of local A.A. meetings, visit www.nnjaa.org/#
For information about A.A. visit www.nnjaa.org

Caring for God's Earth



Submitted by **Diane Burke** and **Sue Smith**

We are running a series of articles from Mission Crossroads on the impact of climate change around the world.

The Problem with Lawns

by **Rob Herring** | Earth Conscious Life

Lawns can be lovely. They're a place for relaxation, beauty, and wonderful memories near

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our homes and communities.

Some of us take a lot of pride in our lawns, too— and putting work into them can become almost a passion project or hobby! However, it might be time to look at our beautiful lawn hobby a little differently.

While we don't necessarily need to get rid of these peaceful and well-manicured spaces altogether, something does need to change about them.

But why? And what can we change about them?

According to the Earth Institute of Columbia University, lawns and the way we care for them are huge contributors to environmental degradation: including pollution of both our air and water.

They might even be more polluting than some large farms, since they collectively use 10 times the amount of chemical pesticides and fertilizers per acre than these farms. And lawns take up to 30-40 million acres of land here in America alone!

This runoff ends up in our drinking water, in wetlands, and eventually in the ocean too, where they create dead zones that harm wildlife.

And not just that: we use tons of gas and exhaust to take care of them, too, in the form of lawnmowers, leaf blowers, and more. This pollutes the air and accounts for more than 5% of the country's air pollution.

Lawns are also a monoculture, not unlike a field of corn. They don't create homes for wildlife, pollinators, or even many important soil microorganisms.

We love our lawns and green spaces. But what can we do to make them friendlier to the environment, wildlife, our water, and the planet— and ultimately ourselves!

We can use organic and sustainable methods to take care of them instead.

No more chemicals. Organic lawn care approaches do exist (as do organic lawn care and landscaping companies) and it should be an imperative to use these instead.

Rather than chemical fertilizers, use natural fertilizers like alfalfa meal or soybean meal. Pests can be a real issue, but more environmentally friendly applications like diatomaceous earth or non-chemical organic sprays may be better in the long run. They're better for both the water supply and the wildlife that visits your lawn, too.

Here's a great list of a few alternatives to RoundUp.

If you have a type of lawn turf grass that is sensitive to nutrient needs and pests, there are also more sustainable varieties available.

Lawns can be diverse and not just "grassy."

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In fact, some lawn owners are already miles ahead of the curve incorporating other alternatives to turf-grass into their lawns. These actually encourage more robust lawn health and bring nutrients to turf grasses (and even cut down on watering!) while drawing in wildlife that could take care of pest problems. (And it looks good, too.)

And why have actual lawn take up so much space? Think about shrinking your lawn area with landscaping or even prairie plots. There are many low-maintenance plant choices for this. And pollinators will love you for it!

And with that said: the air, water, and earth will love you for it, too.

Check out more resources about how to switch your lawn into a productive garden here at FoodNotLawns.

Have you considered upgrading your grass to something better for the Earth?

A Meditation (from Richard Rohr)



The Cosmic Egg : Our Story

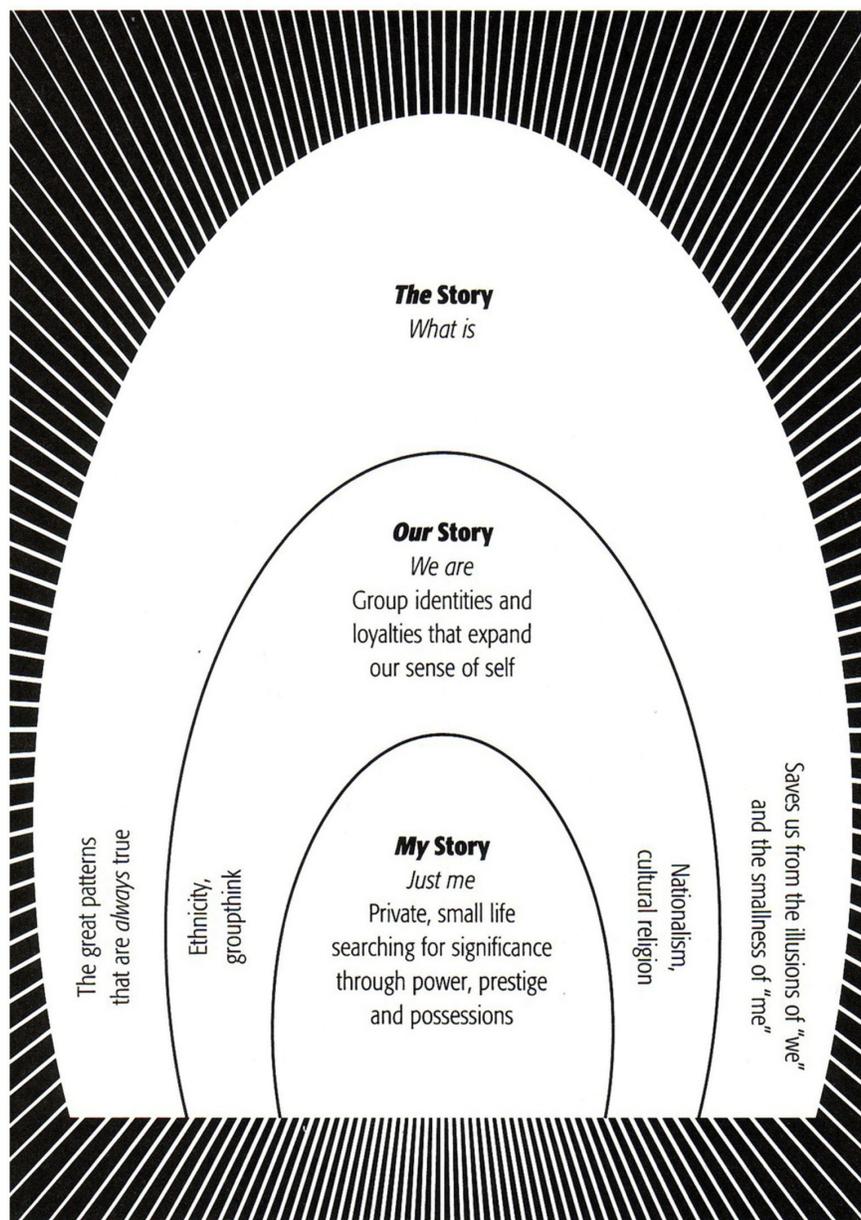
by [Richard Rohr, OFM](#)

January 26, 2021

The larger realm of meaning beyond My Story is Our Story. To continue the model of the three domes, this is the dome of our group, community, church, nationality, gender, and ethnicity. We seem to need this for our own identity and security as social beings. It is both good and necessary, but if we try to make it the whole enchilada, we end up with the culture and identity wars we have today. Most of us have to work through multiple memberships: family, neighborhood, religious affiliation, gender, country. These communities are schools for relationship, connection, and almost all virtue as we know it.

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The Cosmic Egg



Healthy and biblical religion includes the whole cosmic egg.

Everyone has access to this level of meaning, consciously or unconsciously, negatively or positively. We are essentially social beings and we live inside of some shared meanings, which become our reference points and our runway. Our Story is the necessary training ground for belonging, attaching, trusting, and loving. If we are raised in a healthy family system, we generally feel positive about our group possibilities, including our religious and cultural rituals and traditions. Unfortunately, some people get stuck here and spend their lives

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defending the boundaries and glory of “their” group. They make plans for war, and perfect the scapegoating of others. Such group egocentricity is more dangerous than personal egocentricity. It looks like greatness when it is often no more than very well-disguised narcissism. I don’t have much self-knowledge, so I throw all of my cache into being Italian! I live on the surface of my own soul, but I sure play good football. I have no deep identity, so I live through my husband or wife or children or friends.

People try to find identity in a group, an institutional affiliation, a nation, a public cause—or today, like never before, public fame or infamy. Somehow, to be on the news or in social media is to be immortalized. People feel protected inside of the group identity or public fame. We all connect with one group or another—a Catholic, a Harley-Davidson owner, a Chicago Cubs fan—and then we sport proud signs about it. Such group symbols, flags, and patriotism remind us that we are not alone; and such shared meaning gives consolation and security to the small self—and something to talk about! The handy language of “us” versus “them” lifts some real burden from our private striving, and there is true comfort in being among our own. In fact, Our Story feels so sacred that most religion works at this level as a belonging system more than a search for intimacy with God. The second dome becomes an avoidance of the third and most all-inclusive (The Story). I see this in many seminarians, young priests, and bishops, after having given them retreats for many years. They put all their eggs in the Roman Catholic basket, but they have little curiosity about their own shadow or inner life. Their goal is not really love of God, but the love of “my priesthood” as it is often strangely called.

Jesus was not into groupthink or loyalty tests. I’m convinced God could care less about them, but God also seems to know that we need symbols, songs, sacred times and places for communal support and encouragement. However, we will need these boundary markers less and less as we move toward the real Center. Thus, we often see a certain freedom in wise elders and people who have suffered and come through renewed. In the second half of life, we don’t need to be a hero anymore and we may not even need to belong. We just need to be real. Saint Augustine put it most daringly, “Love [God] and do what you will!” [1]

References:

[1] Augustine, Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John to the Parthians, tractate 7.8.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *The Wisdom Pattern* (Franciscan Media: 2020), 106–111.

Pastor John’s Weekly E-Mail “Blasts” for January

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American Tune (Jan 10)

It's Thursday morning and I'm trying to take stock of where we are and what is mine to do in this moment. As you know, my discipline in this time of pandemic has been to write a weekly email blast, with information about worship and some pastoral thoughts. We will have virtual worship Sunday at our usual time—9:45 AM, but my plans for worship are suddenly in flux. Right now, I plan on keeping the lectionary readings, which are Genesis 1:1-5 and Mark 1:4-11. Who knows, I may even keep the sermon title which is, "Becoming More Than We Are." But I had planned for the "hymn" after the sermon to be, "Nowhere Man" by the Beatles. Instead, I think that I will ask Andreea to sing "American Tune" by Paul Simon.

Tuesday afternoon, Cynthia Bourgeault communicated to her widespread contemplative community, of which I am a part, that it was important for us to "hold the space" for our country in the next 24 to 36 hours. No doubt, she was aware of the significance of the elections in Georgia and the joint meeting of Congress on Wednesday and the potential for upheaval. She also was aware that January 6 was Epiphany, a time of sacred revelation and unveiling and, of course, of heavenly signs. She recommended several practices. Tonglen, which is where one consciously breathes in the toxins and sufferings in our collective space or in the life of another, taking on the pain and toxicity, and then releasing an energy of healing and peace. Centering Prayer, where one lets go of mental and emotional attachments and allows the presence and action of God to show up in one's awareness. Also, some hymns and chants and prayers to offer for our world.

I have been trying to practice and also to be aware of what was going on in our country. Yesterday was one of the most troubling days for our country that I have ever witnessed. I became emotionally flooded, and when I did turn to spiritual practice, did find another way of being with what was happening. What I found this morning as I went within was that my outrage quickly moved to pain. And, it was clear to me that my calling was to be with my pain instead of looking for familiar ways of avoiding it.

Don't get me wrong. There are monumental challenges before us as a nation which will require action and decisions. Inner work is only part of our work, but I believe that it is essential that we do our inner work if anything other than a cycle of reactivity and blame is to emerge from our collective brokenness. Already, I see each side moving into reactivity and a demand for the other side to take responsibility for what is wrong with us. Instead of embracing our pain, we simply look to transfer it onto others.

Again, don't get me wrong. Many of us have decided that an intemperate and emotionally unhealthy leader with admitted authoritarian impulses was worth the try. I was not in the least bit surprised that an attack upon our Capitol happened yesterday. In fact, I found it totally predictable. Still, seeing it happen in real time was as disheartening as anything I have

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ever witnessed. Already, I hear of some claiming that those who desecrated the Capitol were leftists in disguise and not supporters of the President. Failure to take responsibility will not get us anywhere good or healing.

Yet, I would caution my friends on the left, not only to point the finger of blame and to give into anger. Your anger is justified. I felt disgust and rage. But I also knew that I needed to process my rage and to practice letting it go, so that I can operate out of an energy of love and compassion. Yes, I believe that our leaders who encouraged this travesty and those who stormed the Capitol need to be held to account. But we must take on this work of healing and rebuilding with an energy in which all of us embrace the pain which is ours to embrace, and even some pain which is not ours to embrace, for the sake of a greater healing.

I apologize for being necessarily short in my reflections. Our circumstances are much more complex and nuanced than I can express here. I apologize for weighing in. But if I did not risk weighing in, I would have even more to apologize for.

For a personality type that wants to be in harmony with everyone, this is a very challenging moment for me. And in a desire to be fully present to the moment and to do what is mine to do, I choose to step into my discomfort with an open and grieving heart, in the trust that God is in our midst, working for our transformation. Will we open ourselves to God and to our pain and to others? Or will we seek lesser ways of escape, denial, blame, self-justification, hatred? Everything hinges on what we decide. May blessings and love and forgiveness abound. And may God give us courage to bear what is ours to bear and to do what is ours to do.

Strangely Hopeful (Jan 14)

First a word about worship this Sunday, January 17. The Scripture readings are 1 Samuel 3:1-10 and John 1:43-51. The sermon is called, "Remembering to Listen." For the hymn, Andreea will lead us in singing "The Sound of Silence," that classic Simon and Garfunkel song.

I began the day today with my spiritual practice. Rosanne is still in bed, so I started to read from Jean Gebser's monumental book, *The Ever-Present Origin*. The complexity and comprehensiveness of Gebser's thought requires great effort to comprehend. Any attempt to summarize or give a flavor of, on my part, risks grave simplification and even distortion. But I am going to give it a try.

Gebser wrote in the mid-twentieth century, but his work seems even more relevant today as we are witnessing the collapse of modern, or what he calls mental-rational consciousness. I think that all of us, on both sides of the ideological divide, are deeply afraid and alienated. The fear has led to a desire for a quick fix and simple answers. During such a time of profound inner dis-ease, as is our own, authoritarian leaders are especially attractive to many.

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Yes, from my perspective, what happened on January 6 was nothing less than an attempted coup and we must hold those who initiated it and participated in it to account. But simply trying to impose new order by legal actions, as important as this is, will not go to the root of our problem. The problem is one of consciousness structure, or one of spirituality. A simple appeal to religion will not be enough to heal us. Many who participated in acts of violence and insurrection were very religious—true believers in every way. I would claim, however, that their religion reflects the deficiencies of our dying consciousness structure, rather than pointing towards the new structure which is wanting to emerge.

This is where my analysis, informed by Gebser, gets deep and challenging. Gebser carefully details the structures of human consciousness and how they have mutated over the eons. Each transition from one structure to another has been deeply unsettling and has taken centuries to fully take hold. But you can see it through art, language, literature, architecture, and all expressions of human culture. The terrain which lies within us includes what Gebser calls, archaic, magic, mythic, and mental. We are living in the deficient stage of the mental structure and it is killing us.

The next structure which is wanting to emerge, he calls integral, and it is a supersession of the mental. Not an elimination of, but a transcending of the mental. Gebser claims that all of the previous structures still live within us. If we are unconscious of their presence, however, then we can easily be taken over by them in their deficient form. In some ways, what we saw on January 6, was an unconscious expression of deficient magic and mythic structures at work. And, by the way, the Left is also easily led to seek magic and mythic solutions to what ails us, in the form of idealization of indigenous spiritualities and magical new age solutions.

Going backwards, however, is never a solution. The integral is calling us to begin to see the reality of time as a genuinely new dimension. In our mental fixation, we see time as merely measurable or chronological or quantifiable. That's why we feel that we never have enough time. Gebser claims that time can be seen as a quality of intensity and transparency. The creativity and energy of origin is always present, calling for our awareness and this awareness will not be primarily mental. Such awareness requires the humility of opening our whole selves—head, heart and body.

In the new consciousness, all consciousness structures will become transparent to us. We will be able to open ourselves to the power of magic and myth and mental, consciously, and to find a new creative power in these, because we are aware, and not being taken over by these structure's deficient stages.

I know that this is hard to take in, but as I keep working at it, I find myself hopeful. I have been looking desperately for a way of holding us all in my heart, amid our violent divisions. When I can see our divisions as arising from our inability, yet, to make the next leap in con-

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sciousness, then it becomes clearer that we are all in the same boat, being asked to open ourselves to potentials which reside in us, but which we have not yet been able to access. This work of transformation is spiritual, but not in any exclusive or dualistic way. It's about the new humanity which is God's dream for us all.

Forgive my plunge into such depths and my feeble attempt to add some clarity. I don't know how much suffering lies ahead for us, but I believe that we are being guided to something new and more life-giving. May we have the courage and trust to see it and to be it. Prayers abounding for us all!

Beyond Our Capacity (Jan 21)

This Sunday, January 24, we will have our Annual Congregational Meeting immediately after worship. Steve sent out an email explaining how members and friends can get virtual copies of the Annual Report on our website. We will receive the reports and vote on the pastoral terms of call. The Scripture this Sunday are Jonah 3:1-5, 10 and Mark 1:14-20 and the sermon is called, "Changing Our Minds." Andreea will lead us in singing "Change the World" by Eric Clapton.

How is it with your soul as we enter into the final days of the first month of 2021? It's been an eventful beginning of the new year and it requires our attention and care. Session admitted to mixed feelings about our current stance of virtual worship only. There are some indications that the rates of the virus are beginning to drop, but we decided not to jump back into an in-person option just yet. We will see where we are in February. A bit more discipline and denial now, may yield dividends soon.

The coronavirus, however, may not be the greatest challenge we face. We are facing a virus of mistrust and division as great as any time since the Civil War. There was much inspiration and optimism expressed on Inauguration Day, but few are predicting that a collective coming together will be easy to accomplish. The virus of division and fear have spread among us and there is no vaccine available to remedy this ailment. We may be able to return more fully to our lives in 2021, but will we be able to return to an experience of national unity? Or, is such a dream beyond our capacity?

I think that any reason for optimism requires deep intentionality at the macro and micro level of our lives. Collectively, we must decide to prioritize unity and communicate with our leaders about our desire. In our daily lives, we must seek ways to change the energy among us. As Jesus said, we must seek, ask, knock. Without a serious desire and intention, nothing much will happen.

There is a cost to living in such times as this. More than ever, we need to take care of ourselves and find ways of resting, re-energizing and restoring ourselves. Where can you go and

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what can you do to find your life renewed? What can we do to connect with Source to renew our spirits? Let us be intentional about answering such questions.

Forgive me if I sound like a broken record. Our spiritual practice is perhaps the single most important step that we can take to fight our spiritual pandemic. Finding that Presence which alone sustains all life can do more to change the energy among us than any other thing that we can do. Sitting in silence before God, engaging Scripture, taking in God through nature, prayer, and acts of kindness are tools available to us to chip away at changing the world. As my messiah complex kicks in, an occupational hazard, surrendering my spirit and anxiety to God is as important as any step I take to avoid participating in the spread of the coronavirus.

What are you experiencing as life-giving in these times? Where and how are you finding a renewing experience of God? When our lives humble and extend us beyond our capacities, there is a natural instinct to turn more deeply to God. What is beyond our capacity is not beyond God's capacity. Faith is often born from times like these, as we learn to lean on that which is greater than ourselves and to become obedient to this greater Wisdom and Presence. God is present and calling to us all. May we be sure to make time to listen and to follow. Blessings all!

The Divine Heart (Jan 28)

This Sunday, January 31, the sermon is called, "A Change of Heart," and is based on 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and Mark 1:21-28. Andreea will lead us in the "hymn" which will be "Fix You" by Coldplay.

It's been quite a start to the new year. My heart has been perplexed, even overwhelmed by the collective events of the past few weeks. Actually, it might be more accurate to say that my mind has been overwhelmed. How to make sense of it all? And when the mind is temporarily disabled or unable to put reality into a manageable box, then we are cast into the realm of the heart. The heart refuses to be managed or directed. It does not take orders from the mind. Try telling the heart that it shouldn't feel as it does, that it is not a valid realm of reality or a valid organ of perception. Many are counseling us to just move on from the unpleasantness of the violent irruption on our Capitol, but if we listen to our hearts, we know that this is not a true response. Something among us is broken which needs to be addressed.

Some of us were inspired by the events of January 20. There seemed to be a heart-opening. But others saw the turning to a new leadership as a profound loss. We have settled again into our respective camps, with our predictable talking points to be used as weapons in a never-ending war of conceptual worlds. In war, we dampen our hearts. They take a back seat to

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the designs of our minds. The battle lines give our minds the meaning they so desperately desire.

My heart grieves at the collective brokenness among us. Then, for me, there was the added shock and grief of the death of a beloved sports icon, Henry Aaron. I felt a need to listen to the tributes to him, and remembered how his story mirrors the still unintegrated pain of our racial history. He bore the brunt of racial suffering as few did. As he said, a piece of his heart was taken from him.

Amid it all, there is the persistence of COVID-19. We are tired of living with the loss of community. We look for signs of hope, and at times we see them. But experts are warning us that the worse may be yet to come. As the psalmist prays, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

In my daily practice of wordless prayer, sometimes I feel an energy of love which is tintured with an undeniable quality of suffering. There is something familiar about that quality. The heart seems to know that love and suffering are never far apart. Jesus revealed to us the heart of God, and none of us can deny the quality of suffering he bore. The church has often applied the words of Isaiah to Christ, "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

Notice how our minds move us away from the vulnerability and suffering quality of love and rushes us to positive thinking. The gospel ultimately is the only true positivity there is, the only true good news, but it does not deny suffering. Our rush to positive thinking perhaps carries with it a denial of the heart, a refusal to open ourselves to truth. What the gospel tells us is that when we take the risk of love and accept the experience of the suffering it brings, that we in some way participate in God's mysterious healing of the world, one heart at a time. Heart work is not to be avoided, but accepted for our sake and the world's. Blessings and courage to all!



First Presbyterian Church of Rumson NJ
P.O. Box 399
East River Road at Park Avenue
Rumson, NJ 07760

Nonprofit Organization

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DATED MATERIAL ENCLOSED

~Please check our website at www.rumsonpresbyterian.org for calendar updates~

FEBRUARY 2021

Feb 1-28		Black History Month	
Feb 2	Tue	Groundhog Day	
Feb 3	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00pm
Feb 10	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00pm
Feb 14	Sun	Transfiguration Sunday	
Feb 14	Sun	Valentine's Day	
Feb 15	Mon	Presidents Day	
Feb 15	Mon	Racial Equity Group	7:00pm
Feb 16	Tue	Session	
Feb 17	Wed	Ash Wednesday	
Feb 17	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00pm
Feb 22	Mon	Mission Committee	7:30pm
Feb 24	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00pm

MARCH 2021

Mar 3	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00pm
Mar 5	Fri	World Day of Prayer	
Mar 10	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00pm
Mar 14	Sun	Daylight-Savings Time begins	
Mar 15	Mon	Racial Equity Group	7:00pm
Mar 16	Tue	Session	
Mar 17	Wed	St. Patrick's Day	
Mar 17	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00pm
Mar 20	Sat	First Day of Spring	
Mar 22	Mon	Mission Committee	7:30pm
Mar 24	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00pm
Mar 28	Sun	Palm Sunday	
Mar 31	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00pm

**WATERSPIRIT sponsored event. All are welcome.*



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