

Oak Leaves

Vol. LXIV, Number 1

September 2021



Recovering Wonder

by Parson John

It's a season of wonder. And by wonder, I don't mean the usual wonder of the fall—bright skies, crisp air, the changing colors of leaves. These will surely come and, I hope, refresh us. But there is also the more ominous wonder of this particular season. We are experiencing an uptick in COVID once again. We could wonder in a deep way about what this reality is saying to us and teaching us. Yet, we see signs of people listening to different interpretations of our reality and choosing different responses to it. Inevitably, this pattern of creating and choosing different sides brings us into incidents of conflict and heated emotions.

To paraphrase Shakespeare, "To mask, or not to mask, that is the question." I have also had conversations about vaccination with those who are convinced that vaccination is not the step for them to take. This same dynamic of division and dualism infects every dimension of our culture, from politics to entertainment. We choose sides and go to battle with each other. Who or what is being served by this dynamic?

Our Session is engaged in prayerful discernment about our church life in this challenging moment. We are practicing holding our discernment in a spirit of trust and openness. We are preparing to make adjustments, as our efforts at ministry unfold this fall. You likely have seen our decisions for the fall. Andreea will return to the sanctuary. I will preach from the pulpit. We will have bulletins. Masks will be required for in-person worship and there will be no congregational singing. Zoom will give way to livestreaming of the service for those who choose to worship from home. Coffee hour will be outside when weather permits, and we will ask volunteers to buy coffee and light snacks.

Did we make the right decisions? Did we listen to God's voice in decision-making? Did God deliver God's answers to us? Or, does the whole process of discernment work differently than these questions of mine suggest?

Continued on next page...

...Continued from previous page

In our relationship with God, even God is limited by the confines of our assumptions and structures of consciousness. We try to force God to speak to us within the logic of our dualistic mental structure. If we read Jesus carefully, we will find him trying to explode our dualistic assumptions over and over. He said things like, "Love your enemy. Rejoice when you are persecuted. Forgive. Serve one another. The first will be last and the last will be first." Jesus simply cannot be made sense of by the usual structures of our minds. Jesus refused to give into our assumptions about who we are and what is possible for us, by demonstrating for us an entirely different way for us to be human. We think that only Jesus can be like Jesus. But this completely ignores what he actually said. He said that we would do the same works as he did and even greater.

How would Jesus live in our time? What would Jesus do? I think that Jesus would look beneath the surface of our situation, and, also, beneath the assumptions of our structures of consciousness, and point to another way. He always pointed to the possibility of transformation. And since resurrection follows death, he lived in hope. Maybe what Christ is asking from us in this challenging time is take with him the journey toward transformation. See you in church or virtually!

Worshipping Together in June



Note: Except where noted, both online and limited in-person worship options are available at this time. Check our website for updates.

Sunday, September 5th, 2021 @ 9:15 AM (Communion)

Sermon: "Wholeness" by Rev. John W. Monroe III

Scripture: Mark 7:24-37

Jesus is about creating a new humanity, one which is truly whole. One capable of true hearing, true speech, true inclusion, and true faith.

Sunday, September 12th, 2021 @ 9:45 AM

Sermon: "Dying to Live" by Rev. John W. Monroe III

Scripture: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Mark 8:27-39

Continued on next page...

...Continued from previous page

Jesus' life and teachings are paradoxical. His frame explodes our binary boxes and our obsession with self. He knew that life truly begins as we let go into the dynamic field of the flowing love of God.

Sunday, September 19th, 2021 @ 9:45 AM

Sermon: "It Takes a While to Sink in" by Rev. John W. Monroe III

Scripture: James 3:13-4:3; Mark 9:30-37

Jesus repeats the core of his mission, and his disciples still don't get it. Looks like this is going to take some time for them to grasp. Is the same true for us?

Sunday, September 26th, 2021 @ 9:45 AM

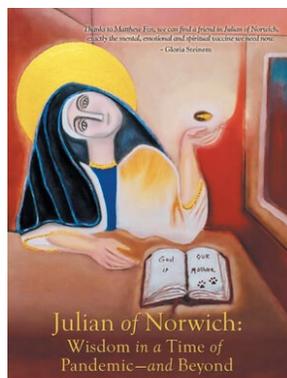
Sermon: "Salting the Self" by Rev. John W. Monroe III

Scripture: Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29; Mark 9:38-50

Both passages illustrate how our attachment to self gets in the way of spiritual attainment. Jesus has some thoughts about this which includes the path of transformation or salting the self.

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

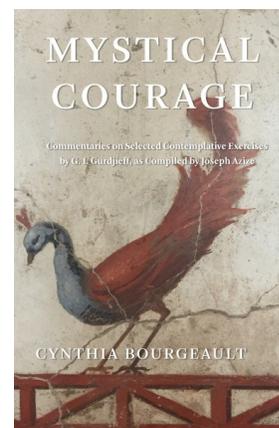
Adult Nurture



Matthew Fox
Foreword by Mirabai Starr

Wisdom Wednesdays: Our Wednesday Wisdom Group will finish reading Matthew Fox's book, *Julian of Norwich: Wisdom in a Time of Pandemic—and Beyond*, sometime in September. Upon completion, the group will decide on its next focus. There has been some interest expressed in working with Gurdjieffian exercises, which are designed to help people taste into three-centered awareness—thinking, feeling and moving—as a pathway toward deeper presence and awareness in daily life. For those interested, it is recommended that they buy a copy of

Mystical Courage by Cynthia Bourgeault. More information will follow. Our group meets Wednesdays from 7:00 – 8:30 on the church Zoom account.



Church School



Hello all,

Happy September to you! I hope everyone had a restful, fun-filled summer. Hopefully we can all ease into this beautiful month despite the business back to school brings.

As some of you already know, my family and I are moving to Rhode Island to start a business. It's a bittersweet time as I am sad to leave but also excited for a new chapter. We will still be offering in-person church school and nursery. John and the rest of the team are finding the perfect fit and will leave you in the best hands.

I am grateful for the time spent with each of you and your children. I am wishing you all peace and joy throughout these uncertain times.

Lots of love!!!

Marie Van Cleve, Church School Director

Music Program



Dear friends,

I hope all of you have had a beautiful and joyful summer!

I will be returning to perform in person for our church services on Sunday, September 12th. With that in mind, I'd like to invite soloists and small groups to perform during worship as

Continued on next page...

...Continued from previous page

well. If you would like to join in creating music together, please reach out by emailing me at andreeafegan@gmail.com.

I'd also like to invite the youth to sing during church services once a month, as we used to do in years past. If you have a child that is school age who enjoys singing, dancing or playing an instrument, please reach out. We'd love to include them.

Wishing you all the best, and see you in worship,
Andreea Fegan, Music Director

Mission News



After a brief one month hiatus, Mission Commission met again in August to resume activities and prepare for a busy fall period. The gravity of escalating global crises drew our attention again to organizations renowned for their support of refugee relief services, prompting a \$2,000 donation to the International Rescue Committee which will be amplified by three times given a three for one matching gift campaign underway. The IRCs efforts to improve child survival rates with targeted solutions to eradicate malnutrition, facilitate Malaria treatments and provide pandemic related services across the globe are examples of their continued commitment to provide vital humanitarian services. We also donated \$1,000 to Education and Hope - an organization for which our youth group collected donations previously - now struggling with the pandemic's impact on their efforts in Guatemala to provide education, goods, services and support in rural areas. We approved a \$1,000 donation to Bread for the World, a faith-based organization focused on addressing the causes of hunger and conditions that allow it to persist. Their central mission is to advocate for policy and legislative changes to end hunger in the US and abroad.

Given the impact that the pandemic has had on food security conditions globally, it is not too early to start thinking about a local event designed to raise awareness, funds and collect food for local pantries: The Red Bank Crop Walk! The Crop Walk is scheduled to take place on October 17th. Donations can be collected now through a link posted on the church's Facebook page. Traditional check collection will also be supported - checks can be dropped or mailed to the church. We will speak more about this during announcements. We also have

Continued on next page...

...Continued from previous page

the Clean Ocean Action Fall Beach Sweep happening on October 23rd, which is an outstanding way to spend the day improving our precious shoreline. Also, to evidence our support for crucial municipal services within our immediate community, we approved donations to the Rumson Fire Department, First Aid and Police departments.

Mission Commission meets the fourth Monday of each month at 7:30pm. All are welcome to join.

Anita Waters, Mission Chair

Other Church News



2021 CROP Hunger Walk



Rumson Presbyterian Church has registered! Walk. Give. Change the world.

We're participating in the 2021 CROP Hunger Walk to support CWS and help families who

Continued on next page...

...Continued from previous page

are struggling with hunger. We're asking you to join us - with your steps and your donations - to provide more meals for the growing number of people in our community who need them, and greater food security in communities around the world.

Please visit our team page (<https://events.crophungerwalk.org/2021/team/rumson-presbyterian-church-2>) to join our team on October 17th, or if you can't join us, to support us by making a donation today! Thank you!

Giving



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.

PC(USA) News



PEACE & GLOBAL WITNESS
SPECIAL OFFERINGS
PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION

Our work of peace and reconciliation is supported by gifts to the Peace & Global Witness Offering. These gifts also unite us with Presbyterian peacemakers across the country and the world who are active, not passive; who are doing, not waiting. Our Mission Commission strongly supports this offering.

Continued on next page...

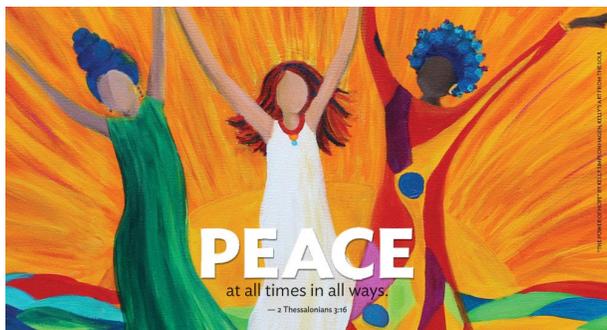
...Continued from previous page

25% of this Offering stays with our congregation for our own ministries of peacemaking and reconciliation. We use it each year primarily to provide scholarships for local students doing peacemaking work in their schools and communities.

25% of this Offering will go to joining with other congregations in our area to support peacemaking work in our region.

50% of this Offering supports programs and ministries working actively for peace and justice around our nation and the world.

The Peace & Global Witness Offering enables the church to promote the peace of Christ by



addressing systems of injustice in our own communities and around the world. Together we are building God's household of peace where everyone is welcome; where all can find compassion, peace and justice.

Many congregations receive this offering throughout A Season of Peace — beginning September 5, and culminating on World Communion Sunday, October 3. (For RPC, there is an envelope labelled "Peacemaking" (September 19 2021) in our offering envelope booklet.) Sign up to receive a daily email during A Season of Peace on the Practices of Building Peace at pcusa.org/subscribeSOP (look under Advocacy and Social Justice).

We are the peacemakers. We are the Church, Together. When we all do a little, it adds up to a lot.

Community News



Early Risers



Continued on next page...

...Continued from previous page

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 other local A.A. meetings, visit www.nnjaa.org/#
For information about A.A. visit www.nnjaa.org

Meetings: Fri. from 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM at Rumson Presbyterian Church

Waterspirit



Event Calendar

Meditation for Earth Every Tues. from 12:15 PM - 12:45 PM (ET)

Please join Waterspirit for a "Meditation for Earth" . We read a short blessing, followed by an excerpt from Hal Borland's 12 Moons of the Year. Then we lead a simple meditation followed with silence, for a flourishing Earth. The meditation and silence last approximately 30 minutes. There are two ways to meditate for Earth with us: 1) In-person in the Sanctuary at Rumson Presbyterian Church; 2) Online on our YouTube channel. All of our meditation videos are filmed by our Programs and Communications Consultant, Abbey Koshak, with loving care.

Fall Equinox Celebration Wed., Sep. 22 from 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ONLINE)

This transition into Autumn, when the light is diminishing, is calling us to align with the changes occurring in the natural world and kindle our inner light of wisdom and courage. Through our strength of will and singularity of focus we can bring our light to illuminate times of darkness. All of nature is heading the call to go within and find the illumination inside. It is time to enjoy the blessings of the harvest and to abide in gratitude for the abundance the harvest has brought. Musical guest: Joseph Alton Miller.

Eco Anxiety Informational Meeting Tue., Sep. 28 from 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Register for this informational meeting that will outline what this 10-step support group entails, explain the course's suggested donation, and answer any questions you might have prior to committing.

In-Person Writers' Gathering Sat., Oct. 2 from 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Enter the flow of gratitude with this creative fundraiser for Waterspirit.

All are welcome. Please visit their website (waterspirit.org)
for more information about these events.

Caring for God's Earth



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

The Mission Commission of Rumson Presbyterian Church just voted to donate monies from the mission fund for Bread for the World. We feel very proud of our church and all the good we are doing during these hard times to help people that are suffering.

Bread for the World advocates for people who are most threatened by climate change – people who are already hungry or at risk of hunger. The cost and availability of food affects these groups more than anyone else. For more information, click here to visit the Bread for the World website— <https://www.bread.org/blog/why-should-christians-care-about-climate-change>.

Why should Christians care about climate change?

by **Bishop Jose Garcia**

“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers” (Psalm 24:1-2). This Bible passage clearly states who is the rightful owner of all the natural resources on our planet. Yet God gave humankind the authority to subdue the earth. In other words, to exercise great care as stewards of God’s creation.

There is an abundance of Bible references showing God’s instructions on how to care for the land. Therefore, we have a responsibility to practice good stewardship of all the natural resources entrusted to our care. Some of the parables shared by Jesus with the disciples stress



the importance of good stewardship and our accountability to God.

The earth is not a wastebasket. It is a perfectly designed house for humanity and all of creation, and God saw that “it was good.” We share this house in awesomeness and reverence because of the way everything, from inanimate objects to living creatures, plays a role in keeping a homeostatic balance in which we all coexist and survive.

Continued on next page...

...Continued from previous page

God created humankind as relational beings who need a vital and healthy interaction not only with one another but with all the elements of creation. Our planet is a system of living organisms and elements that shape and have an impact in the atmosphere, land, and water. As relational beings, we have spiritual, emotional, and physical needs that are met through our interaction with other human beings. However, another important relationship is the one we have with the rest of creation. As stewards of this house, we are called to exercise good care and not to neglect the charge given to humankind by God, to subdue the earth. Whether we like to admit it or not, there is no action without consequence, for we will reap what we sow.

Climate change is real. We do not live in a vacuum void of interaction with God's creation. There is a need for accountability to one another and to God, to ensure good stewardship of the resources in this planet we all share.

Jose Garcia is a bishop in the Church of God of Prophecy and the director of the church relations department at Bread for the World.

A Meditation



Center for
Action and
Contemplation

Unveiling the Universal Christ : Mirroring the Mind of Christ

by [Richard Rohr, OFM](#)

August 24, 2021

For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, everything visible and everything invisible . . . —Colossians 1:16

The true and essential work of all religion is to help us recognize the divine image in *everyone and every thing*. It is to mirror things correctly, deeply, and fully until all things know who they are. A mirror by its nature reflects impartially, equally, effortlessly, spontaneously, and endlessly. It does not produce the image, nor does it filter the image according to its perceptions or preferences. *Authentic mirroring can only call forth what is already there.*

We can enlarge this idea of mirroring to give us another way of understanding the Universal Christ. For example, there is a divine mirror that might be called the very "Mind of Christ."

Continued on next page...

...Continued from previous page

The Christ mirror fully knows and loves us from all eternity and reflects that image back to us. I cannot logically prove this to you, but I do know that people who live inside this resonance are both happy and healthy. Here's how the Franciscan mystic Bonaventure (c. 1217–1274) described this mirroring: “We can contemplate God not only outside us and within us but also above us: outside through his vestiges [creations], within through his image and above through the light which shines upon our minds, which is the light of Eternal Truth.” [1]

Can we then also see the lovely significance of John's statement, “It is not because you do not know the truth that I write to you, but because you know it already” (1 John 2:21)? He is talking about *an implanted knowing* in each of us—an inner mirror, if you will. Today, many would just call it “consciousness,” and poets and musicians might call it the “soul.” The prophet Jeremiah would call it “the Law written in your heart” (31:33), while Christians would call it the “Indwelling Holy Spirit.” For me, these terms are largely interchangeable, approaching the same theme from different backgrounds and expectations. In that same letter, John puts it quite directly: “My dear people, we are already the children of God” and in the future “all we will know is that we are like God, for we shall finally see God as God really is!” (1 John 3:2).

The “image of God” is absolute and unchanging; it is pure and total gift, given equally to all. There is nothing we humans can do to increase or decrease it. It is not ours to decide who has it or does not have it, which has been most of our problem up to now—deciding who is in and who is out, who is up and who is down, who is “going to heaven” and who is not. Only the tiny mind would want such a strange and horrible “comfort.” The great mind hands such questions back where they belong, to the only mind where everything belongs, which is of course the Mind of Christ.

References:

[1] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, 5.1, in *Bonaventure*, trans. Ewert Cousins (Paulist Press: 1978), 94.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe* (Convergent: 2019), 59–61; and

How Do We Get Everything to Belong?, disc 3 (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2004), CD, MP3 download.

Pastor John's Weekly E-Mail "Blasts"

The Courage to See (July 14)

I will be back in the "pulpit" this Sunday, July 18. In reality, I will be back in front of the Communion Table, leading hybrid worship. Thanks to Sue Smith and Linda Goeddel for leading worship the past two Sundays. The Scripture this week will be Jeremiah 23: 1-6 and Mark 6: 20-34, 53-56. I am calling the sermon, "The Power of Leadership." Vince Mottern will be filling in for Andreea this Sunday and the "hymn" after the sermon will be "Fix You" by Coldplay.

Rosanne and I have enjoyed our time upstate, doing lots of work on the property and hosting some of our family for a bit of our stay. Hard work followed by swims in the pond and mixed with spiritual reading and work and, of course, good food. I hope that these weeks are bringing all of you opportunities for nurture and growth.

One thing I have been working on recently is trying to remind myself, frequently, to shift my focus from my habitual ways of thinking, seeing and moving throughout the day. I am seeing how our patterns of awareness keep us from being fully present to the depths and mystery of our lives. As I was looking at emails this morning, there was one which had an article on how to keep our spiritual center while engaging in emotionally triggering topics such as climate change, for instance. The thought came to me that even when we strive for a spiritual grounding that we do so, experiencing ourselves and our perspectives as central. We are seeking to keep our spiritual grounding intact. Even our desire for God is filtered through our perception of being the one through whom this encounter with the divine happens. Does this make sense?

What I am suggesting is that, from a more objective perspective—let's say on the scale of the universe—any encounter between us and God is not centered in us. We are but a drop in God's infinity. Objectively, that is the truth. Subjectively, of course, we have a different experience.

Can we practice letting go of or softening our attachment to our own subjective experience of our lives, in order to taste into something more objective and true? It's mind blowing to try to do this, but I am coming to believe more and more that we need to have our minds blown and our limited selves decentered if we are truly to come alive and to be of service to the whole. The truth is that we are in over our heads, but most of the time we are not aware that we are. We make our lives artificially small and trivial in order to feel like we are in control. A good spiritual practice is to feel the reality of how we are, in fact, in over our heads and to learn to live in awe and trust.

It takes courage to begin to see and feel this in our bones. I John 3: 2 comes to mind. "My

Continued on next page...

...Continued from previous page

dear people, we are already the children of God, but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed. (In other words, we don't see it yet.) All we know is, that when it is revealed we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is." (The Jerusalem Bible)

For the past several centuries, we have developed an almost god-like trust in our reasoning minds. We trust as real only what we can see and understand with our minds. My prayer and practice are that we can come to honor other ways of knowing, also, which may lead us to more hopeful and loving capacities, individually and collectively. Blessings all!

What's Wrong? (July 21)

This Sunday, July 25, the Scripture readings will be 2 Samuel 11:1 – 15 and John 6:1 – 21. I am calling the sermon "A Tale of Two Kings." The "hymn" after the sermon will be Van Morrison's "Full Force Gale."

More and more, I find myself feeling that the old assurances that used to carry me are no longer adequate. I have the personality structure which likes to feel that everything is in harmony. Today, it is obvious that our culture is not in harmony. It is beginning to dawn on me that this world has never been as harmonious as I have wanted to believe; and that, my greater awareness of disharmony is, actually, a sign that I may be waking up and becoming more aware of reality. All great spiritual teachers would suggest that one of our primary tasks is to wake up. Waking up, however, does not make our lives easier.

Almost everything in our culture is designed to support us in finding and achieving something more that will make our lives better and better. And by better, we mean more enjoyable and less troubling. We think that only happiness and comfort are signs of the "good life." And so, as I struggle with feelings of disharmony, I naturally wonder, "What's wrong?"

What if the answer to that question is, "Your feelings of uneasiness are not a problem, but a good sign that you are becoming more sensitive to the voice of God?" As I reflect more about this, I can just begin to see the seductive qualities of our cultural assumptions. Why would I think that as I open myself more to God, that my life would get easier and happier? Only a culture which is excessively individualistic would jump to this conclusion.

God is about the whole and the whole is very complex and dynamic and big. Becoming more attuned to the divine will necessarily complicates our lives. We often hear, in contemporary theological circles, talk about us becoming co-creators with God. I think that this is more than just talk. I believe that this is part of the collective dis-ease that most of us are feeling. God is moving, as God always does—mysteriously and invisibly—to bring us into ever greater conscious collaboration with God in helping to birth the new creation.

As we begin to see and to feel more of what God sees and feels, well, of course, we will find

Continued on next page...

...Continued from previous page

ourselves on quite a ride. God is working for a greater harmony, but the way to that requires a move of welcoming all that exists into our hearts and awareness. We can't be aware of everything. We are finite after all. But our attempts to expand our awareness and our compassion play a role in the great work that God is accomplishing in the world. Somehow our opening hearts and minds, become a part of God's recreation of the whole.

Therefore, I am beginning to practice welcoming my unease as a gift from God to me and my gift back to God. I believe that God longs for us to be partners in the work that he is about in the world. Let's trust that God is indeed at work in it all, even through our imperfect and awkward attempts to join in. Blessings all!

Practices of Faith (July 28)

This Sunday, August 1, will be Communion Sunday. We are still asking people to bring their own elements either to Zoom or in-person worship. Of course, at our August meeting, session will be discerning whether we will return to practices such as coffee hour and distribution of Communion elements. Feel free to give us your own feedback about these and other decisions, including congregational singing. The Scripture reading for Sunday will be John 6:24 – 35. The sermon is "Seeing Signs" and the hymn after the sermon will be "Amazing Grace."

I have been moving for some time into a deeper practice of contemplative Christianity. The assumption of this tradition is that God is present to us in every moment in an energy of tender compassion and vitality. If this is so, then why do we not always experience this fundamental truth? Contemplative Christianity again assumes that the reason is that our inner field is too distorted and reactive to perceive what is real. It claims that when we purify our inner field, we will be able to perceive the presence of God.

That's the theory. Contemplative practice is the daily exercise of putting this theory to the test. In the past decade or more, I have been trying to experiment daily in the practice of the presence of God, to borrow a phrase from a 17th century contemplative named Brother Lawrence.

The contemplative teacher I lean on the most is Cynthia Bourgeault. She gives heft and backbone to the contemplative path. One of her primary teachers was G. I. Gurdjieff who lived and taught from 1866 – 1949. One of his fundamental teachings was that to be truly awake to the presence of the divine requires for us to be present in our three centers—moving, feeling and thinking. Lest this sound esoteric to you, remember the biblical injunction endorsed by Jesus to love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. All of it. All of you.

Two resources, recently, have deepened my practice of bringing all three centers, the whole

Continued on next page...

...Continued from previous page

of myself, into my practice—Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, & Exercises, by Maronite priest, Joseph Azize and a companion book by Cynthia Bourgeault, Mystical Courage. For eight consecutive Thursday nights, beginning next week, I have been invited to join Cynthia and Joseph, with eleven others, to deepen our use of Gurdjieffian exercises designed to bring all three centers on-line.

Our default position is our thinking center which spirals us into all kinds of loops which diminish our experience of the divine presence. With practice, I am learning that when the mind is softened and the body is alive in my awareness, that my heart comes alive to these subtle and beautiful feelings. Are these our resonances with the heart of God? That's the theory, again. The practice is to "taste and see that the Lord is good."

Perhaps there may be some interest in exploring some of these practices with me in the fall. I am finding them powerful tools for practicing the presence of God. Blessings to you all!

Daily Discernment (August 5)

This Sunday, August 8, the Scripture readings will be 2 Samuel 18: 5 – 9, 15, 31 – 33 and John 6: 35, 41 – 51. The sermon title is "Living as We Die." The "hymn" after the sermon will be "Teach Your Children" by Crosby, Nash, and Young.

This Saturday, we will have a service of Witness to the Resurrection in celebration of the life of Jane Murphy. I cannot verify this, but Jane may have the longest membership of anyone in the history of our church. She was a member throughout her life which spanned almost a century. With a rising return of the numbers of COVID infections, the family has decided to make some changes. Masks will not be required, but many have already indicated that they will wear masks during the service. Also, the reception has been moved from an indoor facility to the Oak Grove, where a tent will be in place.

I share this, because it is related to what may or may not happen in the church this fall. For months, we have been anticipating that the majority of the congregation would choose to return to in-person worship, beginning in September. We have been preparing for a switch from the Zoom platform to a live-streaming option for the service. Andreea would be back in the sanctuary. Perhaps the choir as well. Coffee hour might return.

Session will meet on August 17 and consider how to plan for our immediate future. Help us by communicating your expectations at this point. We know that circumstances can change at anytime and that we all need to be flexible. Knowing what you know now, do you plan on returning to in-person worship in September? What safeguards would you want to see in place or not in place? If we hear that the majority of our community would prefer to keep with the Zoom option for worship, of course, this will influence our decision making.

If we do see the majority wanting to return to in-person worship in September, then we will

Continued on next page...

...Continued from previous page

continue to offer a virtual option, but in a live-stream format. If this is our decision, would you like to see an order of worship identical to what we had before the pandemic, like what we have had during the pandemic, or somewhere in-between? Would you like to have Coffee hour? Would you like for us to serve Communion again? We are asking for your perspective on these and other concerns you might have.

As you consider giving us your feedback, I also ask you to reflect on what you have learned during this time of pandemic. How has it impacted your spiritual life and your plans? What do you see now that you did not see before? How has God spoken to you in these months? It's a time for discernment and we appreciate your assistance in our own discernment. Blessings all!

What's Your Aim? (August 13)

This Sunday, August 15, the Scripture readings are 1 Kings 2: 10 – 12, 3: 3 – 14 and John 6: 51 – 58. The sermon is called, "We Are What We Eat" and the "hymn" after the sermon is "Wonder" by Natalie Merchant.

Last Sunday we had a glitch in our virtual worship. I was more than half-way through the sermon when I noticed that I was dropped from Zoom. There was some confusion and attempts to get back on, but for whatever reason our internet connection in church failed. This week it has been working fine and I expect things to be fine this Sunday. I heard that Andreea and Linda Goeddel performed heroically on Zoom to bring the service to a meaningful conclusion. I turned my attention to the in-person gathering and told them how I had planned to end the sermon. I think I did a better job of telling them my intention than I would have done without the interruption. Then we had a good back-and-forth about the sermon and prayed and ended the service.

What I couldn't help but notice was how I had talked about the use of "shocks" by Jesus and other spiritual teachers to wake disciples up from automatic functioning. Then a shock happened in the form of dropped internet, so that the lesson was not just spoken but lived. I think that world events are trying also to shock us awake that consciousness as usual will no longer be adequate for our time. The universe seems set on waking us up to a new and higher structure of consciousness.

I am beginning an eight-week virtual class with Joseph Azize and Cynthia Bourgeault on deepening our awareness using various exercises by Gurdjieff, based on Joseph's recent book. Joseph asked all of us to formulate an aim for our work. Without an aim, we tend to repeat well-formed habits and ways of being. Our aim keeps us working towards something genuinely new. But the new, for it to come into being, requires not only an intention, but also new minds and hearts. We can't create something new from old ways of thinking and be-

Continued on next page...

...Continued from previous page

ing. This is why most of our efforts at change end up coming up short.

After I complete this class towards the end of September, I will explore some of my learnings with those who may be interested. If you are interested, begin to think about some larger aim for your life, and together we will explore methods to help us move into new ways of seeing and being in our lives. Blessing all!

Update for the Fall (August 19)

This Sunday, August 22, the Scripture readings will be 1 Kings 8: 1, 6, 10 – 11, 22 – 30, 41 – 43 and John 6: 56 – 69. The sermon is “The Spirit Gives Life” and the “hymn” after the sermon is “Love Is the Answer.”

Session met last night and made many decisions for the fall. On September 12, we will return to 9:45 worship. On that Sunday, we will switch from our Zoom platform to a Livestreaming of our service. More information will follow about how you will be able to access worship if you choose to worship from home. I will speak again from the pulpit and Andreea will play and sing from the sanctuary. We will not have a choir, but we may have a soloist or duet to help lead music.

There will not be congregational singing and starting on September 12, masks will be required for in-person worshippers, in accordance with CDC recommendations. We will reinstate a bulletin which will look much like what we had before, with some small changes. We will have in-person Sunday School and Nursery. Coffee Hour will depend on the weather. We will create a sign-up sheet, asking people to volunteer to pick up coffee and either some donuts or bagels or other simple treats, and have a coffee fellowship outside.

Session sees this as a very fluid situation, subject to change as we go along. When I asked about whether we should resume serving Communion, for instance, they responded that on September 5, we will still be under current practices and will take up the question again at our September meeting, before World Communion Sunday in October.

We will be communicating about fall changes in many ways in the weeks ahead. It will take some time to adjust to the changes and we are committed to helping us make the transition as smoothly as possible.

We know that many members will not choose to return to in-person yet, and we respect everyone’s decision. Whatever you choose, we want you to feel included and informed. Please reach out to us with any questions or concerns that you have. We look forward to new opportunities to worship and serve together this fall. Blessings all!

Oneing (August 25)

This Sunday, August 29, the Scripture readings are Song of Solomon 2: 8 – 13 and Mark 7: 1 – 8, 14 – 15, 21 -23. The sermon title is “The Eye of the Heart” and the “hymn” after is “What the World Needs Now Is Love.”

As I write, I am preparing for our Wednesday Wisdom meeting. We are continuing with a book by Matthew Fox on Julian of Norwich. Tonight’s chapter is on nonduality, which is a topic which is confusing for many who are new to the Christian contemplative tradition. In talking about this contemplative experience, Julian invented the word, oneing. She expressed what she meant by this word with this provocative statement: “Between God and our soul... there is no between.”

I am very curious about how tonight’s discussion will go. Do we agree with Julian’s assertion that between God and our soul, there is no between? Have we ever experienced such a oneness with God? Does this conflict with our religious upbringing? Do we accept such a statement as true and yet, in our unconscious minds, live as though nothing could be further from the truth? How might our lives be different if we truly internalized this message of union?

Everything in our culture and upbringing and perceptual habits, even the way our minds are wired, runs counter to Julian’s statement. Dualism is our lived experience. I am me and not you. God is separate, a distant Being to whom we pray. We like this and don’t like that. We judge certain events as good and others as bad. Dualism is the lens through which we see and live our lives.

The mystics and saints, however, see things differently. They experience a oneness which transcends separation. In their depths, they experience God as one with their soul. This, in turn, spills out to how they perceive the world and their experiences. Their enemies they perceive as one with themselves. Their experiences of suffering and joy they experience as forming a whole, and learn to embrace whatever comes their way, as a gift from God.

As we move into the fall with another wave of COVID interrupting our plans, it is easy to give into frustration and despair. This is not what we want. We are tired of having to deal with this. We assumed that we would be able to put this behind us. Increasingly, people are taking their anger out on each other and assigning blame.

As human as our reactions are, is there another way of responding? It may be that in this reality, God is giving us another opportunity to practice oneing or a contemplative breakthrough to another way of seeing and being. At the front end, transformation is not always pleasant. But the growth which comes with transformation may prove to be a greater gift than we ever could imagine. Let’s keep to a practice of oneing in the weeks and months ahead, and see what God is able to do within and among us. Blessings all!

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

Nonprofit Organization

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

«AddressBlock»

DATED MATERIAL ENCLOSED

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

SEPTEMBER 2021

Sep 1	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Sep 6	Mon	Labor Day	
Sep 7	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Sep 8	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Sep 11	Sat	Patriot Day	
Sep 14	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Sep 15	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Sep 21	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Sep 21	Tue	Session	7:00PM
Sep 22	Wed	First Day of Autumn	
Sep 22	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Sep 22	Wed	Fall Equinox Celebration*	7:00PM
Sep 28	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Sep 28	Tue	Eco-Anxiety Meeting*	6:00PM
Sep 29	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM

OCTOBER 2021

Oct 2	Sat	In-Person Writers' Gathering*	2:00PM
Oct 3	Sun	World Communion Sunday	
Oct 5	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Oct 6	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Oct 11	Mon	Columbus Day (Observed)	
Oct 12	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Oct 13	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Oct 19	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Oct 19	Tue	Session	7:00PM
Oct 20	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Oct 26	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Oct 27	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Oct 31	Sun	Reformation Sunday	

**Waterspirit sponsored event. All are welcome.*

Please visit their website (waterspirit.org) for more information about their events.



www.rumsonprebyterian.org