



Lent 2006

Views from

the hermitage

Creating an environment of attentiveness to God

All That Remains Is The Doing.

My latest culinary practice is to make flan, a creamy yellow egg custard that I especially like covered in burnt sugar syrup. Not only does it taste delicious, flan looks beautiful when you turn it out of the baking dish onto a serving plate with the syrup forming a dark brown pool around it.

I have been making flan for several months now. My desire is to become so practiced that I know the ingredients and procedure without looking at a recipe, and I can go through the motions without having to think about them. The movements become so well rehearsed that all that remains is the doing.

Recently, I've realized that the practice of making flan is a metaphor for my spiritual life. I desire to be so practiced in the essentials of faithfulness to God (loving God, neighbor and self) so that all that remains is the doing. This means that I must go through the motions of faithfulness to God whether I feel like it or not, or whether I sense God's presence in the movements or not. It is in going through the motions that I become practiced enough so that I don't have to think about being faithful, I know the recipe. My desire is for faithfulness to become such a part of me that all that remains is the doing.

-David Wenger

Watch and Pray

Jürgen Moltmann penned a piece entitled "Watching For God" for a collection of essays published after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 [*Walking With God in a Fragile World* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003)]. He begins the essay noting that in the days immediately following 9/11, many people, including the avowedly non-religious, called for prayer. And very quickly, the calls for prayer died away. According to Moltmann, we have forgotten the most important part of prayer, watching. "Praying is good," he says, "but watching is better."

Why is this so? Because, "In prayer we wake up to the world as it is spread out before God in all its heights and depths. We perceive the sighing of our fellow creatures, and we hear the cries of the created beings that have

fallen on deaf ears. We hear the song of praise of the blossoming spring, and chime in with it. We feel the divine love for life which allows pain to touch us to the quick, and kindles joy. So real prayer to God awakens all our senses and alerts our minds and spirits. The person who prays, lives more attentively."

Moltmann calls us to a kind of praying that does not close our eyes to the terrors around us but looks for God coming through their midst. He invites us to a way of praying that does not hold before us visions of what might be but immerses us in reality. This prayer is not afraid of suffering, in fact, like Jesus' prayer in the garden, this prayer prepares our wills to receive what God wills and in willing with God opens for us the way through whatever must be borne. This kind of prayer is also the way to the fountain of deep joy.

How can prayer make us more attentive? By opening in us a deep hunger for God that searches for God everywhere. If we begin our day looking for God in our quiet place, God will appear in many places and people throughout the day. We are primed to see. Possessing eyes is no guarantee that we see. Seeing what is really there is God's gift to us. Each person we encounter, the grumpy sales clerk, the dishonest fellow-worker, the miserly boss, the tired spouse, or the unruly child, are bearers of impossible glory because God comes to us in them. God gives us repeated opportunities to "see" how serving others is really serving God. "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these *who are members of my family*, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40).

Watchful prayer is one of the practices of faithfulness that makes us ready to make the right choice when the time comes. The strength Jesus gained in the garden while praying watchfully is inestimable. Jesus' whole task that one night was to watch and pray; to stay in the presence of God until all inner dissent was answered or silenced. He prayed to find God, not to get something he wanted. We know his prayer was effective because it enabled him to receive each ensuing person and event without judging, and without bitterness. "Father forgive them..."

This Lenten season, consider cultivating a new

prayer practice that will help you practice watchfulness. Pray with your eyes open. Look at each thing that you see and name it, holding it before God. Ask for God to come to you in what you see.

Away with the darkness. As Jesus said to his disciples at the end of that night of prayer in the garden, "Get up, let us be going." Whatever we face today or in the more distant future is, for the watchful, a marvelous opportunity to see as God sees. We may be saddened or surprised; but we *will* see.

-Naomi R. Wenger



Lenten Quiet Days

The theme of this year's Lenten observance at the Hermitage is "Watch and Pray." We will be particularly emphasizing the ways we watch, the value of watching and how our prayer is made complete by watchfulness. Each of the days will repeat the same content, but guests are welcome to come to as many of the days as they wish. We will be holding the guided retreat days from 9:00 am (Morning Prayer) through 3:00 pm on Monday, March 20, Thursday, March 30 and Wednesday, April 5.

The suggested donation for the day, including the midday meal is \$45. The suggested donation for guests wishing to stay overnight is \$75 for accommodations, meals and the guided retreat.

For more information or to register, contact: David Wenger, 269-244-8696 or thehermitage@juno.com.

Stations of the Cross—Holy Week

We will provide a Stations of the Cross walk during Holy Week, April 9 -15. Meditation guides are provided for use while walking a mile-long trail through our meadows and woods. Participants are invited to stop at marked posts along the way to remember the mysteries of Christ's passion and to pray. In case of inclement weather or limited mobility, the guides can be used in the Chapel of the Transfiguration.

Phoenix Gallery

Our next exhibit, contemplative landscapes by Suzanne Siegel, will run from April 3 through 28. In these paintings, Ms. Siegel invites us to contemplate where we are, who we are becoming and who God is. Landscapes, she says, are a creative gateway to the Transpersonal. The views allow us to gaze on what might be

and find ourselves in that place. She will exhibit again during July and August.

Following the first installment of Ms. Siegel's exhibit, we will host colorful pastel paintings by Megan Schopf, a local artist and teacher.

The gallery is open weekdays and Saturdays from 9–5 for retreat guests and by appointment for others. Please call before you come, 269-244-8696.

Spiritual Classics Reading Group

Our reading group has met twice, reading and discussing *The Impact of God* by Iain Matthew and *The Cloud of Unknowing*. These books treat especially the *via negativa* or way of relating to God as unknowable mystery. The next two books, *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A.W. Tozer (March) and *A Testament of Devotion* by Thomas Kelly (April), take us through the other door of relating to God, through what we can know about God by theological examination and by personal experience.

The group meets from 7:00-9:00 pm on the last Monday of each month. The monthly selection will be published on our web site www.hermitagecommunity.org for those who would like to select a particular author to read. Attendance at the book discussion night gives a participant a voice in the monthly selection.

The spiritual classics are books written by Spirit-filled people that have stood the test of time and still speak to our condition and situations today.

For more information contact: Naomi Wenger, 269-244-8696, thehermitage@juno.com, www.hermitagecommunity.org.

The Feast of the Transfiguration

Our annual celebration of the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6) falls on a Sunday this year. We are planning a day of rest and worship. Please hold us in your prayer as we plan this day. As a friend of The Hermitage, you are welcome to join us for all or part of this Homecoming day.

E-news Available

If you would like to receive notice of an electronic posting of the newsletter rather than receiving it in the mail, send us an e-mail with the word "subscription" in the subject line. We will remove you from our mailing list for the newsletter and add you to an electronic list. You will receive an e-mail notice containing a hyperlink to the newsletter page on the web-site.

Fond Farewell

Josie, our retreat center cat, has died. We are grateful to God for bringing her here, for her good work in keeping the rodent population under control and for her silent presence with many guests.



Gene and Mary Herr, founding directors, remember Josie showing up in the mid 80's. At the time, Cornelia Jutzi from Switzerland and Aunt Elsie were part of the resident community here and they both had a part in taming this "wild" cat that would not let anyone near her. Cornelia persisted in loving and calling her and eventually she succumbed to Cornelia's gentle ways. Cornelia called the cat "Josie" because she kept returning to St. Joseph's Barn. Aunt Elsie would give Josie scraps from the kitchen and she responded by bringing Elsie every mouse and bird that she caught.

Josie didn't ask for much but gratefully received what was offered. In return, she took it upon herself to be the official greeter of others who came seeking a place to be held. One guest commented after a weeklong retreat that Josie was an excellent retreat master. Josie would find him sitting in his favorite lawn chair where she would join him, and only when Josie left did he feel free to go, too.

Her memory lives on in all of us who noticed or cherished her. She reminds us to find a holding place, to receive each other as we are, to welcome the stranger, to take what is offered and give what we can.



The Hermitage Calendar

- Mar 20 Lenten Quiet Day—*Watch and Pray*, 9 am-3 pm
Mar 27 Spiritual Classics:
Book Discussion, 7:00
The Knowledge of the Holy
Mar 30 Lenten Quiet Day—*Watch and Pray*, 9 am-3 pm
- Apr 5 Lenten Quiet Day—*Watch and Pray*, 9 am-3 pm
Apr 9 Taizé Evensong, 7:00
Apr 9-15 Stations of the Cross Walk
Apr 24 Spiritual Classics:
Book Discussion, 7:00
A Testament of Devotion
- May 14 Taizé Evensong, 7:00
May 29 Spiritual Classics:
Book Discussion, 7:00
- Jun 11 Taizé Evensong, 7:00
Jun 26 Spiritual Classics:
Book Discussion, 7:00
- Jul 9 Taizé Evensong, 7:00
- Aug 6 Feast of the Transfiguration-
A Hermitage Homecoming
Aug 13 Taizé Evensong, 7:00



the hermitage

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Taizé Services: Second Sundays at Seven, Chapel of the Transfiguration

The Word Alone

So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breast-plate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

-1 Thessalonians 5:6-11

the hermitage Mission

As Jesus was revitalized for being about his Father's business by periodic withdrawal to retreat and prayer, so The Hermitage seeks in its mission:

- *To be a prayer community, available as a place of spiritual formation where scripture, silence, nature, group experiences, and personal companioning are cultivated elements of retreat.*
- *To provide a guesthouse away from daily tasks where pastors and other pilgrims can deepen their call and relationship with God, be refreshed in their whole person and be revitalized by the presence and promise of Christ.*

(from The Hermitage Rule)

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Resident Community: David & Naomi Wenger, co-directors

Board of Directors: Robert Charles, Larry Terlouw (chair), David Wenger, Naomi Wenger

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