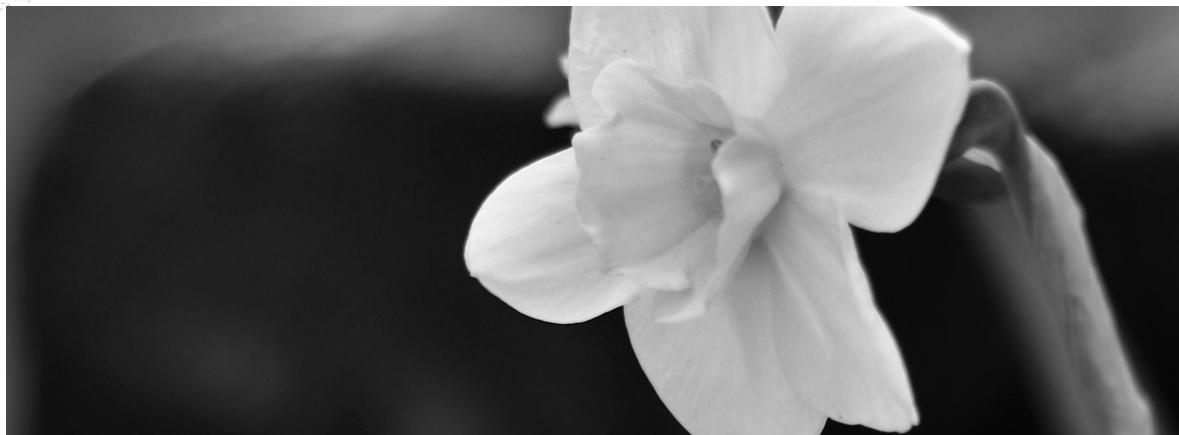




# *views from the hermitage*

*Creating an environment of attentiveness to God*



## **Practice Hope—Practice Resurrection**

In the poem “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front,” farmer, poet, Jesus-follower, Wendell Berry writes: “...every day do something that won’t compute. Love the Lord. Love the world ... Love someone who does not deserve it. Practice resurrection,” he concludes.

Berry challenges us to respond anew to the challenges of our lives—to the challenges of the pandemic—to recognize that our faith makes claims on us and invites us to understand the world and our lives in ways very different than the culture around us.

We know all too well the practice of crucifixion. We are living in a kind of crucifixion. We see it daily in the news, social media, and in a culture that advocates, “Me first.” So, how can we practice resurrection? We can think of new ways to bring the power of Easter to this world—to embody this power daily. We must become conduits of God’s love and energy. We are to be everyday reminders to people that sickness and death—in all its forms—is not the final word. Rather, to remember each day that we are called to life, to love, and to each day “begin again.” We are called to love God and to love others. Isn’t this what we have experienced: the love of God who doesn’t insist that we deserve this love, doesn’t demand that we get everything right, doesn’t demand us to overcome our fears and anxieties, and doesn’t require us to be cleaned up and shiny for Easter morning?

We return each day to the practice of hope, the practice of resurrection. To remember “that it is in God in whom we live and move and have our being,” (Acts 17:20). Continue returning to hope, returning to resurrection until our very beings are united with God. *-June Mears Driedger*

## Advice for Surviving a Pandemic from Julian of Norwich

By Carl McColman

(The following article is a blog post by contemplative writer Carl McColman, posted on March 16, 2020. His blog can be found at [www.carlmccolman.com](http://www.carlmccolman.com). Adapted and reprinted by permission.)

Julian of Norwich is my favorite mystic and she offers us advice on surviving a pandemic.

She lived from 1342 to approximately 1416; which means that she survived one of the most storied and terrifying pandemics of western history: the Great Pestilence, what we now call “the black death” — during which the bubonic plague ravaged England between 1348 and 1350. It would have come to Norwich when Julian was still a child; her older contemporary in the mystical tradition, Richard Rolle of Hampole, died young around the year 1349; scholars speculate that he may have been a casualty of the plague.

It is believed that approximately *one-third* of the population of England may have succumbed to the plague — and in Norwich, the death toll may have been even higher, claiming up to one-half of the city’s thirteen thousand inhabitants. And if that first devastating pandemic wasn’t bad enough, England suffered additional outbreaks of the plague at least four more times during Julian’s life.

Julian herself does not mention the plague in her book of *Showings*. That, in itself, I find quite remarkable, but there is much about Julian’s own life that remains shrouded in mystery. Virtually all the personal details of her life were left unmentioned in her writing; she simply did not see the point of telling her own story.

A number of scholars and writers have done fascinating work speculating about the details of Julian’s life; but ultimately we must be content knowing that for the most part we simply *don’t* know about Julian’s life — all we have is her brilliant book detailing the spirituality of her “showings” or visions/revelations of divine love.

But while Julian may have chosen not to write directly about her experience surviving multiple outbreaks of the plague, we can still read between the lines and discern some advice from this medieval mystic about how to survive the uncertainty that comes with an infectious disease pandemic. Indeed, I see four ways that Julian speaks to us even here in the 21st century. *(Continued on page 3)*



Statue of Julian of Norwich, Norwich Cathedral, by David Holgate

1. **Social Distancing is a good thing.** While Julian does not write about her life circumstances, a colophon on her book, probably added by an unknown scribe, identifies Julian as a “recluse” or “ anchoress” living in Norwich. In other words, she lived a life of intentional solitude, “anchored” to her parish church (St. Julian’s) by inhabiting an enclosed cell adjacent to the sanctuary. Julian very likely lived in such a hermit-like way for anywhere from 20 to 40 years, which means she probably survived at least two outbreaks of the plague by remaining in spiritual solitude. I don’t think this means everyone is meant to be a solitary or a hermit! Clearly, for Julian, this was a religious vocation. But if 21st century people have a hard time understanding why a healthy woman would have chosen a life of enforced isolation, perhaps “social distancing” is the clue that makes it easy to understand.

2. **Keep your distance — but stay connected.** Julian never mentions it, but we know from the autobiographical *Book of Margery Kempe* that Julian, even in solitude, worked as a spiritual director. In other words, she remained in relationship with others, even if behind the safety of a screen. For that matter, going to the trouble to write her book — the first book by a woman in the English language — was another way that she endeavored to keep “in touch” — if not physically, then spiritually. Julian knew that human beings are meant for relationship, and in the challenges of a pandemic, we must be creative about finding ways to keep our relatedness alive and well.

**Julian filtered everything in her life through a vivid and generous prayer life — and it’s also clear that Julian kept prayer as an integral part of an overall mindfully-lived life.**

3. **Stay positive.** Julian is renowned for her optimism and her faith in both God’s love and Christ’s saving acts. “All shall be well,” she proclaimed, earning her a spot in *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*. But Julian’s soundbite is actually the cornerstone of her entire philosophical outlook — and what a positive outlook it was! She speaks repeatedly of not only God’s and Christ’s love, but also their joy, courtesy, and “homeliness” (what we might call their “down-to-earth-ness”). Despite the fact that we live in a world marred by suffering, sin and death (infectious or otherwise), for Julian there was never a need to despair. Hope is the birthright of all people of faith. It sees us through the ordinary passage of our days, and it also is the beacon of light in difficult times as well.

4. **Pray.** Julian filtered everything in her life through a vivid and generous prayer life — and it’s also clear that Julian kept prayer as an integral part of an overall mindfully-lived life. Prayer does not render prudence unnecessary: I pray for God’s protection, and I still lock my doors. Both actually go together well: the locked door is an act of prudence, and the prayer is an act of trust. Without locking the door, prayer is a form of escapism; but without prayer, the locked doors can become an expression of paranoia. Julian, as a woman dedicated to prayer, understood that isolating herself from infectious disease by itself was not enough. She had to balance her prudent actions with the generous gesture of trust. In this way, she was able to preserve both her optimism and her faith.

I hope we can all balance prayer and prudent action to remain both safe and faith-full during this uncertain time. Let us all pray for good health, for comfort and healing for those afflicted, and for the many women and men who are working hard to develop vaccines and otherwise take measures that will keep all people safe.

For further reading:

*Julian of Norwich: Showings, The Classics of Western Spirituality* (Paulist Press, 1978)

*All Shall Be Well: Revelations of Divine Love*, modern language, Ellyn Sanna (Anamchara Books, 2011)

*An Explorer’s Guide to Julian of Norwich*, Veronica Mary Rolf (IVP Academic, 2018)

*Why Julian Now? A Voyage of Discovery*, Sheila Upjohn (Eerdmans, 1997)



### **Being a contemplative community in a time of coronavirus**

The Hermitage has been quiet these past few months. Being quiet is the natural state of The Hermitage. Being empty, however, is not.

Like everyone, we are learning how life changes and stays the same during these uncertain times. While guests have stopped coming here to retreat, the life of Hermitage continues. Some days are spacious; other days are active. The shrubs, flowers, and trees are bursting forth regardless of quarantines.

Resident community members gather daily via Zoom for morning prayer, offering spiritual direction, and offering online retreats. The gardens are prepared and planted.

The House Built of Sky construction slowed with the government restrictions. We've completed excavation, laying the foundation, and begun framing. We continue moving forward at whatever pace we can. Our initial plan of large groups of volunteers will be revised to smaller groups.

A portable saw mill was on-site for a few days to mill pine from our woods to be used as siding, stair treads, and collars ties. Several neighbors also brought logs to be milled for their own projects.

Naomi continues to participate in the Retreat Center Collaborative, a 3 year project bringing together retreat centers from around the country. It is helpful to be in contact with these other centers as we are all dealing with similar issues during this time of closure.

The Hermitage gratefully received a federal Paycheck Protection Program loan from the Small Business Authority which covers all staff salaries, and utilities for eight weeks.

We are also grateful for the financial support so many of you have offered over that past months. Your words of encouragement and financial gifts are deeply appreciated.

We continue to imagine when and how we will resume offering space to guests for retreat. We are very attentive to issues of cleaning, and the particular challenges of preparing and sharing food.

Our grounds remain open to all to explore the trails and the labyrinth.

*-Kevin Driedger*





## Straw Stuffers Wanted

*We are stuffing our walls with clay and straw  
and you are invited to come and play.*

With the foundation on the Hermitage house now complete and exterior wall framing in process, we anticipate clay/straw wall construction to begin in June. **Come join us for community fun and work June 9-13 and June 16-20.** We are organizing work crews of up to 10 persons each day. Come for a day, two days or a week.

For more information go to <https://www.hermitagecommunity.org/event/house-wall-stuffing/>.

Lodging on the premises is possible as needed, please contact Kevin, [contact@hermitagecommunity.org](mailto:contact@hermitagecommunity.org) or (269) 244-8696 to discuss the lodging options.

~

**Thank You** for your continued financial support so many of you offered these past few months. Your words of encouragement and financial gifts are deeply appreciated.

~

## Upcoming at The Hermitage

### Ecotheology Retreat #2

“God as Wholeness: All Creation Groans”

June 20 @9 am-4 pm; \$75

Leaders: Margie Pfeil and Naomi Wenger

We will consider wholeness and healing as a way to approach the Earth; linking God as One/Whole and Creation as part of that unity. We will participate in weeding and applying compost as a way of making wholeness possible.

~

### Feast of Transfiguration

“Offering Radical Hospitality”

August 1 @ 9am—4 pm

Blessing the Land

Deb Borst presenting

Hermitage Waykeepers commitment

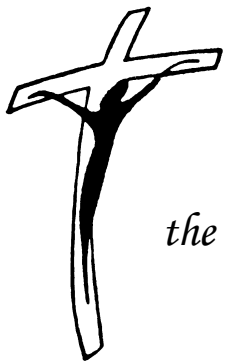
### Words of Wisdom from Dallas Willard:

“We must beware of pretense. It is crucial that we do what we can to avoid acting as if everything is fine, when in fact we are suffering.

*Faith and complaining are not mutually exclusive.* Even if you have strong faith, you may still complain to God.

While Job never cursed God or accused God falsely, he did complain. Job complained and he moaned and he groaned. When bad things happen, you can do that too. If you doubt this, just read the psalms! Tell it to God! Let him hear from you. He is not nervous, he is not insecure, he is not worried. *It will not upset God to hear you complain. It is one of the ways that we seek God.*

One lesson Job teaches us is that we can seek God by complaining.” *Life Without Lack* (Thomas Nelson, 2018) p. 118



*the hermitage*

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269-244-8696

## Creating an environment of attentiveness to God

### Retreating at The Hermitage

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As Jesus was revitalized for begin 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 the 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.

If you would like to join us for retreat of any length, contact us by phone: 269-244-8696, email: [contact@hermitagecommunity.org](mailto:contact@hermitagecommunity.org), or find us on the web: [www.hermitagecommunity.org](http://www.hermitagecommunity.org). We provide silence, solitude, spiritual direction, guided group retreats, space for groups to meet, community morning prayer, simple healthful food, walking trails, and a gentle atmosphere. You provide the willing spirit.

### Board of Directors

\*\*\*\*\*

Mary Asmonga-Knapp  
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Jane Stoltzfus Buller  
Jayna Gallagher  
Rob Gallagher  
Joel Hogan  
Lynda Hollinger-Janzen  
Jeff Miller  
Darrell Paulsen

### *Resident Community*

June Mears Driedger  
Kevin Driedger  
David Wenger  
Naomi Wenger

*Please hold the board and  
community in your prayers*