



THE MARK

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A Contemplative Christian Community
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I Would Have To Be One of Them

by Tim Cook

We are afraid we are going to die. However, the Easter event manifested in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus has forever abolished the need for human beings to fear death. We are not going to die.

As far as we know, human beings are the only creatures with the kind of self-consciousness that makes us capable of anticipating our own disappearance. Animals of all sorts are simply alive until they are not, and they have no capacity to imagine their death beforehand and therefore no fear of death. They have a kind of life that is referred to in Greek as “bios.” This is the life that needs to be constantly sustained and nourished by inputs of food, water, air, sensory manifestations and rest. Animals are thus biological life in expression and we humans share that life with the animals of creation. But there is more to us than biology. We also have another kind of life deeper than biological life and superior to it. This kind of life does not come and go like biological life does and it needs no support or input of any sort to sustain itself. This kind of life is called in Greek, “zoe” which refers to “life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and which He

gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself.” This is the true life which is present in each human soul. When our personal identity is realized to be the expression of “zoe”, it is impossible to fear its loss because zoe is eternal; it cannot come and go.

Our fear of death is due to the fact that we have mistakenly identified ourselves with biological life which we know must end. The real tragedy, though, is that our fear of death is the very thing which makes us grasp our physical experiences so tightly that we lose touch completely with the true life that God is constantly communicating to us at a deeper level than our biological life. Though we are in truth spiritual beings, manifestations of spiritual life, we act as if we are animals. But we are worse off than they are until we know the Truth of our lives, because unlike the animals we are able to imagine the death of our bodies and also unlike the animals we therefore live in fear and denial of our true lives. Our fear of death kills us spiritually before our bodies die.

How then are we to come to our true lives? God has certainly revealed Himself to us in countless ways; but before Christ, the fear

remained firmly in place. It is utterly impossible for us to figure a philosophical or scientific way out of this mess by using our rational intellect, based as it is on our senses, because our senses reveal to us that the bodies of all those who’ve gone before us have disappeared into the ground or the fire. And if we follow our mistaken reasoning in believing that we are our bodies we have no choice but to believe that death has overcome the lives of all those who’ve gone before us. But God, in His infinite love, His infinite creativity, His infinite mercy and His infinite potential, has made a way. I have never seen it more perfectly illustrated than through a story told by the famous radio commentator, Paul Harvey. The story is set at Christmas but I think it is an even more powerful insight to the meaning of Easter.

“The man to whom I’m going to introduce you was not a scrooge; he was a kind, decent, mostly good man. Generous to his family, upright in his dealings with other men. But he just didn’t believe all that incarnation stuff which the churches proclaim at Christmas Time. It just didn’t make sense and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. He just couldn’t swallow the Jesus Story, about God coming to Earth as a man.

“ ‘I’m truly sorry to distress you,’ he told his wife, ‘but I’m not going with you to church this Christmas Eve.’ He said he’d feel like a hypocrite. That he’d much rather just stay at home, but that he would wait up for them. And so he stayed and they went to the midnight service.

“Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier and then went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound, then another, and another. Sort of a thump or a thud. At first he thought someone must be

not come in. He figured food would entice them in. So he hurried back to the house, fetched bread crumbs, sprinkled them on the snow, making a trail to the yellow-lighted wide open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay, the birds ignored the bread crumbs, and continued to flap around helplessly in the snow. He tried catching them. He tried shooing them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms. Instead, they scattered in every direction, except into the warm, lighted barn.

“And then he realized — they were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and

sound reached his ears above the sounds of the wind. And he stood there listening to the bells – *Adeste Fidelis* – listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. And he sank to his knees in the snow.”

God became Jesus. He became like us in every way, as a real man who lived out a life in a real historical place and time. He had a trade, and family and friends. He was born to a human mother and He died a humiliating death on the cross. But in His resurrection He destroyed the power of death over the human psyche; its power to hold us in the grip of fear. His empty tomb and His uninterrupted relationships with His friends and family robbed death of its seemingly irresistible power over our lives.

Over the centuries of human experience God has progressively revealed Himself to us. First in nature, then as the Presence within us, then as the transcendent Creator and finally, through Jesus, as the very Life that we truly are. Our bodies are wonderful gifts that allow us to participate in creation, but they are not the limit of our lives. Christ reveals to us that we are life itself. He came to reveal us to ourselves and to bring us into the experience of eternal life that we are both now and forever. Now we know that how it went for Jesus is how it goes for us.

This little story of the birds gives a lot more impact to our understanding of Jesus words, “*Fear not little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom*”.

(Luke 12:32)

*This kind of life is called in Greek, ‘zoe’
which refers to “life in the absolute sense”...*

throwing snowballs against his living room window. But when he went to the front door to investigate he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They’d been caught in the storm and, in a desperate search for shelter, had tried to fly through his large landscape window.

“Well, he couldn’t let the poor creatures lie there and freeze, so he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter, if he could direct the birds to it. Quickly he put on a coat, galoshes, and tramped through the deepening snow to the barn.

“He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds did

terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me, that I am not trying to hurt them, but to help them. But how? Because any move he made tended to frighten them, confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shooed because they feared him.

“ ‘If only I could be a bird,’ he thought to himself, ‘and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to the safe, warm barn. But I would have to be one of them so they could see, and hear and understand.’ At that moment the church bells began to ring. The

He Is Risen

by Babara Cook

I can sense and feel the earth stirring with the quickening of Spring. Bluebonnets are springing up and tiny buds are forming on the trees that put off their leaves for winter, looking as though they had died for a time. Here in Austin we actually had, what for us, was a real winter; so Spring feels especially welcome with its warmth and new life. It also provides a good parallel to Centering Prayer. When we sit in Centering Prayer we are also experiencing a kind of death and new life percolating up at the same time. Sometimes it seems to weigh more on one side than the other. During Lent it becomes especially obvious that when we sit in prayer, we are participating with Christ in His passion, death, and resurrection. Lent emphasizes the death of our old selves and Easter proclaims the birth of the new man in each of us, as we join in the great alleluias of His Risen Presence. We are reminded that unless a seed falls into the ground and dies it can not bear fruit, but if it dies it will bare thirty fold, sixty fold, a hundred fold.

In Christianity we are accepting the new life of the spirit revealed to us by Jesus Christ — if we only consent. We know that anyone who willingly learns to die to the old false-self that is made in the image of this world can be reborn as a daughter or son of the Living God. This is our Christian birthright and our destiny. To receive this gift we must want it, and learn to open

ourselves to God in genuine daily relationship. We learn to die daily to our over-identification to this world and to its goals and values. Remember, Jesus called us to be in the world but not of it. We cannot be both a child of this world and a son or daughter to God, so we must learn to die to the world while still living in it. The process is somewhat like a child being weaned from the breast. To the child, that doesn't always seem easy or pleasant. He can't really understand why what he considers comfort and consolation would be taken away.

And he doesn't always understand what the blessings of solid food and increased mobility will be after the transition. Similarly, once we consent to it, a process is begun in us that fruits in the blessings promised by Christ.

When we join with Christ in His passion during Lent we enter more deeply into the desert and the

weaning process. The practice of Centering Prayer makes the joining clear and powerful. And deepening our relationship with Christ by small deaths of the false self in our daily practice opens us to truly join in the rejoicing celebration of Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday.

For me personally the impact of the Holy Thursday Taize service and the Good Friday service, followed by the community prayer vigil, usually bring the Lenten desert time to a profound close. Often I go to the Easter Sunrise Service still feeling dry, parched and empty. Then during our simple gathering for our Sunrise Service the presence of the Risen Lord touches me and I find myself literally rejoicing inside. I know that He and I are one and that He is resurrecting again in me. And each year I'm a bit more free in Christ, to enter the upcoming celebration of Pentecost with the rest of His disciples ☉

SEEDS:

I am my own unique door

The way to find the real "world" is not merely to measure and observe what is outside us, but to discover our own inner ground. For that is where the world is, first of all: in my deepest self. This "ground," this "world" where I am mysteriously present at once to my own self and to the freedoms of all other men, is not a visible, objective and determined structure with fixed laws and demands. It is a living and self-creating mystery of which I am myself a part, to which I am myself my own unique door.

By Thomas Merton

Originally published in *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*

Knock and the door will be opened to you.

~ Luke 11:9

by Mary Theriot

*Come in: let us bow and bend low;
let us kneel before the God who made us
for He is our God and we His people.*
Psalm 95

Prayer was often difficult for me. I was raised in the Catholic faith, by parents devout in their attendance at church and unselfish in their service, though there were no obvious signs of their level of God devotion in our everyday home life. I can't recall any special nightly prayer time, though we blessed lunch and dinner each day. I often wondered why we never said the blessing at breakfast, though I can now see it's a testament to the mechanicalness of our prayer blessings. I thought maybe it was because God was a late sleeper, not to be disturbed.

In preparation for my First Holy Communion, I was to learn the Our Father, Hail Mary, Apostle's Creed and others. Nothing in those prayers was alive for me, nothing spoke to me. I kept practicing, though, finally memorizing them. After my First Communion and then Confirmation, the praying of them stopped for most of my young life.

The closest thing to prayer for me was something a Catholic lay teacher told me when I was 7 or 8 years old, about my guardian angel, and how he was always at my side.

I was delighted and when playing, I would scoot over on the swing to leave room for my angel to sit beside me. When no one was watching, I talked to him. I remembered the teacher told me to talk to him like I would a friend, and I did. He was the best friend I had. I told him everything. In the comfort of his presence, I could tell he really understood, and most times he even agreed with me. I can see now that those conversations were indeed my prayers. Sadly, as time passed, the swing set as well as my guardian angel were no longer part of my life.

After that, prayer showed up for me only in emergency situations, and always in a cry for mercy. "Oh God, please don't let my parents find out what I've done." "Oh God, please don't let the teacher call on me." "Please make this pimple go away before Friday night." "Please don't let me be pregnant." (They did, she did, it didn't, and I was.)

I had to feel helpless before I sought God's mercy. I had to have exhausted all my feeble, haphazard efforts and attempts. I had to have run out of time and been at the end of my rope. The prayer then came out from me, almost as an animal instinct.

And so it was, until as an adult with much more at stake than pimples and homework, having

April Calendar

Visit conscioussharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

Special Events

Holy Week:

- Apr 1 - Taize at 7:30pm
- Apr 2 - Good Friday noon service
- Apr 2 - Prayer vigil 1pm-6:30am Easter.
- Apr 4 - Emmaus Walk 7am
- Apr 4 - Lectio Divina at 7:30-8:30am

1/2 Day Centering Prayer Retreat

- Apr 3 8:30am-12:30pm
- \$10, no need to pre-register

Introduction to Centering Prayer

- Apr 17 8:30am-4pm (lunch included)
- The class will meet for six consecutive Tuesday evenings at 7:30pm, beginning Apr 20. Pre-register in the office. Cost is \$75.

Adult Baptism Class (4 classes)

- Apr 24 Contact the office for details.

Monthly

Tuesday Enrichment 7:30pm

- Apr 6 Sacred Chanting
- Apr 20 Gurdjieff Music

Community Workday

- Saturday Apr 24 9am-noon

Weekly

Prayer Circle

- Wednesdays 9:15am

Contemplative Lunch

- Wednesdays 12noon

Mid-Week Communion Service

- Wednesdays 6-7pm

Introduction to the Work Class

- Thursdays 7:30pm

Daily

Weekday Centering Prayer Service

- M-F 7-7:35am in Theosis Chapel

destroyed and sabotaged nearly every good thing I had ever been given, my life fell apart. I started drinking heavily at age 15, and by the age of 37, alcohol had become the only god I knew. When things were bad enough, I sought professional help, and recoiled when the therapist offered prayer as a remedy. I told her I wanted no part of any solution which required prayer to a God who had abandoned and deserted me. She acquiesced to my demands, and with no God to interfere, I proceeded on my own. I can see now the skill at which she worked with me, allowing me to believe I was in control. And so, I kept up the shadow boxing until, with no energy left, I fell and hit rock bottom. My marriage suffered greatly, and we separated. The booze lost the numbing power, and I crashed. With no energy or fight left in me, a prayer came from my mouth, *I GIVE UP!* Alone, in the middle of the night, on my knees, I cried out. From the bottom of my soul, I screamed, *I GIVE UP!* At that moment, something responded, not with words, not with a sound, or flash of light, not even a feeling, really. I don't have words to describe it, but it was real. What I 'heard' was that the pain I was suffering was necessary, and that I needed to just hold on.

The pain was debilitating to me, and everyday functions were more than I could handle. As evidence of God's action in my life, I was somehow led to a spiritual recovery program in Val David, Canada. I


worked harder there than I had ever worked in my life. The program was largely based on the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, with God the focus in each step. I threw myself into it. The director there compared me to Richard Pryor who said, "You find God real fast when you are on fire!" and that's where I was, on fire, with everything I was standing on pulled out from underneath me. So God and I began our relationship anew. With the concerns and crisis of my life physically so far away, my focus moved to discovering just who I really was. I didn't even have access to books — my alone time was just me and God.

As I look back now, I recall most of my prayers were asking God to arrange things according to the way I felt would be best for all concerned. As the time in the recovery program progressed, and as it continues to progress, my prayers have evolved to asking for God's will for me. I became at home in His presence. My prayers became conversations with my new Love.

His mercy was there holding me through every moment of my mess of a life. He welcomed me home and gifted me with eyes to see colors more radiantly than ever before, ears to hear Him in nature and the voices of my many loved ones, and a mouth that prays confidently and joyfully to a God that always hears and answers. My marriage was made richer and stronger, and I'm blessed to have had the ability to adopt my step-granddaughter.

And now, through the gift of Centering Prayer, God and I have become intimate. I especially value and treasure our mornings together. I can't imagine not beginning my day with Centering Prayer. We first dedicate our time together to those in special need of His love and attention. Next, I read the daily scripture in the *Magnificat*, allowing God to reveal to me what I need to know...and it is almost always exactly what I need to know. After sitting and allowing that to settle into me, I read a Commentary from the *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*. I ask God to show me what I might aim for this day in order to become closer to Him, and less self-serving. And then I give myself to the "Divine Therapist" as Father Keating says, for at least thirty minutes of silent Centering Prayer. During this time, I am at the mercy of God, silent and open, ready and willing, held and healed. Later in the day, either before my daughter comes home from school, or after the dishes are done and the house begins to quiet down for the night, I enter again into the Silence.

I am looking forward to my upcoming Centering Prayer Retreat. It's good to once again go away, leaving behind my life problems and demands, and focus more fully on God.

Prayer is easy for me now. As often as I can remember to, I offer my life as prayer to God, without a doubt that it is acceptable. 



The Grace of the Resurrection

*I am ascending to my Father
and to your Father,
to my God and to your God.*

~John 20: 17

Jesus, in the plan of God, has opened the way
to the highest states of consciousness.
The pain and agony of self-consciousness,
with its guilt-ridden sense of responsibility,
has been replaced by the invitation to enter into
the human potential for unlimited growth.
... The third level of contemplative prayer,
the abiding state of Divine union,
is to see God in everything.

This is the transformed consciousness of inner resurrection

...the certitude of being loved by God,
of loving Him in return, and of God giving Himself
in every event and at every moment,
both within or without.

In this state, outside and inside are in harmony;
they have become one.

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*

I will put my Spirit within you and make you live

Guidelines for Christian Life, Growth and Transformation

Fr. Thomas Keating, in his seminal work *Open Mind, Open Heart*, lists 42 principles
underlying the Christian spiritual journey. Fr. Keating asks that these principles be read
according to the method of *Lectio Divina*.

One principle will appear in these pages each month.

27th Guideline

Reflection on the Word of God in scripture and in our personal history is the foundation of
contemplative prayer. The spontaneous letting go of particular thoughts and feelings in
prayer is a sign of progress in contemplation. Contemplative prayer is characterized not so
much by the absence of thoughts and feelings as by detachment from them.

CCH Bookstore

Year of Mercy

April-Prayer

**Community Reading
Begins April 18th**

Invitation to Love

By Fr. Thomas Keating



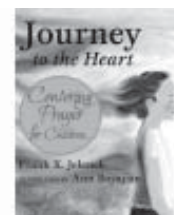
Psalms for Praying

by Nan Merrill



Journey to the Heart

By Frank Jelenek



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Open Monday-Friday

8:30 am - 3:30 pm

Sunday 9:00 - 10:00 am


11:30 am - 12:30 pm



The Work

I felt a certain lightness

When a man knows he is in a bad state from the Work point of view and cannot find out how to get rid of it...One's task is to get into different parts of centres and into different 'I's that can feel the influences of the Work. Recently observing myself under such a condition I began quite deliberately to think of the Ten Commandments. I tried to repeat the first five Commandments from memory and found I did not know them distinctly enough. As you know, the first five Commandments are psychological, and although the second five Commandments are also psychological in their ultimate meaning they refer in the first place to our relationship to external life. But the first five Commandments refer only to our relationship to ourselves. Take the opening Commandment: "Thou shalt have none other gods before me." If this teaching coming from Conscious Influences were so powerful that one worshipped nothing else – namely, that every thing else was in the second place – one would be in a position to resist all the evils of the body and of life. Perhaps you see what I mean. You would be held up the whole time by a strength that nothing could break. Then I thought of what Christ said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy

heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: This is the first commandment." (*Mark XII 30*). And just by thinking of these references to following the Will of Higher Beings from which the teaching of this Work comes, I felt a complete transformation taking place in me which was like a shock, and suddenly everything looked different – people looked different and I felt throughout the whole of my body a certain lightness. You know how the Work teaches that if you give yourself the shock of Self Remembering it changes even the whole working of the body so that all the cells in the body receive a different food. I assure you that this can be experienced often by every one of you. Remember that always what you value highest is God for you. What you value most you worship and what you worship is God. What you value most controls all your being. In this sense God is a reflection of you and God is according to your level of understanding. We worship strange things and have strange Gods. 

Pages 367-368, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, by Maurice Nicoll. For more information and experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the *Introduction to the Work* classes held every Thursday at 7:30 pm at The Church of Conscious Harmony.



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