

Music: *What Wonderous Love is This?* Music: American Folk Hymn, Arranger: Bruce Ley, 2020

Welcome

Peace be with you, this very moment in which you breathe and live and are a part of the wonderful tapestry that is your life, woven in with all the others in your time and place in history.

I am Rev. Dr. Candice Bist and along with my very talented musical husband, Bruce Ley, we serve the Shelburne Primrose Pastoral charge in the Headwaters region of Southern Ontario.

I am taking a few weeks off, and during this time, I am offering you a relook at the five services that were prepared last April for holy week, the highest holidays in the Christian tradition. Though, I repeatedly say, that the lessons, both theologically and spiritually, that our high holidays represent, can offer illumination for all people, of all faiths, and all spiritual inclinations.

And today, we have a quiet, reflective time as we listen again to the Holy Saturday Vigil Podcast.

Everyone loves the Sunday morning party of Easter – what’s not to love about waking up to a day that celebrates spring and new beginnings, with its playful motif of bunnies and Easter egg hunts, awash in shades of buttery yellow and palest mauve and the hope of some kind of confection before the day is through. Christian or not, it’s a day marked by the delight of new possibilities.

And hopefully, that you have listened to one or the other, if not both, of the Good Friday podcasts that I have re offered the last two Sundays and can be found on our website. It takes courage and intention to sit still and hear again, not only the particular dark passion story that is a cornerstone of the Christian faith, but the universal story of humanity’s fearfulness and the terror that sets in when shifts in the wind herald a change in thinking for which we feel unprepared. It may be noted that we are living in such a time now, with the winds of change a veritable storm blowing in from all sides.

If Easter Sunday is the cheerful child in our trio of days, and Good Friday the dark, serious sibling, Holy Saturday, is the quiet, overlooked one who is vitally necessary to hold all three days together. So, if you are part of our gathering today, thank you, for setting this time aside to take part in a relook at the Saturday vigil of holy week. With all the change swirling around us, now is not the time to look away. Now is the time to be quiet, to be reflective, to move slowly, but steadily in a new direction. And that direction is one of open embrace, a recommitment to open our minds and our eyes and our hearts to all others.

Last night, I did something I have never done before. I watched a basketball game on television. And I did so as a spiritual practice, to spend quiet time with my husband, to peek into a world I knew nothing about and to see what I could learn. I learned that the human form is beautiful, and it comes in many shades of colour. I learned that people cared about matters important to them. I

learned that people were searching for ways to be heard, to be seen, to be acknowledged. The fact that they were playing sports was just a side bar.

Last week, I quote Simone Weil saying, “Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.” And so it is. To sit quietly and pay attention to anything at all – a teapot, a child, a tree, a podcast, a basketball game – it matters not. To quiet yourself and simply pay attention, is a great act of generosity and devotion.

I am hoping that this vigil gathering, which consists of both teaching and praxis of the spiritual discipline of holding vigil, will have a kind of intimacy and communication allowing us to all draw together in sacred space through the simple act of paying attention.

Be blessed this week. You are already a blessing to many others.

Musical Interlude, Composer/Artist: Bruce Ley

Throughout the Lenten season, we have been working our way through Macrina Wiederkehr’s wonderful book *Seven Sacred Pauses, Living Mindfully Through the Hours of the Day*. The keeping of the hours is an ancient practice in the Christian faith, but all faiths have ways of breaking down the day into set time periods so as to be reminded to stop and consider larger matters, to rest briefly, to pray, to walk, to consider, to remember.

And even if you do not hold to a particular faith tradition, it may be that though you have not thought of it this way, you reconnect with yourself at different periods. Perhaps a quiet time in the morning, a moment of thanksgiving before you eat, an afternoon walk, an evening yoga or meditation class, a time you sing, or paint, or play, a blessing for your children or family at bedtime, a journal that you turn to at days end. All these are times that mark throughout the day a time of mindful reconnection – assuming that this is your intent. Vigil is just one particular kind of pause in the day – one you will discover you have already experienced.

I begin by reading from the introduction of *Seven Sacred Pauses*, where Macrina gives a brief history and overview of this practice of pausing throughout the day.

Musical Interlude

Reading from Page 3, top two paragraphs, page 11/12 – three paragraphs then to page 4....
introduction to Vigil

Musical Interlude, Composer/Artist: Bruce Ley

Page 33/34, Chapter One....

Musical Interlude, Composer/Artist: Bruce Ley

So, here we are all of us on Holy Saturday of Easter Weekend. Yesterday, we listened to the difficult passion story, the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth – someone trying to

lift up all those around him, someone trying to make the world a more compassionate and graced place. His teaching, his person, how he lived his life was embraced by some, rejected by others, punished by those who were afraid what the power of love would unleash.

And now, symbolically, on Holy Saturday, we consider the many characters within the story that the gospel writers have given us.

Consider, for a moment, all who had followed Jesus, who had gathered at the seashore to hear his sermons, his teaching, all those who had been healed in some way by his presence, all those who had been lifted up out of the mire of rejection and given not just ritual seat at the table, but an actual one. Where are they? What do you think they are doing? Their beloved leader is dead. And with him, all their hopes for a new way forward. They must be bereft, lost, despairing. They must feel so very all alone.

They require, even all these years later, our graced attention and love.

And what of the soldiers who mocked? What of the ones that held the whips and did the scourging? What of those who erected the timbers and ran nails through a living body as custom and orders dictated, they do? At the days end, and on the morrow, when they returned to their families, where they themselves shackled with disgrace, or had their hearts become hardened to the everyday brutality that was part of their daily living.

They require, even all these years later, our graced attention and love.

What of Pilot and his court? Has he washed his hands one more time and set about feasting for the evening? Or is he still troubled by his encounter with Jesus and all the courtiers and priests of the temple? What of Caiaphas and Annas and the rest of Sanhedrin and the Pharisees and their families? What are they doing? What are they thinking?

It is Passover, and there will have been a great quiet settle over Jewish homes, though it is likely to be an uneasy quiet, a fretful quiet, for certainly they must all know that something dreadful has taken place.

All those in power who brought Jesus to his death, even after all these years later, they require our graced attention and love.

All of them require our forgiveness, which is the divine technology without which nothing new may take place.

We will offer them our forgiveness and all manner of graces....

And what of those who really loved? Jesus' mother, Mary Magdalen, John, Peter, the apostles who did not leave the awful scene even in the midst of bloody death?

They held vigil, true vigil in the midst of all their personal loss, they did not turn away, but held steady. They held steady because love held them steady.

If you are breathing this very moment, it is certain that at least once in your life, though most probably many times, someone or some group of people have held a vigil for you. They have waited in love for you to be healed, to be well, to come home – to an actual home, or home to yourself. And it is also most likely that you have done the same for another – you have held a vigil for someone you loved to be healed, to be well, to come home, to themselves, to you, to where they belonged. And you did that because you loved them.

Love, make no mistake, is the single more powerful force in all the world. There is nothing else like it.

I invite you into the practice of vigil now. Take whoever you like into your heart. Any of the characters in the passion story that speak to you, any one in your own story that speaks to you, any one in your community who needs your special attention, anyone who comes to your heart and mind, and perhaps yourself as well.....

Just hold them, in love, and hold steady....

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Closing Remarks and Closing Prayers:

I am going to let Macrina lead us out with her beautiful closing vigil prayer. Once again, the book I am working from is *Seven Sacred Pauses* by Macrina Wiederkehr, easily ordered or found in bookstores where spiritual matters are of import.

Closing Prayers.....

I would ask you all to continue to do what needs doing to stay home safely and keep well. Remember that we are all deeply connected, and how we behave, affects everyone.

Musical Interlude, Composer/Artist: Bruce Ley

With grateful thanks to this wonderful book that we have been studying this last winter:

Seven Sacred Pauses: Living Mindfully Through the Hours of the Day

by Macrina Wiederkehr, Sorin Books, Notre Dame