

Scripture:
Psalm 16:7-11

Life is a Hot Mess

We are a forgetful people. We are made for love and we are beloved but so often we forget. Many of us have times that we are not even aware of God's presence even though God is right there. Wendy Farley wrote in her book *Beguiled by Beauty* "The source of life is deeply unimaginably good, but life is a hot mess." We get that don't we? We know life is a "hot mess." If you didn't know it you certainly know it now. It is easy to see as we live in the midst of a global pandemic, as our world faces our capacity for cruelty and destruction, as we go through global moral turmoil acknowledging the we do not treat all people as equal, as beloved, as our greed destroys our earth. We think we can escape this reality for a moment by going for a nice walk in the beauty of the earth but we are quickly awakened to the reality of life and its turmoil. "The difficulty and crisis of the world is overwhelming. It is virtually impossible to bear it without very deep resources."¹

Researchers of the brain and behaviour say that humans have a negativity bias. We tend to pay more attention and to more easily remember negative encounters and interactions. It makes sense evolutionarily—it keeps us safe to avoid what we perceive as harmful. I imagine this is especially true in times of pandemic, famines, floods, war, and corruption. Our negativity bias can keep us safe, but it can also make us feel miserable! It can be one of the things that impedes our relationship to God and to one another.

"[Julian of Norwich] likened humanity to someone who has fallen into a ditch and cannot see where they are. Their body is full of pain and distraction. They feel isolated because they cannot see that they are intimately connected to God and to all beings. Julian says that the worst part of all of this is that such a person has forgotten God's tender and unconditional love for them and for all creation:

Julian, like other contemplatives, acknowledges that there is a great deal of suffering that is simply part of being human. But what makes this suffering so soul-destroying is that we cannot see how beloved we are. We no longer remember that we are adored and cherished by God. If we could reconnect to God's love for us, we would still suffer, but it would not be so overwhelming. We must learn to hold the beauty and the suffering together. In acknowledging the life is full of both beauty and pain and allowing them to be held together we will recognize God with us in the journey of life we will recognize the divine goodness that draws us to our wholeness. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit for our Spirit to be its most beautiful self. As Irenaeus said "The glory of God Is the human fully alive."

¹ Farley, Wendy *Beguiled by Beauty*

Julian Norwich of the 14th century who lived through the black plague and so much more is known for saying “All will be well.” Now I am the first one to cringe at anything trite and petty. But when I learn where this quote came from it makes me ponder a little deeper. She actually said “All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.” “**All will be well**” is not about the rational mind. It's about something deeper and more inarticulate — an attitude that approaches this big, scary life with openness and hope rather than with fear and dread. It's true in a part of me that theology and reason **can't** reach, but music **can**. **All will be well**.

Just like we sometimes hear in our time Julian lived in a time when there was a lot of theology that stated God is angry and we are being punished. Many of us don't want to believe that today but the thoughts creep into our souls. The deepest truth however is that God loves us. The unfolding of the earth is held by divine love and compassion. If we can trust that all that is going on just might not be so hard.

In our humanity we want to figure things out, control everything, if we can do that we think we can eliminate suffering. Still lets be honest when we get down to it we know suffering will happen. Solace is found when we come to know divine love is with us in our suffering.

The African American tradition has a affirmation of faith that states “God is good all the time, All the time God is good.” Now we have been reminded lately that the African American people do not live a ‘good life’ all the time so how do they say that. The fact is there may be suffering in the world but the world is not God. This comes out of lament - like that of the psalms. Deep trust in the midst. Things are not always good, the world isn't always good, life isn't always good but God is always good.

We forget that we are intimately held in holy love, holy protection. Farley suggests that forgetfulness is our sin. When we forget the god is with us we separate ourselves from God. We have a longing for God because we have forgotten in the depths of our beings who God is and who we are. We may say we believe but deep in our hearts we have trouble believing. Our mental patterning is in conflict with our beliefs, our habit of need for control sets us into worry, anxiety, forgetfulness, and it separates us from God. Thats what contemplative practice is about it assists us in becoming more aware of who and whose we are, remembering more deeply is a soul practice. It assists us in unlocking the habits that prevent us from really deeply accepting we are loved.

Teresa of Avila considered the absence of self-knowledge to be the root of our spiritual crisis. For Teresa, our deepest problem is that we have forgotten the great beauty of our soul and who dwells there. We lack self-knowledge. We may think it is a kind of humility to despise ourselves or to identify entirely with a socially constructed identity, but she believes this is false humility. It is a petty theft (of our identity). Our willingness to be satisfied with a low-flying understanding of ourselves is a theft of our true identity. The important moment of awakening is to relocate this

identity in a larger context. Our identity is formed by society. Our value comes from our wealth, our work, our production, our success in the eyes of others but God's fundamental truth is that you are a beloved child of God. When we wake up to the beauty of our soul and to the unspeakable joy that it is Holy Goodness dwelling within us we become fully alive our anxieties about the crisis of the world become less intense.

A contemplative way of life is not simply adding on meditation or prayer practices to our beliefs about God. It is a wild journey which unravels our beliefs about God in order to drop into deeper relationship with the Divine Beloved. Who we understand God to be is deeply related to who we believe ourselves to be. If I am primarily preoccupied with my own angers, frustrations, and desires, I am likely to conceive of God as a divine dispenser of rewards and punishments. In my egotism or my anxiety, this dispensation is likely to follow my own assessments. Because my church rejected me, God, too must have rejected me. Or perhaps God rejects those people I reject and rewards those I would reward. This punishing God turns us against each other and even ourselves. This God suggests that the world is filled with things for me to use but not care for. It is full of "enemies" – I forget that they are, like me, part of the single fabric of creation. I have learned to attribute to God hostility and condemnation which is all too human. Or maybe God is just not that involved in daily affairs. I conduct my life more or less without him, even though I feel genuine devotion to and belief in him."

This week I want to encourage you to go deep to imagine God wrapping you in a blanket. We wrap babies in a blanket when they are first born because it is like the feeling of the womb. Imagine yourself in the womb of God. Tap into the unconditional love. Let your heart open into a place of remembering holy love. If you remember the love of another person that you have experienced acknowledge that that is only a 'sprinkle' of the kind of love God holds you in. This isn't head knowledge this is soul knowledge take time to drop your attention into a deep heart space let your heart open into tender vulnerability and allow the neatness to reside in you consciously reconnect with being deeply loved.