

Karen Hollis | Jan 24, 2021
Proverbs 8:1-2, 22-31 | Mark 1:14-20
Theological Banquet: Spiritual

Clear our heart, O God, that we may see you. Clear our heart, O God, that we may truly see ourselves. Clear our heart, O God, that in every moment we may seek you, serve you, strengthen you as the Living Presence in every presence. Amen. (J P Newell)

When I consider the spiritual stream, my thoughts drift to the Isle of Iona. And I know several of you have been there. I traveled to Iona in 2007 with an intergenerational group from my church. Those who had been before spoke of pilgrimage . . . even the journey to Iona was a pilgrimage. If memory serves, to get there we had to take an airplane, a train, bus, ferry and barge. The two day trip happened in stages: leaving home, hurrying up and waiting to change forms of transportation, sleeping overnight, and anticipating the long awaited welcome . . . each stage had its own rhythm and energy. I was a leader of the youth portion of the trip – we were greeted warmly upon our arrival at the McCloud centre, which would be our home base for the week, and we were folded into life there. We worshipped with the community 2-3 times a day, we did chores, and had program and free time to experience, learn and reflect. The rhythm of the days felt so good to my soul, being held in a framework that gave shape to life without being oppressive.

On the 3rd or 4th day, I remember entering the Abbey for morning worship, sitting down in a chair,

closing my eyes, and instantly finding myself in the presence of God. It was as if the decades, centuries even, of prayer in that place had conditioned the energy to support connection with the Holy. It's as if the years of pilgrims seeking God in that place, truly made it a house of prayer. Connecting with God within was so effortless – it would have been so easy to remain there . . . but the community was gathering, so our personal connections with God became a collective as we worshipped and sang together in that thin place, where God is so close.

It was evident after several days that while Iona fosters closeness with God through practice and the intention with which people live there, it is not paradise. The environment is harsh; even in the summer the wind blows fiercely and the waves rise up and crash on the shores. The soil isn't hospitable to many larger plants, so the landscape is mostly grass. They had a saying during our visit about life on Iona – . . . they used a swear word which I won't repeat here, but suffice it to say, Iona is where the **stuff** bubbles up. On Iona it is very common for people's stuff to bubble up. But remember life there is held in a container; it is a thin place . . . the veil there is very thin; God is close; and there is a community of support.

The shadow for the spiritual stream is to remain in our own stuff. It can be such a rich space of gifts, challenge and grace, that it is easy to remain

in there . . . sometimes for safety and familiarity, sometimes out of habit, sometimes because of the depth of work happening there. The interesting thing about the spiritual stream is that from inward places of connection and communion with God, we are called out into the world to serve. Richard Rohr calls this the rhythm of action and contemplation, where we go out and serve, come back to be filled up again, and then sent out.

The wisdom this stream seeks is remarkable and poetic on its own: images like hearing God in the deafening silence or wisdom participating in creation . . . but their power is in applying them to life and influencing the world around us. If wisdom participated in creation, then in what ways are we looking to creation to teach us? What is our posture toward creation – is it an object for us to use, or a co-creator in the unfolding of life? What is the wisdom of our ancestors? How can we learn from them and apply their wisdom to the world today? Those in the spiritual stream do regularly remove themselves from the world to dive deep into the abyss . . . at their best, they come back and integrate their learning, apply their learning to their own lives and in service of others.

Richard Rohr emerged last year with his latest book, *The Universal Christ*, which I refer to now and then. He challenges us to differentiate between Jesus and Christ, and to see Christ as larger than Jesus; he

challenges us to **see Christ** as the expression of God's love in the world . . . and the expression of God's love in ourselves. He challenges us to name **everything visible** as the outpouring of God. Rohr says, "in all of creation there is a unifying heartbeat . . . one word for it is Christ . . . it includes everyone . . . it excludes no one." Theologians like Rohr from the spiritual stream challenge our beliefs, our worldviews, our image of God. Thanks be to God for Rohr and the Spiritual stream – because life is not static . . . life is a pilgrimage – sometimes it's messy and unclear, sometimes everything makes sense - we are meant to continue seeking and growing in God as we move through the seasons of life. Thanks be to God.