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EFFORTLESS RECEPTIVITY

EFFORTLESS RECEPTIVITY

BY PETER HAAS

Has someone ever given you an unexpected gift? Was it easy to receive? Did you feel a little hesitant to receive it? It is a very common human experience to be unwilling to receive something, especially if we don't know the person well, or fear that we might be obligated to them in an uncomfortable way if we did receive the gift.

This tension illustrates that grace always has two sides. The giver giving, and the receiver receiving. We often think that grace is all about the unexpected gift. But grace is also about the *willingness to receive*. Grace can't fully bloom in our life if we are only willing to give, and resistant to receive. Especially when it comes to the spiritual dimension.

Our willingness to receive God's love is often grounded in an unwillingness to believe that we are loveable. This belief may find its roots in an early life experience of shame, or an encounter with a trauma, or simply the absence of tender maternal or paternal love

in childhood. There are all sorts of reasons we human beings constrict down on ourselves and self-sabotage our original goodness and lovability. It is not necessary to know *why* we constrict. What is important is to recognize that we *do* constrict, and that in this constriction, we can see our resistance and unwillingness to let the profound and indescribable love of God and others in. In resistance, we often act out with fear, anger or shame. Our wounds and pain can freeze our will to love and be loved. Thawing the will, and liberating the will to be receptive, is the invitation of the spiritual journey.

I remember visiting the Austin Animal shelter at Town Lake before it moved to its new fantastic location. It broke my heart to see the dogs in the cages in the summer heat. And more than that, I could see what I interpreted as sadness in many of the dog's eyes. I was drawn to one dog and asked to walk her in the common area. The dog was so precious, but also so scared

and cowering; shivering with fear. Clearly, the dog had been beaten or very badly mistreated. It took a long time for her to calm down. I just sat on the ground with the dog. I gently petted her and spoke in a calm and gentle tone. Slowly, she began to become more receptive to me and I perceived that she started to feel safe enough to eat a treat from my hand.

Humans are similar emotional creatures. My experience at the animal shelter illustrates an aspect of why receptivity can be so challenging for us. Can we really trust someone? Will my heart be safe if I really, fully and deeply open up to someone? Will they receive me? Can I receive them?

In my experience, because of past pain and events of getting burned by opening to love, being receptive to another can often take an intentional effort of our will. Sometimes "the splinters of language," as poet Denise Levertov put it, take years to be removed and replaced with the healing presence

of silence. So too, sometimes events unfold that damage love and trust so deeply that the very best of love's gifts can't ever be opened freely. And this is a reason to weep, as Jesus wept for Jerusalem – which represents an image of the unreceptive human heart.

The poet Rilke once defined love as, two solitudes that border, protect and salute one another. And some have defined a monastery as a community of solitudes – a way of being alone together. Somehow these phrases cast a shadow of sadness over me. So, I prefer John of the Cross' definition: *love establishes unity*. And St. Paul's soaring hope that

*love believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things,
indeed love never fails.*


It turns out that we need each other to discover our self. We need relationality to learn receptivity.

And, paradoxically, we need effort to learn effortlessness. In the end, it takes an act of the will to trust that love can do the loving. That love can do the unifying.

Perhaps you wish to love someone so consumingly, but feel the closed door of their heart. Stu Mittleman, an ultradistance running champion, described how he ran such long distances, "I never ran one thousand miles. I couldn't have done that. I ran one mile, one thousand times." It is like that with effortless receptivity and love. We may not be able to consent and open our whole lifetime all at once. We consent one moment at a time. So go ahead and recall a moment when your receptivity collapsed into resistance, and became the very opposite of effortless. When did you become unwilling to let yourself ever be hurt again? Can you feel into that fruitful wounding, one that taught your heart to fear the love so wished for? Is there someone in your life right now who wishes to love you

so deeply it terrifies you?

There are pains that only divine love can heal. And for such seasons and scars we may need the grace of God in Christ to demonstrate to us that divine love goes all the way into the depths of rejection to transform it into receptivity. Who can resist the power of the spiritual resurrection of coldness of heart to warmth of devotion, that turns the fear of Golgotha into the joyful tears of the empty tomb filled with angelic light and Magdalene love?

We are drawn into spiritual community, like The Church of Conscious Harmony, because we intuit that God's love is our everything. No matter who has let us down or failed to love us unconditionally or even kindly or joyfully, or whom we have failed to love, God's love has always met and will always meet every dimension of our being, all the time, though perhaps in different ways than we might expect. Will you receive that gift? Will you give it too? 



**THE CHURCH of
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A CONTEMPLATIVE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

7406 Newhall Lane
Austin, Texas 78746
512.347.9673
512.347.9675 fax
www.consciousharmony.org

MINISTER

Peter Haas

minister@consciousharmony.org

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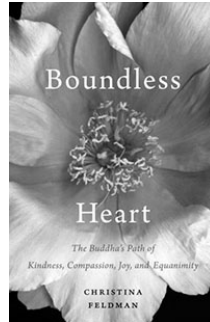
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Virginia Maxwell, Manager
bookmgr@consciousharmony.org

NEWSLETTER

Sandra Ely, Editor
garzaely@swbell.net
Carol Hagar, Design
lifeisart@austin.rr.com

COMMUNITY READING MAY-JUNE




*Boundless Heart: The Buddha's Path of
Kindness, Compassion, Joy and Equanimity*
by Christina Feldman

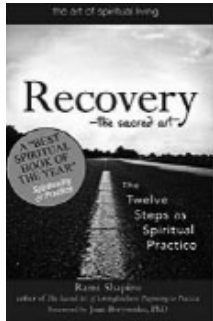
If you haven't started reading *Boundless Heart*, it's not too late! This practical guide provides insight and tools for liberating our lives and awakening our hearts. These teachings on the *brahma viharas*, the four immeasurables of Kindness, Compassion, Joy and Equanimity, are a gift for us to deepen our level of being, connect with our true essence, and become more aware of the interconnection we have with other beings. When we pursue these four gifts sincerely as spiritual practice, they work together, complementing and enhancing each other, leading us to an awakening that compels us to share with others.

Feldman writes,

“There is no greater love than the immeasurable friendliness that can embrace all beings, all events, and all experiences with unshakeable kindness. There is no compassion greater than the fearless heart that can turn toward suffering and pain, tremble with empathy, and live with the commitment to end the causes of anguish. There is no greater happiness than inwardly generated joy and peace. There is no equanimity more unshakeable than the profound poise of the liberated heart that can meet the world of ungraspable conditions and events without being shattered.

Threaded through the entirety of the Buddha's pathway of awakening are the teachings on cultivating the boundless heart – immeasurable kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. . . . We are encouraged, whether standing or walking, sitting or lying down, whenever we are awake to make kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity the home of our heart. This is the noblest way of living in this world here and now.” 

BOOK LOOK RECOVERY



Rami Shapiro's book *Recovery: The Twelve Steps as Spiritual Practice*, is a must read for anyone who wishes to become more passive to one's personality, mechanicalness or sleep, and more active toward willing new choices for one's life. Rami's writing and wisdom provides practical insights that relate to the nature of will, especially as it connects to recognizing our powerlessness of will to addictions, and what the Work of Inner Christianity calls our mechanicalness and sleep.

What is very illuminating about this book is the way Rami weaves wisdom from many of the world's major religions into the Alcoholics Anonymous process and ideas. However, this isn't just a book for dealing with addictions, it is a book that can help you change your life and make new choices in any area where your will operates – with wanting desire, receptivity or reactivity. It's a book that helps articulate and apply powerful Work ideas, such as non-identification and asking for help from above. *Recovery* is an accessible and readable life-line of practical wisdom for anyone who wishes to understand the patterns of human suffering and be transformed through them into the tapestry of freedom and joy. ☯

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 appears in these pages each month.

GUIDELINE 17

The experience of being loved by God enables us to accept our false self as it is, and then to let go of it and journey to our true Self.

The inward journey to our true Self is the way to divine love.

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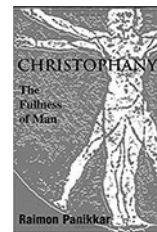
SUGGESTED TITLES FOR JUNE



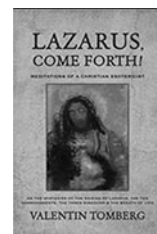
Discernment Matters
Listening with the Ear of the Heart
by Mary Margaret Funk



The Path of Centering Prayer
Deepening Your Experience of God
by David Frenette



Christophany
The Fullness of Man
by Raimon Panikkar



Lazarus Come Forth!
Mysteries of humanity's covenant with God
in history
by Valentin Tomberg

Bookstore and Library Hours
Open Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm
Sunday 9:30-10 am & 11:30 am-noon



Whoever is in Christ is a new creation ...

behold, new things have come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

ANNUAL AIM: A NEW CREATION

EFFORTLESS RECEPTIVITY BY LISA BROWN

To converse with God presupposes a willingness to listen to God. Listening is an act of silence.

You cannot hear what somebody else is saying if you are talking all the time.

Prayer as relationship emerges as the essence of prayer, which can then be expressed in many different ways.

Little by little we enter into prayer without any other intention except to consent.

Consent becomes surrender. And surrender becomes total receptivity, as this process evolves.

And total receptivity is effortless.

Thomas Keating, "Centering Prayer," *Heartfulness: Transformation in Christ*

You bring all of yourself to the contemplative path, including your actions, your efforts, and your dedication, yet action that becomes too effortful interferes with your receptivity to God. ...

Contemplation is effortless in the same way that the falling of snow is effortless. ...

In receptive effortlessness, there is nowhere to go, nothing to deepen, not even any need to be gentle.

The depth of contemplation is just being, effortlessly, in God.

David Frenette, *The Path of Centering Prayer*

Last April I participated in a 10-day Lenten retreat located in the hill country of Texas. I walked up to the front door of the retreat lodge feeling excitement and trepidation about the long period of extended Silence in community. As I witnessed the rapid beating of my heart, I went to turn the door knob, looked down to wipe my feet

before entering, and was stopped in my tracks by lettering on the well-worn mat: "In Word, In Nature, In Eucharist, In Silence." I inhaled deeply into my belly and instantly relaxed as I continued to open the door to the Lenten retreat lodge. Affirming my willingness to receive, I was right where God wanted me to be – simply opening

another door that was open to me.

I reflected on my first journey into the Silence eleven years earlier where I spent 40 days at a silent house of prayer called Lebh Shomea, which means "a listening heart." These are the four specific elements that would change (and continue to evolve) my life and lead me to a new relationship with

Christ, family, and humanity.

Receptivity of the One God

For those of us who struggle with addiction and/or depression, change is inevitable when we hit a bottom and experience spiritual bankruptcy. 11 years ago, my decision to spend 40 days discerning the next phase of my life was motivated by a combination of things. 20 years as a massage therapist had taken a toll on my body and I was experiencing chronic pain. I finally ended a tumultuous 10-year relationship at the age of 43, and my opportunity to have children had slipped away. Who would I be now? Body failing, no relationship, no children. What am I going to do with my life? Most importantly, what does God want from me? Ongoing fearful anticipation of the future and chronic pain led to self-pity and isolation. I needed time to physically rest and openly surrender to whatever God had in store for me next. I had the intellectual knowledge to know God would take care of me, but the scared little girl inside was terrified of change. It was during the Lenten season of 2008 when I became willing to accept whatever God had in store for me as I headed for the desert.

When I arrived at the house of prayer, I did not know what was expected of me in terms of participating in the community religious services. I was a strong believer in God, and I had years of 12-step recovery that included daily prayer and meditation, but I had no affiliation with a religious denomination. I asked the priest who happened to be visiting the front office if I could participate in the Eucharist service even though I wasn't Catholic. Fr. Kelly responded with a simple shake of the head and twinkle in his eye, "There is only one God." His words took me by surprise. I was touched. A favorite Rumi poem I had on my refrigerator came to mind: "All these religions. All this singing. One Song." He was inviting me to worship God without condition. "If this is today's religion," I thought to myself, "I want to know more." I moved into my room with a sense that my parched soul had found cool fresh water.

I knew receptivity would be a process of slowing down in order to listen to the Silence. I discovered this capacity in the quiet walks of the undisturbed animals in nature, spending time studying palm trees and making detailed sketches, and

surprisingly, in the Eucharist. Every morning in the darkness before dawn, I would hear the sound of Fr. Kelly's electric golf cart whizzing by my window on his way to chapel, waking up the noisy buzzards flapping their wings in the palm trees. He showed up every day (for 46 years), whether there were 20 guests that morning, or just one. I never tired of witnessing the sacrament of the Eucharist, the methodical movement of his elderly hands as he faithfully offered the bread of life to all seeking spiritual nourishment. There was a certain meditative spaciousness as he moved from one part of the ritual to the next. It somehow slowed everything down within myself and altered my consciousness into a higher realm. I would often find myself sitting alone following the service. Hearing only the sound of my breath, in awe, listening to the beating of my heart. It is good to remember, *Whoever is in Christ is a new creation... behold, new things have come. 2 Corinthians 5:17.* I knew I was being changed. I just didn't know how. It would be years later before I understood the alchemy that transformed me. Today I know the Eucharist was transmuted through the Word and into my being, creating a sense of

continued from page 7

unity and connection to everyone and every living creature as the entire body of Christ. I was being created anew. From that moment forward, I no longer believed I was ever truly alone in the world, but an integral part of the cosmic whole.

Surrender

The unconditional love I received from the daily ritual of the Eucharist encouraged me to surrender to God during hours spent in Centering Prayer. I had never spent so much time in the Silence, and the minimal distractions introduced me to aspects of myself that were deeply hidden in my unconscious. Initially, I only asked for God's will for me and the power to carry that out. When the monkey-mind kicked in, I would return to my breath and do my best not to keep following distracting thoughts, feelings, and sensations of physical discomfort. As a novice at such an endeavor, I tried way too hard in my attempts to have some sort of "spiritual awakening" to relieve me of my discomforts. I exhausted myself.

Emotionally I was all over the map. Tears would arise during periods of prayer, on long walks, or spontaneously in the middle of a silent meal. Bouts of anxiety would spring up in the middle of

the night. (I once thought I heard drumming in the distance, only to realize several nights in a row it was the racing of my own heartbeat pumping in my head!) Fr. Thomas Keating refers to this emotional process as the "unloading" of the unconscious. Indeed, the "Divine Therapist" was fast at work! As the mind began to slow down, I would eventually sink deeper into the Silence, and on occasion I would have moments or glimpses of effortlessness during Centering Prayer. I would come to experience frequent moments of being present with whatever was arising, with a sense of renewal and hope.

Action

On a daily basis I continued to ask God what he wanted from me in the form of service. Toward the end of my stay at Lebh Shomea, I began to have vivid dreams of singing while wearing a monk's robe. I reflected upon my years spent volunteering with hospice singing for patients and family members. The heart felt connection with others was not only a sacred act, but a privilege. It was effortless, pure joy, and allowed me to be in the Presence of those at the threshold of another dimension. In his book, *Creativity*, Mathew Fox suggests, "...the work

of the artist in all of us is to be in dialogue with our hearts, for God dwells there. And the work of the artist [contemplative], is nothing less than to "put divinity into things." I realized that my work as a healer was the same creative "act of divinity" I experienced when I was present with patients. It is God within us that longs to offer itself to others in service.

One day as I was walking to the chapel during my stay in the desert, I heard a faint voice suggest pursuing chaplaincy working for a hospice agency. The thought actually made me laugh out loud. Although my heart was overjoyed with the idea, my false-self thought it was a ludicrous idea that could never be accomplished. When I returned home from my time spent in the Silence, I decided to follow the suggestion of 'the voice', and pursue chaplaincy. I felt a deep sense that I was on the right path due to the ongoing support, synchronicities, and doors that continued to open. When I had the willingness to take action, followed by the courage to knock, God continuously guided me every step of the way. Four months later, I enrolled in seminary and the adventure began.

A degree in pastoral care requires ongoing self-reflection,

critical thinking, a tremendous amount of paper writing, and ongoing organizational skills. The self-reflection was welcomed, but the other three? No thank you. I learned very quickly that my ego has no problem riding along the smooth highway of spirituality as long as it doesn't have to be challenged. I quickly identified parts of myself that I didn't know existed. To put it simply; my childhood programming of false security and need for approval reared their heads. My greatest challenge was not the stress of paper writing, or deadlines, but the unconscious messages entirely based on false beliefs. In his book, *The Mystery of Christ*, Thomas Keating reminds us, that, "... the false-self system, firmly in place from early childhood, does not drop dead upon request." I so wanted those perceptions and beliefs to go away, but they didn't budge. So where does one go for consolation? Centering Prayer. On a consistent basis I reminded myself that the Divine Therapist was at work somehow, someday, when I consented to God's loving presence, no matter how frazzled I felt when I dragged myself to the mat.

Upon reflection, the key element that was missing

throughout my education was my limited ability to observe my false perceptions without becoming over-identified with them. Months and years of self-reflection created an over-identification with the negative images of myself. I was in some ways, negatively contributing to an already stress-filled education. Having compassion for others is much easier than having compassion for myself. I have only recently begun to practice the tools of Self-Observation, Non-Identification, and Self-Remembering, used in the Work of Inner Christianity. Repetition, compassion, and

practice, practice, practice.

The Art of Receptivity to Others as Service

With deep gratitude I am finally stepping into my new life as a chaplain. What I am learning in my new "role" in service to others, is to simply practice being a loving Presence, and doing my best to meet another person wherever they are in their journey. This sounds easy, but it is quite challenging with years of education! Deep listening with the ear of the heart, without attempting to fix anything or even offer suggestions to people who are suffering, is not an easy task, but it is a life long journey

SUNDAY SERMON THEMES

NEW CREATION STORIES

| | | |
|---------|-----------------|---------------------|
| June 2 | Genesis 1:1-5 | Empty & Light |
| June 9 | Genesis 1:26-27 | Image & Likeness |
| June 16 | Father's Day | Spiritual Fathering |
| June 23 | Genesis 1:28-31 | Very Good |
| June 30 | Genesis 2:18-25 | Two Become One |

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I look forward to. If the greatest gift I can give to another is loving Presence, the creative divinity within myself, I am committed to continuing my own evolution of consciousness with increasing awareness, self-observation, and compassion.

Listen, Consent, Total Receptivity

David Frenette says, “The depth of contemplation is just being, effortlessly, in God.” My most recent Lenten retreat reunited me not only with a chaplain from my residency, but with a fellow pilgrim I had met during my stay at the Lebh Shomea house of prayer so many years ago. Coincidence? I don’t think so. It’s as if God was showing me where I began my journey – in the Silence, in Nature, in Word, and in Eucharist – and where my transformation has led me along the contemplative path to this point. Back into the four elements that nourish the divinity within myself and always lead me home to my heart. Each night during the compline service, I gratefully received the sacrament that continues to offer me a new life in Christ consciousness. It’s a beginning of receptivity that is always new. The willingness continues. The process evolves. And I continue to listen, consent, surrender, and just be, in God. ☉

My Father is still working, and I also am working. John 5:17

LIVING THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY IN DAILY LIFE

WILL AND RECEPTIVITY

Work Idea: Sometimes one must make an effort of the will in order to be receptive. The vitally important, yet incomplete diagrams on pages 76-79 of Volume 1 of Maurice Nicoll’s *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky* provide an essential beginning for understanding the multiple aspects of human functioning. The shortcomings of these mid-20th century diagrams can be overlooked in the light of their historic significance. Today, rather than “compartments” or pie-charts, we might translate Nicoll’s diagrams into a more readily understood analogy of simultaneous operations of a computer’s operating system. The aspect or “operation” we will focus on this month is the importance of our Will. Notice on page 77 that Nicoll locates little daily “wills” or desires in the intellectual part, of the moving aspect of the Emotional Center. This is different from Real Will or New Will, which is what we will focus on now.


Work Source: “Will is connected both with what we like and what we love. What one loves, one will

and what one wills, one does, either openly or secretly. If restrained, one does it in imagination, which spiritually – that is, psychologically – is the same. I mean that there is no will formed. The dog will return to its vomit when occasion arises. A new will would mean to go in a new direction. But as you cease to like or love something – such as yourself – you will less and less will it. Now by observation you may come to dislike a part of yourself, something in yourself. Then you will not will it as you did when you did not clearly see it. But as long as your self-love remains undetected, unexplored ... you unknowingly let it will all of you, being ignorant of the ... ‘T’s it conceals ... Now if one could through self-observation and self-study cease to love oneself quite so much, one would not so much wish to have one’s own way. That would liberate energy. By seeing more what we are like we would not love ourselves so much. We would not be so critical and overbearing (openly or secretly) of others ... In short, we would have a little new will ... gained from diminishing the self-love. Now if one continues to love the same things, one will

continue to will and do them. In that case there can be no new will." Nicoll, *Commentaries*, p. 1595.

Practical Application: This month, Work on observing what you will. Notice the connection between what you love and what you will. Explore observing what your will is, how it works, where you feel will in you, and discover something new about your freedom and non-freedom of will. Play around with your will. Give yourself a task to will and do something you like, then will and do something you don't

like. Notice the contrasts. Learn from the inner struggle. All and any observations will be useful to greater self-understanding and development of a receptive will, a new will toward God not just a will toward self.

Supplemental Recent Resources: For excellent insights and illustrations that reveal the connection between the Will and our human emotions, see Chip and Dan Heath's book *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*, especially Part Two: *Motivate the Elephant*. 

JUNE CALENDAR

Visit consciousharmony.org for a complete listing of events

SPECIAL EVENTS

Exploring the Mysticism of John of the Cross - Wednesdays in June & July 7:15-8:25pm in Sanctuary. Open to all.

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat
June 15 9am-4pm
\$20 Preregister. Bring a brown bag lunch

MONTHLY

1st Sundays
Bring non-perishables for Caritas

WEEKLY

Sundays
Lectio Divina 8-9am
Prayer Circle 9:15-9:45am
Worship Service 10-11:30am
Youth Program 10-11:30am
Fellowship 11:30am

Wednesdays
Contemplative Communion Service 6-7pm

Thursdays 7:30-9pm
Work of Inner Christianity Class

Fridays
Yin Yoga 1-2:15pm \$15
Preregister: AwakenedHeartAustin@gmail.com

Saturdays
Scriptorium noon-12:50pm

DAILY

Sunday-Saturday 7-7:35am
Centering Prayer Service, Theosis Chapel

Recordings of services are available through the Bookstore and online at www.consciousharmony.org

UPCOMING CENTERING PRAYER RETREATS

HALF-, ONE-, TWO-DAY AT THE CHURCH OF CONSCIOUS HARMONY

| | | |
|-----------|--|-------|
| June 15 | 9:00 am-4:00 pm | \$20 |
| July 13 | 1:00-5:00 pm | \$10 |
| Aug 10-11 | Sat 8:30 am-4:00 pm & Sun 8:00 am-4:00 pm | \$100 |
| Sept 21 | 9:00 am-4:00 pm | \$20 |
| Oct 19 | 9:00 am-4:00 pm | \$20 |
| Nov 16 | 9:00 am-4:00 pm | \$20 |
| Dec 14 | 1:00-5:00 pm | \$10 |

One-day – please bring your own lunch.

Two-day commuter retreat – sleep at home; meals included.

Cost is a suggested love offering. Scholarships are available as needed.

MULTI-DAY, OVERNIGHT AT CEDARBRAKE RETREAT & RENEWAL CENTER

| | | |
|------------|-------|-------|
| July 26-31 | 6-day | \$595 |
| Sep 13-18 | 6-day | \$595 |
| Dec 6-12 | 7-day | \$695 |

Double room prices. Single room is an additional \$10/night.

Please contact the CCH office or website to register.



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*Afterwards Jesus Himself, through them,
sent forth from east to west
the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.*

Amen.

Mark 16:20



Gloria in Excelsus Deo!

PENTECOST

The peace of the Lord is the supreme gift
that is offered to us on this feast.
Peace is something greater than joy or any emotion.
It is beyond joy and beyond suffering.
It is the rerooting of our entire being
and self-identity in its Source so that the feeling
of being separated from God is dissolved.
There is no more feeling of separation from God
once the grace of Pentecost has done its work.

Peace is defined as the tranquility of order:
everything in its right place.
The right order for human beings is to see, hear, touch, feel,
and taste God in everything that happens . . .

The grace of Pentecost enables us to hear God
speaking in every human being and in every event.
'Here He comes! I embrace Him –
hidden in this trial, in this dreadful person,
in this stomach ache, in this overwhelming joy.'
He is in the present moment no matter
what the content of the moment is.

Thomas Keating, *Rearwakenings*