



To Fall in Love with Anyone, Do This (Brian Rea)

On the Road to Damascus

A few years after the crucifixion of the rabbi Jesus of Nazareth a Jewish citizen of Rome, Saul of Tarsus, became known for arresting and even consenting to the execution of those who followed Jesus' teachings.

One day, as Saul traveled from Jerusalem to Damascus aiming to persecute more members of the Christ movement, the Divine brought him up short with a vision of light and truth. It knocked Saul off his mount and struck him blind. Well-funded tough-guy Saul had to be led by the hand the rest of the way to the city; he couldn't see and didn't eat or drink for three days.

His guide out was the compassion of someone he previously would have tortured: a Christian named Ananias of Damascus. Ananias put his hands on Saul and it was as if scales fell from his eyes. Saul took the name Paul, meaning "little", and began sharing the message of the Christ movement around the world.

When has the Divine knocked you to the ground through Spirit and Truth, resulting in misery? How did you make it to your Damascus? How long did the scales take to fall from your eyes? Who or what was your Ananias?



Moon rises in Denali National Park, Alaska

A Lunar Spiritual Path

In his book *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality*, Franciscan priest and theologian Richard Rohr explores the dance of darkness and light as being integral to the spiritual path.

Patriarchal religions often promote a solar spirituality that obscures the generative power that arises from the contemplation of the shadows of our consciousness, the divine darkness within. Engaging our nondual nature, encompassing the darkness and the light, allows us to transform pain rather than transmit it.

“Lunar light is much more subtle, filtered, and indirect, and in that sense, more clarifying and not so quickly conclusive,” Rohr writes. “Jesus is a lunar teacher, patient with darkness and slow growth. He says, ‘The seed is sprouting and growing but we do not know how’ (Mark 4:27). He even shockingly says to let the good and bad seeds grow together until the harvest (Matthew 13:30). He seems to be willing to live with non-perfection, surely representing the cosmic patience and freedom of God, who is Infinite Love and Life that finally fills all gaps.”

As we approach the longest night of the year in this time of Advent, how can you be a lunar practitioner of patience today? Can you be with the transformative struggle that happens only in the shadows of life?



Cascade Head, Oregon

Burning the Headland

In her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, botanist and poet Robin Wall Kimmerer relates a story from the Pacific rainforests. When those who went out in the canoes were too long gone, the people lit a fire of driftwood on the beach to guide them back home, as one cove or beach can look the same as any other, especially in dense fog.

“And so it is too that the people [would] make ready for the arrival of their brothers who bring food in the canoe of their bodies,” Kimmerer writes. If a summer had gone on too long, the people would worry that the salmon had lost their way. They would set fire to the grasses atop Cascade Head as “a beacon to bring their brothers home.”

For what or whom do you wait? What beacon fires will you (or have you) set alight in welcome and to guide the way?



The Visitation (He Qi)

God Is With Us

O come, O come, Emmanuel
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear

The first verse of this beautiful ancient hymn is a plaintive cry, acknowledging the pain of our loneliness and separation from God.

Rejoice, rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel

But the refrain and the verses that follow are filled with hope—a joyous reminder that God will come to each of us and to all nations, rescuing us from death. It is a reminder to open our hearts and prepare for God’s coming during this holy season of Advent.

In what ways do you experience separation from God, a sense of “God-without”? In what ways do you experience or want to experience connection or togetherness with God, a sense of “God-with”?

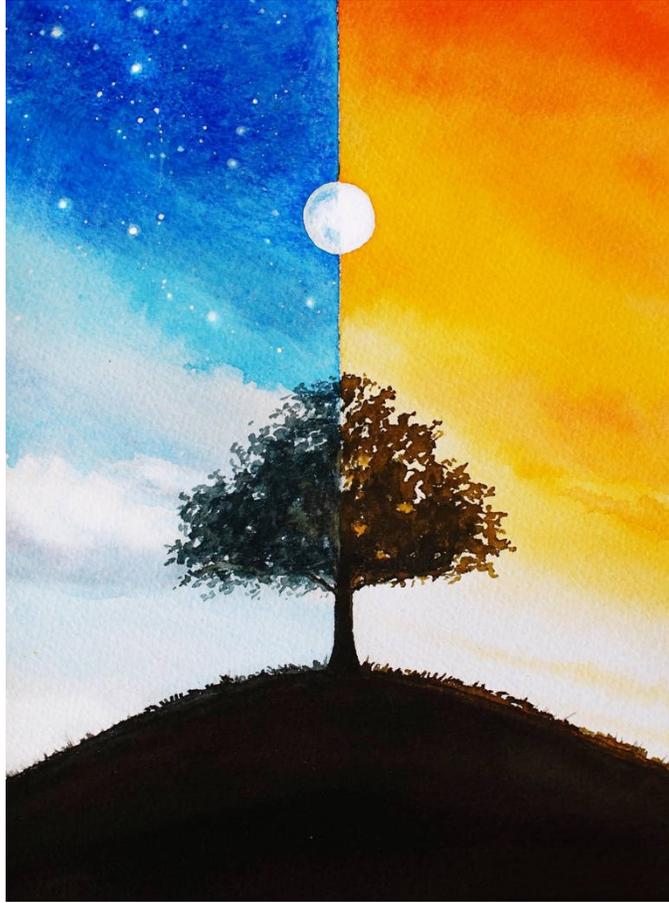


The Danger

Christian mystic Simone Weil wrote, “The danger is not that the soul should doubt whether there is any bread, but that, by a lie, it should persuade itself that it is not hungry.”

When have you doubted the presence of the “bread” that satisfies the hunger in your soul?

Where do you experience an absence of hunger? What untrue things might you have come to believe that lead to this experience of absence?



I Am

Behind the Polarities is Wholeness

Spiritual teacher Ram Dass cautions us that if we get trapped in the struggle of polarities — a mindset of either this or that — then we miss the fuller nature of our being and the world. We risk making important decisions on behalf of ourselves and others based on only one belief — an illusion, just a part of the truth. To be wise, we must learn to trust that there is more to the story and become deeper listeners.

Dass says, “A lot of people try to counteract [the belief that] ‘I am not good enough’ with [the belief that] ‘I am good enough.’ In other words, they take the opposite [belief] and they try to invest it. That still keeps the world at the level of polarities. So the act is to go not to the world of ‘I am good’ to counteract ‘I am bad,’ or ‘I am lovable’ as opposed to ‘I am unlovable,’ but to go behind it to ‘I am. I am. I am.’ And ‘I am’ includes the fact that I do crappy things and I do beautiful things and I am. That includes everything and I am.”

Bring to mind a negative belief about yourself. Counter that belief with its opposite. Then, in a moment of settled quietude, repeat to yourself, “I am. I am. I am.”

Did a shift occur? Can you allow that same wholeness for others today?



Friendship Candle

The Light Within Us

Let us dare say
that in the midst of awful stillness,
in the midst of anguish, darkness, emptiness,
there dwells complete, mysterious Light.

This is the Light
that forms our minds and hearts.
This is the Light that falls on the words
of our mouth,
making them alive and shining.

This Light is ready to emerge, break forth,
even through the most broken
minds, hearts, and bodies.
Light wishing to be born,
to be as is:
wonderful, peaceful, alive.

Fr. Pat Twohy, SJ
from "The Light Within Us", *Finding A Way Home*

When do you feel most connected to or emboldened by the "complete, mysterious Light" that dwells within you?

If this Light is "ready to emerge", are you ready for its emergence? What would it take for it to be fully born and brought into the world? What can you do, or who can you ask for help, to facilitate and prepare for this process of birth?



Hands (Leigh Wells)

A Messy and Necessary Work

“Forgiveness, I am learning, cannot stand as a single, once-and-for-all event. Every morning brings a fresh coffeepot, and a fresh chance to get back to this messy and necessary work.”

Seth Haines

Coming Clean: A Story of Faith

*What messy work of forgiveness are you engaging in with your community?
With your locale? With the broader world?*

What messy work of forgiveness is stirring in your relationship with yourself?



Short-stalked Russula mushrooms

Death Eaters to the Rescue

“All the devils I meet are angels in disguise.”

Indigo Girls, “Jonas & Ezekiel”
Rites of Passage (1992)

Fungi. Underground dwellers associated with the dark and dank, they are often overlooked, maligned, and even feared. Yet it is the death eaters among them, the consumers of decaying plants and animals, who take all that those lives contained and return it to the living.

Fungi offer us salvation from pollution — they can bind up heavy metals, pull pollutants from water, and even chew up plastic and other petroleum-based substances, spitting out only water and air in return. Fungi partner with plants, creating a great underground web that strengthens both, a network where food, nutrients, and chemical messages can be exchanged. Turns out the underworld is full of medicine-makers, soil-creators, alchemists, plant-empowerers.

Look into the shadows in your world; look among the garbage. Can you recognize what is rotting into rich fodder?

Think on the devils you face. Look again — look closely for the angels in disguise.



Filament, filament, filament

A Noiseless Patient Spider

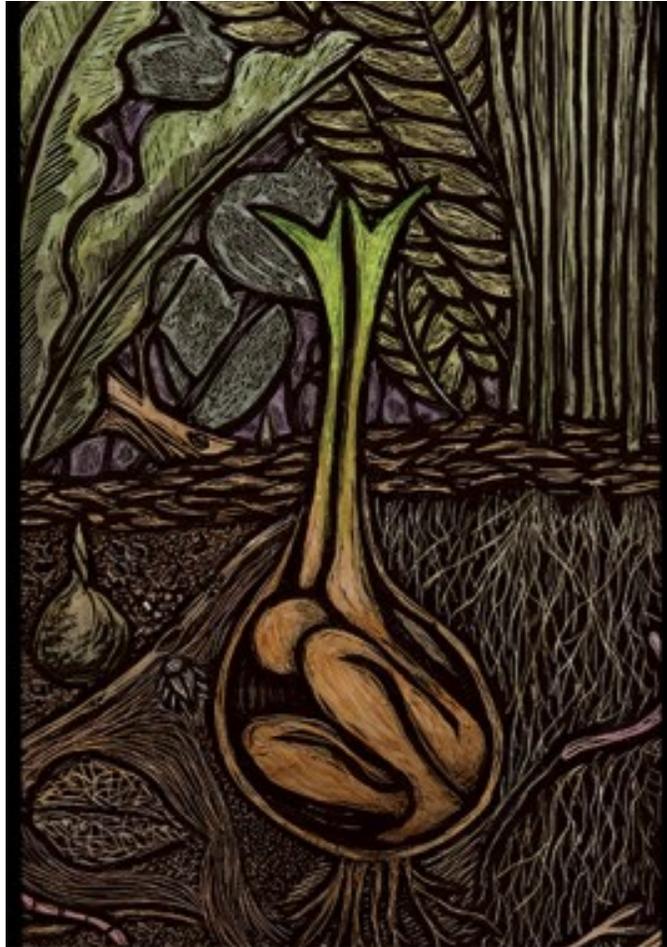
A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood, isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my Soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing,
 seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form'd,
 till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my
Soul.

Walt Whitman
Leaves of Grass

*Where in your spiritual journey have you noticed or needed patience?
When have you, too, felt "surrounded, detached, in measureless
oceans of space"?*

Why do you think it is important that the spider is "noiseless"?



On the Deregulation of Life (Ricardo Levins Morales)

An Environment that Sustains

In her book *Trauma Stewardship*, Laura van Dernoot Lipsky gives careworkers a guide to care for themselves as they also care for others. In caring for ourselves she calls us to build compassion and community.

“To the south we call upon the peace and removal that come from the earth element. By developing a microculture of supportive friends and family, we create an environment that sustains us, just as the earth does. By being compassionate to ourselves and others, we ground ourselves. This is where we come out of isolation, tap into the core energies of Mother Nature, and tend to both our individual and collective health and wellness.”

What do you plan to do to ground yourself in community? What will you do to build community to sustain yourself and others during difficult times? What other communities need your care, or can you find care?



Cultivating Wonder

In this hectic season help us to remember,
even the simplest actions count.
Let us pause and take a breath
to feel the miracle of air filling and emptying within,
as though God is breathing into us.

Let our eyes really see.
How does sunlight glow on tree leaves?
How do stars glimmer in the night sky?
Help us pay attention. What does an apple really taste like?

Let us walk outdoors and feel the air moving,
see clouds shifting or shimmering at sunset.
Help us shake hands or embrace
and feel the warmth of another human being.

Let us look a person in the eyes and
discover the sparkle of a fellow soul.
May we give and receive kindness,
for that is where God lives.

Tina Datsko de Sánchez
Cultivating Wonder

What are you going to do to ground yourself in community? What will you do to build community to sustain yourself and others during difficult times? What other communities can you tap into?



Pay Attention

Praying

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

Mary Oliver
Thirst

What are you thankful for today?

In the past week, when have you heard your heart singing?

If you were to pick one thing to "pay attention" to, what would it be?



Where I Stand (Claire Rawson, Woodburn '17-18)

Be Where Your Feet Are

A fellow Jesuit Volunteer shared this phrase with me during our year together, and it is something I have often repeated to myself since.

Our feet and bodies carry us to and through all different spaces and communities. Often we arrive somewhere without savoring the steps to get there. We may stand or sit or simply exist in a space, while our minds and maybe hearts are someplace else.

There is a gift and privilege in taking time and energy to enjoy moments of being, even as we know that they may take the place of moments of doing. We are called to show up, and doing so invites more than just a physical presence; compassion, courage, connection, and community happen when we take moments to truly *be where our feet are*.

When was the last time you felt truly present in a moment? When have you found yourself repeatedly straying from where your feet are this year? What would it look like to “be” rather than “do”?



Inspirit (Jeff Manning)

With These Hands

If you look deeply into the palm of your hand,
you will see your parents
and all generations of your ancestors.
All of them are alive in this moment.
Each is present in your body.
You are the continuation of each of these people.

Thich Nhat Hanh

Imagine a relative whose life carries on through your hands.

Think about how your hands have served you over the years: from birth and childhood, from adolescence, from adulthood, from the beginning of your experience as a Jesuit Volunteer.

How does your personal and familial history connect to your current sense of self? What experiences, stories, and wisdoms of your ancestors and relatives do your hands carry into this present moment?

On the palm of your hand, write a note or poem or draw a picture based on this connection. Take a picture of your hand and send it to a relative.

If you have come
to help me you are
wasting your time.
But if you have
come because your
liberation is bound
up with mine, then
let us work together.

ABORIGINAL
ACTIVIST'S
GROUP
QUEENSLAND, 1970s

Ricardo Levins Morales

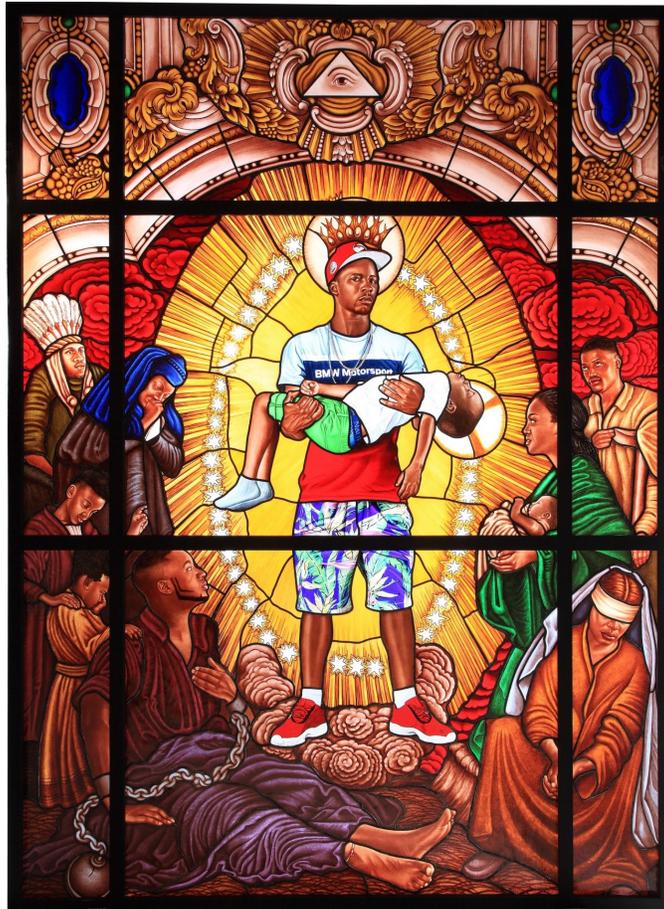
Suffering Love

I went to church on Sunday with a heavy heart for our suffering nation and world. I was stirred and quieted by the homily offered by The Very Rev. Nathan LeRud. This is a summary of what remained in my heart and mind during my walk home.

Suffering is universal. It is seen and unseen. We all suffer. And the questions here are, “What kind of person do you want to be in the midst of that suffering?” and, “What tools liberate us from suffering?”

In his seminal book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl suggests that a primal urge for human beings is to make meaning out of suffering. While we may not choose suffering, we can choose how we respond to it. And our liberation from our own suffering is bound up with the encounter of someone else's suffering — not to fix them or solve a problem, but to learn how to be with suffering people. Being with, liberation, love.

In this particularly dark time of the year, can you intentionally choose to be present to the suffering of others, to be a ministry of presence to those in need? Where is your own suffering in the midst of this encounter? Where is the liberation in this?



Mary, Comforter of the Afflicted II (Kehinde Wiley)

Alive Somewhere Better

paradise is a world where everything
is a sanctuary and nothing is a gun.

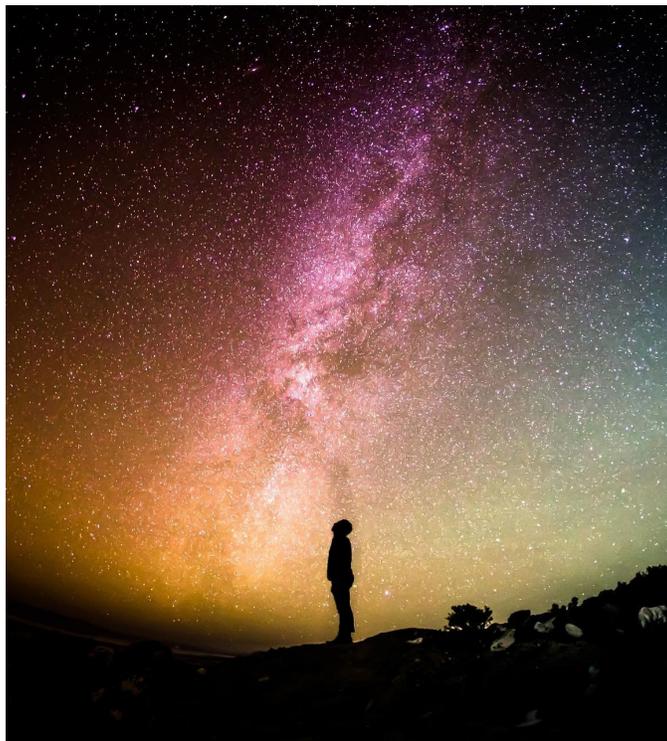
In their poem “summer, somewhere” from *Don't Call Us Dead*,
Danez Smith visions a place on the other side of death where
Black boys killed by police are reborn, fully alive and fully free.

this is how we are born: come morning
after we cypher/feast/hoop, we dig
a new boy from the ground, take
him out his treebox, shake worms
from his braids. ...
we say congrats, you're a boy again!
we give him a durag, a bowl, a second chance.

As of November 2018, police have shot and killed 867 people,
22% of whom were Black. (Black people make up 13% of the
national population.) Of those killed who were Black, 41%
were under the age of 30. These are the ones who dwell in
Smith's paradise, the “metal-less side of the mountain” where
“everybody wanna be black & is.”

*Spend some time today meditating on the paradise Smith proposes in their
poem. What feelings does it evoke in you?*

*In his Lamentation collection, American portrait artist Kehinde Wiley
presents the figure of Mary as various people of color, including in this piece
as a young Black man. What does this piece make you think about?
Where do you see crossover between Wiley's painting and Smith's poem?*



The scale of things

Brightly and Humbly

Wisdom is knowing I am nothing,
love is knowing I am everything,
and between the two my life moves.

Nisargadatta Maharaj

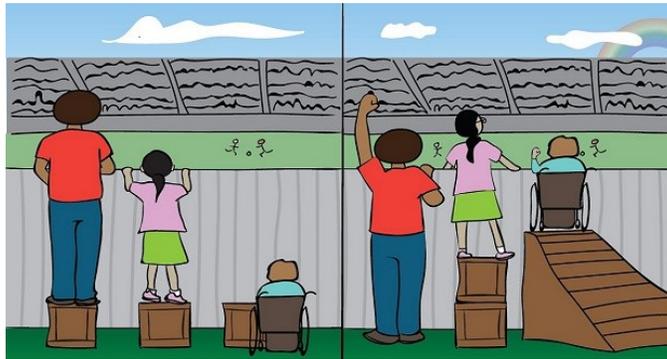
Have you ever gazed up at the night sky where there are no city lights to compete with the unfathomable galaxy of stars? Perhaps you felt small, a moment of “being nothing”.

Have you ever experienced the unbridled love, gratitude, or adoration of another for you? Perhaps you were aware in that very moment that your presence profoundly matters.

What a paradox to discover that you are nothing and everything all at once! Such humbleness and warmth can bring us to our knees. But mostly we’re moving through life forgetting one or the other of these paradoxical truths. Just being human. And sometimes forgetting your wholeness can cause you and others suffering.

As the Serbian proverb says: “Be humble, for you are made of earth. Be noble, for you are made of stars.”

Go out in the world and shine brightly today, with a humble heart!



Equality vs. Equity, from Second Line Education

People Who Add Richly to Our World

“Those who are [disempowered] have great difficulty finding their place in our society. The image of the ideal human as powerful and capable disenfranchises [people who are] old, sick, [differently] abled. For me, society must, by definition, be inclusive of the needs and gifts of all its members. How can we lay claim to making an open and friendly society where human rights are respected and fostered when, by the values we teach and foster, we systematically exclude segments of our population?”

I believe that those we most often exclude from the normal life of society — people with disabilities — have profound lessons to teach us. When we do include them, they add richly to our lives and add immensely to our world.”

Jean Vanier
Becoming Human

In community, at service, and elsewhere, how do you actively include people more in conversations, activities, gatherings, and the like?

In this season of Advent — Arriving — where do you need to arrive for others? Where do you need to reposition yourself so others can arrive?

When would it be more fitting to replace the Golden Rule (treating others how you want to be treated) with the Platinum Rule (treating others how they want to be treated)?



A True Order

A True Order for Spiritual Work

“So often in ministry, I have wanted to do it by myself. If it didn’t work, I went to others and said, ‘Please!’ searching for a community to help me. If that didn’t work, maybe I’d start praying. But the order that Jesus teaches us [in Luke 6:12-19] is the reverse. It begins by being with God in solitude; then it creates a fellowship, a community of people with whom the mission is being lived; and finally this community goes out together to heal and to proclaim good news.”

Henri Nouwen

Where do you see the Divine in solitude, community, and service? Are these three elements—solitude, community, and service—balanced in your life?



Last Night (Lydia Wilson, Aloha '17-18)

Showing Up

“The willingness to show up changes us, it makes us a little braver each time.”

Brené Brown
Daring Greatly

In my year of living in community, I was forced to examine deep wounds from my past. My community mates helped me overcome my fears of vulnerability and weakness. They sat with me in the silences, held me, cried with me, and laughed with me. They made me brave. And they continue to, every day.

What does “showing up” mean to you? In what ways has your community shown up or not shown up for you this year? How will you show up for others?



Tulip shoots breaking ground

The Resurrection is Birth

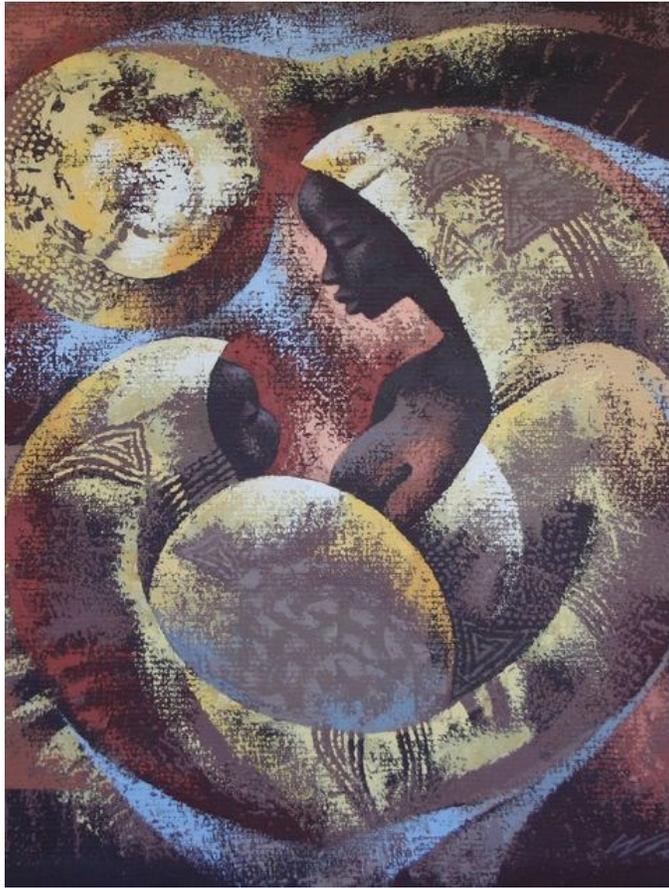
When [you and your JV community mates] moved in together it was in a way like burying some of yourself to the wishes of community. And now you are pushing through, becoming ever more aware of its beauty, challenges, and wonder.

Yet Saint Paul tells it well when he says, “The whole of creation (including JVs) is groaning in one great act of giving birth.”

Community isn’t easy, but it is the Spirit. She’s always pushing, tugging, demanding, prompting, surprising, urging. It is all about birth. The resurrection is birth into the real world of light.

Fr. Jack Morris, SJ
Letter to JVs, Spring 2009

Where do you feel the pangs, prompts, and pushes of the Spirit’s work in your community? How does your journey of growth in community reflect the greater narrative of the whole of creation?



Love Cocoon (Wiz Kudowor)

Patient Trust

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
That it is made by passing through
some stages of instability —
and that it may take a very long time.

Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ
from "Patient Trust"

In this season of "Arriving", where do you need to pause, slow down, and practice patience — at service, in community, in a relationship with a love one?

Walter Burghardt once described contemplation as taking a "long, loving look at the real." How can you create reflective space to take a "long, loving look" at "the intermediate stages" and the "stages of instability" in your life?