


Middler Vocational/Theological Statement
Pacific School of Religion
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Poetics of Faith

'Straight to the point'
can ricochet
unconvincing.
Circumlocution, analogy,
parable's ambiguities, provide
context, stepping stones.

Most of the time. And then

the lightning power
amidst these indirections
of plain
unheralded miracle!
For example,
As if forgetting
to prepare them, He simply
walks on water
toward them, casually –
and impetuous Peter, empowered,
jumps from the boat and rushes
on wave-tip to meet Him –
a few steps, anyway –
(till it occurs to him,
'I can't, this is preposterous'
and Jesus has to grab him,
tumble his weight
back over the gunwale).
Sustaining those light and swift
steps was more than Peter
could manage. Still,
years later,
his toes and insteps, just before sleep
would remember their passage.

–Denise Levertov

What Your Feet Know

It happens all the time. Maybe you're sitting in the doorway of your tent. Maybe you're out in the wilderness, keeping track of your father-in-law's flocks. Or maybe you're drifting and drowsing out there in the middle of the lake. Wherever it happens, it is always heart and feet that remember first. Out of the blue, bypassing all the slow circuitry

of reason and consequence, heart and feet conspire to recognize the One you have always known. And before you can think to stop them, your feet are in motion: leaping to greet those strange visitors; throwing off your shoes to touch that holy ground. Even launching you onto the tips of the afternoon waves, so eager are they to meet the One who is the very Life of your life. In that instant, what your feet know—long before you know it yourself, and long after you have forgotten—is that you and that Life are one and the same.

If you are very lucky, you have friends around out there on the lake. Friends who will help you catch your breath and dry your hair; friends who will row with you in silence all the way home. Later, there will be time for words. Words for the stories we tell. Words for all the songs we sing to help ourselves remember that afternoon on the lake, and those steps, light and swift, our own feet dared to take.

Contexts and Stepping Stones

So many communities have nurtured me with their stories and songs, helping me find words for the miracles of recognition and memory that knock us out of our shoes, and out of our small boats, again and again. I believe that these intentional communities of memory and faith, along with the holy “contexts and stepping stones” of the traditions we tend, embody humanity’s best hope of remembering our miraculous moments of deep recognition and love, and of reshaping our lives—and our world—in their wake. I name here just a few of the communities and traditions that have taught me to keep watch out on the water, and who have helped me row home.

While the religious and cultural context of my first spiritual formation was very different than the one I now inhabit, it would be hard to overestimate either its

importance or the degree to which it continues to live in my bones as well as in my soul. Growing up in synagogues within the Reform and Jewish Renewal movements, I absorbed an ethic of what Rabbi Arthur Waskow calls “Godwrestling”: the understanding that while God’s revelation to humanity may have its dramatic moments of burning bushes and walks across the lake, everything we create in the wake of these encounters—scripture, tradition, theology, culture—involves translation and interpretation. For this reason, it is our sacred obligation to become active and discerning interpreters ourselves, wrestling with texts, with traditions, and with all received notions of God until they yield the very particular revelation they hold for our current lives and historical circumstances. What I learned in these communities is that this active wrestling with the God we remember in our bones, and the God we encounter in the world, is the holy work of the community of faith, and is required of all its members, young and old.

Also crucial to my earliest faith formation was a twofold commitment to the recovery of the mystical and contemplative strains of Jewish tradition, and to the struggle for justice and peace. I will always be grateful to these earliest communities for making it absolutely clear to me—probably more by example than by explicit instruction—that God always calls us simultaneously to an inward and an outward journey of liberation and transformation. Returning again and again to welcome the Holy One within, we can learn to recognize that very One in every face, in every leaf, and on every inch of this burning, suffering, and always holy ground.

It would be difficult in such a short space to try and relate the events that led me to leave the Jewish community and to go looking for a new spiritual home. I think it will suffice to say that at a certain point, I found that I could no longer fit my changing experience of God into the liturgies that had formed me. And yet, even as I felt more and

more distance from Jewish communal worship, the mystical and contemplative stream of Jewish tradition continued to help me listen for the deepest longing of my soul—a longing for God that eventually led me off the path I had been walking toward rabbinical school, out of the Jewish community altogether, and (to my enormous surprise) into the Christian contemplative tradition. It was here that I fell, finally, into the arms of the God I had been seeking all my life. I think it's worth mentioning that my conversion to Christianity took place on this contemplative path, and that it was in this context that I began to rework my lived relationship with God, and my theology, long before I ever actually set foot in a church. I think this progression helps to explain the fact that although the outward forms of my faith changed dramatically, the transition felt seamless to me. It is my belief that this seamlessness can best be explained by the fact of our essential oneness, and by the memory of this oneness as preserved in the world's wisdom traditions: an "experiential knowing"¹ that underlies all the world's outwardly diverse religious systems, and that has been preserved in the mystical and contemplative streams of each. In the words of theologian Bruno Barnhart, "in this sapiential knowing which is not purely objective but participatory, one shares in that which one knows, and knows it in the sharing. Ultimately...it is a knowing by union, by identity. Here, in the language of antiquity, the knower, the knowing, and the known are one."²

Of course, despite the shared wisdom foundations of our various religious traditions, their outward, relentlessly rational, and often divisive structures must still be reckoned with— not to mention all the painful historical baggage they carry, particularly in the case of Jewish-to-Christian conversions. People often wonder, usually with some

¹ Bruno Barnhart, *The Future of Wisdom: Toward a Rebirth of Sapiential Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 6.

² *Ibid.*, 52

mixture of astonishment and betrayal, how I could possibly have moved from the heart of one tradition into the heart of the other. At these moments, it is always difficult to explain how astonishing it was to step into a church and see my own faith articulated so visibly among Christians—a people I had been brought up to think of as entirely “other.” Harder still is to try and explain how perfectly natural it felt to be among them. Standing in church that first morning, I felt as if my own heart had been turned inside out, my soul’s deepest truths suddenly made visible in prayer, song, and embodied love. I mention this because I believe that this experience of simultaneous sameness and difference continues to be foundational to my theology, and to my sense of what it means to live in a world full of people from whom we differ in marvelous ways, and with whom we are also one in God.

I should also say that for me, as for many other LGBT persons, the process of coming out has been a deeply formative experience, one that calls me again and again to be attentive to my own deepest truth and to speak that truth even when it brings me into conflict with others and forces me to walk through my fear. Of course, coming out isn’t something we do once and for all. Every day, we are all—every one of us—called in some way to shed the layers of defense that hide our deepest truth and that keep us from seeing one another as unique and beloved children of God. Every time I come out—as a lesbian, as a Christian, as a Christian who grew up Jewish—I learn something new about the power of truth to heal and transform us as individuals and communities in the face of magnificent difference. I also learn something about the need to celebrate and honor difference even while crossing the boundaries that have historically divided us. While I believe that the church is indeed called to the work of building relationships across traditional lines of division, I also believe that because of Christianity’s long and painful

history of imposing its will on those less powerful, modern Christians must step into neighboring territories with great tenderness, taking care to respect the differences that continue to be essential to the identity and survival of religious and cultural minorities.

Out On the Water

I believe that the story of our journey with God is a story of recognition and forgetfulness. All along the way, there are moments of miraculous recognition: moments that send us leaping overboard with joy, willing to give our lives to the truth we suddenly know. In these moments, face to face with the Holy One, we know beyond any doubt that we, also, are One: one with God, one with each other, and one with all creation. These are the high points of our individual and collective journeys, moments when we suddenly find ourselves in the kingdom of God—a state in which the center of our consciousness somehow escapes the prison of the small, individual mind and flies into the larger Mind of God.

And then we forget. Sometimes midair. Sometimes not until we are safely back on land. But sooner or later, we fall back into our much more familiar, and much smaller, everyday mind. This is the egoic, or dualistic, mind: a state of consciousness in which we are always on the alert for difference, separation, and danger. Neuroscience calls this smaller mind the “reptilian brain,” and tells us that it is the job of this part of the brain to keep watch for anything that might threaten our survival. Ancient and primal, this is the mind of fear, the mind our earliest ancestors relied on to survive, and the mind we slip into as our default state of consciousness. Without our conscious effort and attention (not to mention the occasional miracle) we see our world through the lens of the often

paranoid and always suspicious egoic mind: a mind that is constantly dividing the world into “us” and “them;” constantly urging us to protect whatever it is we think we own.

And so, in the wake of our miraculous moments in the kingdom of God, we fall back into egoic mind and frantically start to work: developing doctrines, issuing edicts, and building religious institutions to try and protect that stunning, miraculous insight we had into the very heart of God. The problem, of course, is that the systems we create with our profoundly dualistic egoic mind are directly antithetical to the very nature of the God we have encountered and long to meet again. The God we keep meeting out there in the afternoon sun is not, after all, the possessive, tribal God our ancestors once presumed. Rather, the God who keeps finding us is the God whom our deepest, most shocking monotheistic insight tells us is profoundly One: the undivided, indivisible God of all creation. What’s more, our collective moments of insight and recognition tell us again and again that this is not a static God who can be contained in any institutional or doctrinal box. On the contrary, the God who calls our feet out of their shoes and over the sides of our boats is the God who is indeed always one step ahead of us, calling us to let go of everything we thought we knew about ourselves and the world; a God who leads us into the wilderness, calls us out onto the water, and loves us right through the fears that contain our safe, small lives.

Of course, the God who is continually calling us out of all our carefully constructed vessels of understanding poses a big problem for theologians, whose job it is to satisfy our very human need to name and share our experience of the God who can never be contained in words. What we really need is a theology as comfortable with change and growth as the God it seeks to describe: a wide-open, nimble, and very forgiving theological boat, perhaps—one that can hold us safely while we catch our

breath and celebrate what we have seen, but that will easily tip us over the gunwales the minute God arrives to call us into deep waters once again. It seems to me that process theology, articulated by Catherine Keller as a theology of “immeasurable becoming,”³ might offer this kind of vessel: one that is flexible enough to keep up with the shifting currents of our life in God, allowing us to name the truths we experience while encouraging us to hold all our understandings provisionally. As we take to the water in just such a boat, pulling up to other boats to compare notes from our leaps and our swims, truth-making becomes a process: a radically relational endeavor that opens us to the lives and experiences of our fellow travelers as we work together to continually build, and continually revise, our understanding of God.

Needless to say, the idea of a shifting, evolving, and shared truth-making process can be disconcerting. After all, our scriptures and newspapers are littered with all kinds of schemes and atrocities carried out in the name of Truth, and the name of God. But there’s good news, and it hails from the place where the deeply relational and contingent realm of process theology meets the ancient insight of the world’s wisdom traditions: *We are not alone*. No matter how choppy it gets out there on the lake, and no matter how many times we lose our bearings, God is always right there in the water with us, gently urging us—all of us together—toward a truth which, as Keller puts it, always “furthers individual and social liberation.”⁴ In other words, God not only offers us the real and often terrifying freedom to choose, to experiment, and to discern our way in the world, but also fully enters into that truth-making process with us, calling us toward the truth

³ Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), xii.

⁴ Catherine Keller, “Scoop Up the Water and the Moon is in Your Hands: On Feminist Theology and Dynamic Self-Emptying,” in *The Self-Emptying God: a Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, ed. John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Evans (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 102-115.

that is most liberating and life-giving for everyone involved. (And everyone is always involved.) The insight shared by process theology and by the wisdom tradition is that the more we live into the freedom of God, for ourselves and for others, the more this freedom expands. In other words, if the truth I think I've found oppresses someone else, I need to be willing to abandon it. But if the truth I've found frees me to love, frees me to live, and frees others to do the same, I can be pretty sure I'm following the call of God, and that new choices are about to appear: brand-new possibilities that come into existence as the direct result of the liberating choice I've just made. And on it goes, in an infinite and infinitely creative process of freedom and grace, expanding every time we choose to follow the call of God.

The fact that modern process theologies and ancient wisdom traditions both understand that our life in God is always calling us into a process of transformation is exciting news for anyone who longs to build a faith that doesn't strangle the life out of the shifting, moving, becoming truth we've encountered. But I think there's even more good news to be had. Because in addition to the God-given grace of deep freedom and intimate relationship, I believe that human beings are gifted with a built-in truth-seeking mechanism that is always available to help us recognize God's liberating love and to discern the choices that will bring us into alignment with that love. And the key to this recognition lies in our ability to freely and consciously choose to move out of the egoic mind of fear and into the unitive mind of self-giving love. At its best, the human organism is finely tuned to physically *feel* the difference between these two poles—in our hearts, in our souls, and in our bodies. In other words, we have the ability to actually feel the current of liberating energy that begins to flow every time we pop out of fear and into love. This current is the very spirit and power of God: a power that moves through the

world but is not of the world; a power that originates with God and that returns to God; a power that flows through and among us, growing in strength and abundance even as we give it away. In our psyches, this current of liberating energy can be felt every time we move out of egoic mind and into the mind of Love. And when this current is released, our bodies respond with joy: a free-flowing, powerful joy that acts as our inner compass, pointing the way to liberation and calling us to follow. Better yet, this joy observes no boundaries. The very joy that lifts our hearts when we break free of our own inner bondage is exactly the thrill of joy we feel when we meet the spirit and power of God liberating someone else. I believe that this joy is the key that lets us recognize, with our hearts and with our feet, the truth of God. When we meet that truth, we know it: joy meets joy, freedom meets freedom, and we leap—all of us together—into the kingdom of God.

An inner compass of joy. It's enough to make a person agree with the psalmist that we are indeed "fearfully and wonderfully made." It's also the truth that theologians, depth psychologists, and contemplatives of every stripe have been naming, in their various ways, for many centuries. The problem is that the compass of joy simply doesn't function when we are locked in the prison of the egoic mind. Somehow, the force field of fear generated by this small, terrified mind throws our internal, God-seeking compass completely out of whack. Trapped in the egoic mind, we can no longer even imagine the liberating possibilities in ourselves or in the world, much less act on them. This is why all the world's religious traditions, somewhere in their tool kits, offer spiritual practices designed to sweep us out of the isolation of the egoic mind and into the liberating power and joy of our oneness with God, with each other, and with all of creation. In Christian terms, this is exactly what it means to put on the "mind of Christ": to train our minds to

become so transparent to God, and so free of egoic fears and divisions, that we come to embody the liberating, self-giving love of God, and can walk through the world empowering others to do the same. When we manage to do this, our moments of inhabiting the mind of Christ (our own right mind!) are precisely those moments of stunning recognition that cause us to throw ourselves overboard into the arms of Love. Suddenly, there is no reason to hold anything back: self and other, water and air—all are one in a flow of love that is bigger than anything we can name or control.

Needless to say, the transformation of consciousness that carries us out of egoic mind and into the unitive mind of self-giving love is a slow and painful process, requiring infinite attention to our state of inner freedom and unfreedom, as well as a willingness to dismantle the oppressive notions and institutions we've created and received. In fact, it seems that the process by which we get there might in fact be nothing short of the incarnation of God in us. It is a painful and exceedingly costly process. But then, as far as we know, all incarnations are. And here lies the deep insight, and good news, of all the world's wisdom traditions: the demanding work of incarnation is ours to do, but God is right here with us, helping, calling, and praying us through the painful, intricate journey into freedom and new life, and sending the one who has managed it—the Christ of God—to help us do it. Christian tradition knows this Christ of God as Jesus of Nazareth. But every religious tradition, somewhere in its memory, offers us a savior or enlightened one who knows the way, along with a set of tools to help us along. Which is a very good thing. Because if humanity is going to take this path—and I believe it is the only path that can save us—we are going to need all the help we can get: every ounce of wisdom the human race has accumulated, and every true savior, to help us accomplish the task of ushering in the reign of God.

Of course, this is a departure from traditional notions of soteriology, which hold that the savior is one who comes to do the salvific work that we cannot accomplish for ourselves, offering himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins and descending to the depths of this mortal, material world in order to redeem a creation that has fallen away from God. The wisdom tradition, however, understands that creation is forever sustained and suffused by the loving, indwelling presence of God: an immanent presence that binds all together, like to like, in a matrix of creative, flowing, radically relational and self-giving love. This love is, in fact, our inviolable nature and destiny, shared by every infinitesimal particle of this world. Seen through the lens of the wisdom tradition, then, the work of the savior is not to redeem a fallen creation, because nothing can ever fall out of God. Rather, the job of the savior is to pop us out of the egoic mind long enough that we can see our notions of separation and fallenness for the *pure illusion* that they are. In the wisdom tradition, the savior—the Christ or Sophia of God—dissolves our illusion of separateness by embodying the astonishing truth of our oneness with God, and shows us that we can do the same, *no matter what*. This, for me, describes the person and work of Jesus as the Christ of God: the one who comes to *reveal* to us, beyond any doubt, that there is no place that God is not, no person that God can't love, and no circumstance that God can't work with to produce liberation and new life—as long as we refuse to succumb to the fears and divisions of the egoic mind. The catch is that we have to learn to let go of ego's agenda, even in those moments when we are most tempted to defend and to cling. Even in the midst of the pain we cause one another (especially in the midst of this pain), the Christ arrives to say that if you can do it, if you can keep your heart open and give everything away in love, exactly as God does—that's the moment when God's power flows in to change everything.

Needless to say, one of the things first things this path may cost us is our attachment to traditional Christological formulations that posit a fundamental separation between humanity and God, between Christians and our neighbors, and between God and a fallen creation. These supremely dualistic Christologies are the unmistakable result of our collective egoic mind run amuck in the fields of Christian theology: a mind that has caused a degree of personal suffering, interfaith alienation, and disdain for life on this planet that we can no longer afford. What we need are new Christologies that support, rather than hinder, our collective transformation into unitive consciousness. And I believe that as Christians, the task of developing these new Christologies is our most urgent and salvific work. For this reason, I am deeply grateful to the work of theologians such as Bruno Barnhart and Cynthia Bourgeault, who locate the person and work of Jesus squarely within Christianity's wisdom tradition, as well as the many feminist theologians working to reclaim and articulate the ancient sophiological traditions of Jewish and Christian thought. Since arriving at seminary, I have also been particularly grateful to encounter Asian theologians such as Stanley Samartha and Raimon Panikkar, who are doing the desperately needed work of developing ethical Christologies that bring Christianity into right relationship with other faith traditions.

That said, I think it's important to talk about traditional Christological formulations, and about their real importance to the lives of many Christians. Because I came to Christianity as an adult, I was able to work out my own understanding of Jesus without having to first free myself from received Christologies. However, as someone who was deeply formed by a childhood faith community, I know firsthand how persistent our attachments to the theologies of our families and communities of origin can be. While it has been many years since I have worshipped in Jewish communities, I can still find

myself completely overwhelmed by the music and words of those liturgies. So, for example, while I am not personally fond of Christian atonement theories, I do understand how important these formulations can be to many people, linking them through time and space to the families, pastors, and communities who formed their faith. One of the tremendous gifts I've received here at the GTU is the opportunity to take classes at various seminaries in which my classmates tend to embrace Christologies that are very different from my own—Christologies that bring them into deep, personal, and often transformative relationship with Jesus Christ, and with God.

While I do believe that our shared task is to search for multiple new Christologies that can heal our relationships with other human beings and with a planet that is desperately in need of our care, I also believe that as Christians of different political and theological persuasions, we must somehow find a way to meet one another in great gentleness as we seek to move beyond the restrictions of our old theological concepts. Often, this means not being too quick to throw out the traditional formulations that continue to hold emotional power for many. Rather, I think our path may lie in reinterpreting these formulations together, seeking to imagine them in ways that that leave open the possibility of real and deep relationship with Jesus as the Christ of God while helping us to live into ethical relationships with friends and neighbors who come to God through different paths and in the company of different saviors. In my experience, this involves reading these formulations in a more symbolic and less literal light than they have traditionally been seen, and becoming aware of the ways in which these symbols point to our inner psychic processes of transformation. Once again, theologians from the Christian contemplative tradition can be of enormous help here, applying the transformative work of the Christ to the inner conversion of our own hearts, rather than

focusing on the outward conversion of our neighbors. In addition, I believe it is crucial for those of us who are developing new Christologies to bring these out into the public arena. This can be difficult work, of course, given the embattled and often divisive nature of public discourse on the topic of Jesus Christ. But I believe these conversations have the power to take us directly into the heart of our relationship with God and with each other, and that we can rightly claim the transformative presence and power of Jesus in the service of this most urgent and healing work.

Meanwhile, Back in the Boat...

As Jesus would probably be the first to admit, the transformation of consciousness is a stunningly difficult path that demands deep self-knowledge, tremendous discipline, and radical openness to the God who is continually calling us to let go of everything we think we are, in the service of what we might yet become. Needless to say, it's a path that's as painful as it is difficult, especially once we commit to living without ego's beloved paddings and protections. If we can stand the pain, however—the pain of dying to self again and again—it leads every time to a bigger love than we can possibly imagine.

How, then, do we manage it? We need two things. We need to see the truth of non-separation again and again, and we need a way to put that truth into practice. I believe it is the gift—and extraordinarily good news—of Jesus to offer us both: continued, patient teachings designed to remind us of the truth of our oneness every time we forget, and a very clear model of how, exactly, to embody this oneness in the very real and difficult circumstances of our lives. The trouble is that in order to see and hear and live this message—in our scriptures and in our lives—we need to get out of the egoic,

self-centered mind long enough to see with new eyes and hear with new ears. And this is why Jesus so often teaches through the exasperating “indirections” of parable and miracle: stories and events that so confound the small, linear, egoic mind that we are finally forced to pop right out of it—and into a mind that lets us glimpse (for a minute, anyway) a far bigger and always liberating truth.

And so it goes: moments of joyful reunion with very Source of Life, separated by long periods when the best we can do is sing the songs, and tell the stories, that keep our souls alive in a long drought of forgetfulness. The good news, I think, is that scripture and tradition are full of help—practices and prayers, warnings and wisdoms—that can help us open to the love that is always trying to change our minds and our hearts in a constant conversion to the ways of God. However, in order to make use of this help, we need to be able to “read” scripture and tradition through the lens of transformation—a lens that lets us see not only the visible, outer oppressions in our lives, but also the inner bondage to the egoic mind that keeps those outer oppressions in place. In other words, if we want to reclaim our tradition in the service of the transformative path, we need to pay as much attention to the work of inner transformation as we do to the outer work. This is the call of the wisdom path, and I believe it is exactly the call that Jesus himself issues, urging us to look inside ourselves as the source of the pain we see in the world. What Jesus seems to know is that without the work of inner transformation, our work in the world is not only ineffective, but also downright dangerous.

Why? Because unless we are continually owning and grappling with our own shadow, we will always reinscribe the evil of that shadow in the institutions we create. The history of religion is the history of human beings who, despite their stunning theological insights—despite those moments of holy Oneness on the lake—continue to

silence, hate, and kill one another in the name of the One who is Love. How is this possible? Because in our zeal to reform the outer structures of our world, we have persistently neglected the inner work of transformation and remained hopelessly rooted in the egoic mind. This is our default mind, and when it remains in place, it will always lead us to recreate its own divisions and unfreedoms, even when we think we are doing so in the name of peace. As people of God, we are always called to do the sacred work of dismantling the very systems of oppression (religious and secular) that have been built by the egoic, dualistic mind. But in order to do so, it is essential that we get out of that mind. In the words of the late Audre Lorde: “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”⁵ Until we commit ourselves to the path of inner transformation, the egoic mind will continue to be master of our collective house, creating the world in its own image. What’s more, our attachment to the perceived safety and control of the egoic mind makes us radically unavailable to the liberating power and presence of God. In fact, it is the ego’s *job* to maintain its own control, and to close us off to God and to one another. Becoming available to God—and available to do God’s work in the world—requires a radical vulnerability and loss of control that ego finds terrifying. And it is exactly this holy, terrifying, and transformative work that we need to very intentionally set ourselves to accomplishing.

I believe that the work of healing and transforming a broken world requires nothing less than attentive and dedicated spiritual practice, both in our individual lives and in our communities of faith. To this end, we need to reclaim the time-honored spiritual practices of the contemplative and experiential traditions that can help us—against egoic mind’s every instinct—to let go of our personal preferences and

⁵ Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in *Sister Outsider* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 110-113.

presumptions again and again. These are the practices that train and strengthen our recognition faculty, so that we can discern the call of God and distinguish it from the compelling (and very loud) call of the egoic mind. Fortunately, many different forms of meditation and prayer have been preserved and refined by some of Christian theology's finest minds, and I believe we need to teach and use these practices intentionally and communally. At the same time, we should certainly avail ourselves of the wisdom practices developed by all the world's religious traditions. In fact, I believe this is one of the most promising arenas for interfaith relationship, learning, and the deep joy that comes with finding, in the midst of all our differences, that we are indeed on the very same journey into the arms of the One.

In addition to these time-honored spiritual practices, some of the most stunningly effective tools for the journey of inner and outer transformation come from the field of depth psychology, and particularly from the frontiers of dream work. Through many years of studying and working with the dream, both on my own and with others, I have come to believe that the deep intention of the dream is always to lure us out of the egoic mind and into the mind of God. The dream does this by offering symbols that point simultaneously to the inner and outer paths of transformation, very quickly dissolving the illusion of separation between the individual and collective realms. In addition to the tremendous value of the dream itself to anyone on a spiritual journey, I believe that the practice of dream work in faith communities can hone our ability to read all symbolic texts (scripture included) for their inner and outer meanings simultaneously. Recently, I have had very good results using the tools of projective dreamwork to read scripture as our individual and collective dream—a dream that calls us to the fullness of life in God, and to the work of answering God's call to a bigger, more inclusive love.

Last, but certainly not least among our resources, I believe that the most important task of communal worship is to tip us right out of our safe, small, isolated minds and make us vulnerable once again to the power, presence, and call of God in our midst. Seen through the transformative lens of the wisdom tradition, the planning and practice of worship can be one of our most important spiritual disciplines, provided that we are willing to continually discern the particular forms of worship that will help each unique community make its journey of transformation. This kind of worship is not a mental exercise. Rather, it is fully embodied anamnesis: the crucial antidote to our perpetual human forgetfulness. Worship that is embodied and alive has the power to engage the visceral, powerful memory that lives not in our minds but in our hearts and souls and bones—the kind of sudden recognition that plunges us into the current of liberation and joy, carrying us out of our small, fearful minds and into the Mind of God. When we very intentionally enter the power and presence of this bigger mind together, we help one another to recognize God’s liberating call when we meet it, both in our own lives and in the world.

This kind of transformational practice happens best in a diverse community of all ages, in which people with different life experiences and angles of recognition can share their gifts and insights, holding one another safe while we become vulnerable, together, to God. For this reason, I believe it is essential to our children’s spiritual journeys that they be fully engaged in our worship life. Sunday school classrooms are lovely places. In fact, they are among my very favorite places in the world. But classrooms are designed by our collective egoic mind to transmit the rational knowledge (including a rational theology) that the egoic mind reveres. Certainly, religious education has its place. But nothing that happens in a classroom can ever replace the gift of living, breathing

community that is very intentionally practicing transformative worship in the service of embodied, experiential knowledge of God. Our children need and deserve to engage in this experiential practice with us every week—a practice they are unlikely to find anywhere else in their lives. Children need to see the adults in their lives being tipped joyfully out of our safe little boats and into the arms of God, and they need to be invited, and welcomed, to do the same. When this happens, children and adults help one another into the fullness of a sacramental life: eyes open, and feet ready, to meet the Holy One on the tip of every wave, and in the touch of every hand.

Thoughts on Ministry

The work of human transformation hasn't changed much since our ancestors first found themselves called out of their shoes, and out of their boats, by the Source of life. And yet, that very Source is the one who calls each one of us *by name*, and I'm pretty sure that our most critical task in this life is to figure out exactly what piece of God's healing work we are uniquely called to do, and precisely where we are called to do it.

After many years of trying to answer God's particular call to me in forests and fields, classrooms and libraries, I have come to the conclusion that the key to our individual and collective discernment of call lies in our willingness to faithfully apply a hermeneutics of joy to our lives, no matter how surprising the outcome may be. In fact, my journey to hear and answer God's call has put me in complete agreement with Brother David Steindl-Rast, who insists that the only name for God that ever really works is "Surprise."

Maybe I shouldn't be surprised anymore to find that every time I step into the deep current of joy, that current carries me very swiftly into the heart of a congregation.

Even at a congregation's most difficult and painful moments, there is nowhere on earth I would rather be than in the midst of a faith community that is searching, listening, and longing for the heart of God—and for the call that will help it carry God's love out into the world. One of the things I particularly love about the United Church of Christ is that our congregations have the freedom to answer that call in all the spectacularly diverse and surprising ways that we do. I believe that at their best, our churches are places where we very intentionally make ourselves open and vulnerable to the call of God, and where we give one another the freedom to answer that call in ways that look completely different in every congregation and every individual.

This kind of freedom and wide-open vulnerability to God require an enormous amount of safety and trust. For me, the work of ministry is the work of helping congregations create and hold that safe space, so that we may embody for one another both the tender care and the radical freedom of God—a freedom that longs to find its way out of our hearts and into the world. Over the past several years, I have had the great privilege of serving congregations as they do exactly this, and of seeing how breathtakingly *alive* everyone becomes as we climb out of our small, safe boats and meet each other in the deep, swift waters of God's own love. It is my extraordinary joy, and my continued hope, to help our congregations become places of both spiritual transformation and deep listening for the always surprising, and always liberating, call of God in our lives.