

Take it on the Road

Contemplation and Action—One Continuous Movement

Readings ~

“After this, Jesus appointed seventy-two others, and sent them on ahead in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. He said to them, “The harvest is rich, but the workers are few; therefore, ask the overseer to send workers to the harvest.” Luke 10:14-23*

“Having sent the crowds away, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray, remaining there all alone as night fell.” Matthew 14:23*

“The reputation of Jesus continued to grow. Large crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to some place where he could be alone and pray.” Luke 5:16

“Then Jesus told them: ‘Go into the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation. . . . Then, after speaking to them, the savior was taken up into heaven and took his seat as God’s right hand.’” Mark 16:15,20 *

Reflection ~

The gospels present a picture of contemplative engagement as Jesus lived it, day in and day out. Throughout the gospel stories we see the rhythm of Jesus’ deep connection and involvement in the daily lives of real people who suffer, struggle, search for meaning and purpose and Jesus’ intimate relationship with his ABBA. There is no separation between these. It is the love that flows between Jesus and his ABBA that flows into all his relationships and actions.

This is the contemplative engagement we are called to embody in our lives and ministries. The call to contemplative engagement has never been about withdrawal but about deep immersion both in the heart of the Beloved and in the world. This truth has been attested to by all the great mystics both within and beyond the Christian tradition. Think of

Hildegard of Bingen who wrote such ecstatic music and poetry and was involved in all the daily demands of overseeing a double monastery.

Teresa of Avila who spoke of finding God among the pots and pans.

Therese of Lisieux, who never left her cloister and was named the patron saint of missionaries.

Each was deeply immersed in love and service—love of the beloved that informed and shaped their immersion in the world and immersion in the world that shaped and informed their intimate relationship with the beloved.

To Ponder ~

- ❖ Can I identify some moments in the past month where I have known this experience of flow?
- ❖ What helps to foster this flow within me?
- ❖ What tends to impede this flow within me?

Consider the Following ~

“In practice the way to contemplation is an obscurity so obscure that it is no longer even dramatic. There is nothing left in it that can be grasped and cherished as heroic or even unusual. And so, for a contemplative there is a supreme value in the ordinary routine of work and poverty and hardship and monotony that characterize the lives of all the poor and uninteresting and forgotten people in the world.”

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*

**“Before enlightenment, chop wood and carry water.
After enlightenment, chop wood and carry water.”**

“After the Ecstasy, the Laundry.”

Book title by Jack Kornfeld

Authentic contemplative engagement is a way of living that can be practiced with each breath that we take. No matter what our life circumstances are, at any moment we can send the energy of love into the universe and that energy of love contributes to the transformation of all creation.

It is how the Holy One is “doing something new.” There is no more important activity in which we can engage than contributing to this flow of love in the universe. And this can be done anywhere, anytime, under any circumstances—in chapel, in a team meeting, feeding the homeless, lying waiting for the nurse to come and assist us. It is quite simply about being deeply present to the moment, doing whatever we are doing in love. In this sense our most incapacitated members may, in fact, be our most active members.



Reflection ~

Take some time to read and pray with the very familiar poem by Teresa of Avila, "*Christ Has No Body.*"

Then do the same with the poem "*A Prayer for the Long Haul*" by Jack Shea.

- ❖ Notice what moves in you as you spend time with each of these poems.
- ❖ What do you find yourself drawn to in each of the poems?
- ❖ Do you find yourself resisting anything in either of the poems?
- ❖ What are you learning about contemplative engagement from your reflection on these two poems?

Christ Has No Body

Chris has no body but yours,
no hands, no feet on earth but yours,
yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world,
yours are the feet with which he
walks to do good,
yours are the hands,
with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ had no body now but yours,
no hands, no feet on earth but yours,
yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world.
Christ had no body now on earth but yours.

Teresa of Avila



A Prayer for the Long Haul

Allow me not, Lord of Blood,
to be one with the One
and mountain top smile
on the trashing plain.

Allow me not, Lord of Bone,
to drive out ambition with
a whip of dreams
and smuggle heaven onto the
troubled earth.

Allow me not, Lord of Flesh,
escape ecstasy, the inner
endless journey,
the noiseless perfections of the soul.

Give me, Broken Lord, the
long courage
for compromised truths, small justices
partial peaces.

Keep my soul in my teeth, hold me in hope,
and teach me to fight.
the way farmers with hoes defeat armies
and rolled up manuscripts survive wars.



John Shea, author of **Seeing Haloes: Christmas Poems to Open the Heart** (Liturgical Press, 2017)
(Used with permission.)

Take it on the Road ~

- ❖ At the beginning of your leadership team meetings, take some time to take “a long loving look” at your agenda.
- ❖ Stop occasionally in whatever you are doing and remind yourself to “Pay Attention.”
- ❖ When you read or listen to the news be intentional about sending transforming love out to the heart break of the world.

Communal Contemplative Dialogue ~

- ❖ After reviewing the various ideas here, take some time to share what contemplative engagement means for you, how you experience it, where you struggle with it.
- ❖ Then explore together what contemplative engagement might look like in the very real circumstances of your life and community at this time in your history.
- ❖ What shape might it take? How might this vision of contemplative engagement foster new life and energy among you.

**Scripture citations are from The Inclusive New Testament © Priests for Equality, 1996.*

