



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Online Edition

May 2024

Thoughts From Solitude

"The True Seed"

Over and over again, God calls you and me to the gardening of our own divine depths, to the cultivation of what Meister Eckhart called the "true seed" within us. God calls us to tend what lies seeded in the soul, this kernel of our truest nature—the God-image or True self.

Eckhart identified the true seed as the living presence of God's image implanted in the soul. "There is something in the soul which is only God," he wrote. I can't think of anything that creates such a feeling of awe in me.

He wasn't saying that the soul *is* God, but that "God is *in* the soul", that the soul is the holy soil in which the divine life of God is planted for us to cultivate the experience. He wrote, "God has sowed his image...He sows the seed of the divine nature...the seed of God is in us. If the seed has a good, wise and industrious cultivator, it will thrive and grow up into God."

Could it be that at the most fundamental level this is what it means to grow spiritually? Could it be that this is the meaning of the verse, "we are to grow up in every way into...Christ (Eph.4:15)?"

....I began to get a glimpse of the process of spiritual transformation: there's a bulb of truth buried in the human soul that's "only God" - God's image and likeness. Throughout our lives, we create patterns of living that obscures this identity. We heap on the darkness, constructing a variety of false selves,. We become adept at playing games, wearing masks as if life were a masquerade party. This can go on for a long while. But eventually the music of the True Self seeks us out. Sooner or later (often in midlife), we're summoned back to the garden. We're called to soul-work.

About this time I discovered Hildegard of Bingen, a woman of the twelfth century who was an extraordinary preacher, theologian, doctor, scientist, artist, composer, and writer. She was a

towering spiritual presence, all but forgotten now....She said that the soul was like a precious field from which we must "root out the useless grasses, thorns, and briars: in order to reveal the beauty of God's image glistening in the soil." To Hildegard, sin was failing to care for the soul, failing to water it and give it what she called "greening power." The saddest thing, to Hildegard, was a drooping soul."

I began to get an almost stunning sense of how little attention we Christians have paid to the soul as the seedbed of divine life within us. We've mostly looked at it as something to *save* — an immortal essence in need of redeeming. "How many souls have you won?" then becomes the central question of Christian life. But the soul is more than something to win or save. It's the seat and repository of the inner Divine, the God-image, the truest part of us.

I woke fresh to the knowledge that the soul is the place where we meet God. "Here God's ground is my ground and my ground is God's ground," Eckhart wrote. When I began to see the soul in this light, the important thing became not saving the soul but entering it, greening it, developing the divine seed that awaits realization. I realized that the heart of religion was setting up an honest dialogue with the uniqueness of one's soul and finding a deeply personal relationship with God, the inner Voice, the inner Music that plays in you as it does in no one else.

I'm aware that, if it stopped there, religion would be in danger of becoming inward and selfish. That's why Eckhart and Hildegard both insisted that the discovery and tending of the true seed must expand into compassion. As the seed branches out, one's soul intertwines with others in loving reconciling ways.

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*A Word
From
Still Wood*



Spring has come early to the Smoky Mountains and we are hustling to catch up with it. For instance, we had just started moving some furniture back onto the deck, when we were startled by a sudden buzzing sound flitting past us. Oh my! The hummingbirds are back and we haven't put out the feeder yet. We immediately left off to prepare the feeder and even as we hooked it into place, the tiny shadows zoomed in close back and forth over our heads. Whew!

The cherry tree and flowering crabapple have already bloomed and the air is alive with numerous butterflies - yellow, blue and white - fluttering to and fro among the blossoms. Further down the slope, another of our favorite

trees was displaying strings of creamy flowers - the Carolina Silver Bell. Have you ever seen this delicate survivor in the spring? The birds are back and already busy building or rebuilding nests. One pair of Phoebes always chooses to rehab a nest above our highest windows where they raise at least two broods each year despite sharing space with the bats who hang out on the screened vent above them.

All this activity reminds us to reach for one of our favorite books: **Hope for the Flowers** by Trina Paulus, copyrighted in 1972 by Paulist Press. Thankfully, it's still being published since it offers a timeless lesson we all need to renew in our hearts. The caption on the cover says it is: "a tale - partly about life, partly about revolution and lots about hope for adults and others (including caterpillars who can read). Trina says she wrote about a caterpillar who had trouble becoming what he really was, because *"It's like myself—like us."* Yes! Who among us has not struggled to realize what we are really meant to be?

At some point, we become aware that we are being called to be "more" than we are at that moment. For many of us ravens, it has been a call to a deeper spirituality; a more profound awareness of Who and What God wants to be in our lives. At first this can feel like that ominous hum diving toward us; something we may (at first) duck or run from because we know that we are being called to change - and who jumps at that opportunity? Like the caterpillar in Trina's story, we often only move toward something *more* when we become too bored or worn out with our current situation/predicament. Just eating (consuming) or trying to "reach the top" (whatever that might be) no longer satisfies. That "persistent humming" drives us into a desert where we learn that the "more" of life means not death but transformation - the "real revolution" that Trina calls it. We discover our true *authentic* selves as we dare to respond to the God who creates a new spring each year. Allowing ourselves to be enfolded by the cocoon of God's love, our "wings" can unfurl, and we discover we can fly! And even more, we gradually realize the purpose of our flight as we carry the nectar of God's love from one flower to another, as the caterpillar in this story does. We wish you a bright new spring transformation.

With Grateful Love, Paul & Karen

Raven's Bread is a quarterly newsletter (FEB-MAY-AUG-NOV) for hermits and those interested in solitary life published by Paul and Karen Fredette. It affirms and encourages people living in solitude. As a collaborative effort, it is written for and by hermits themselves, delivered by postal mail or email. Please send your written contributions, address changes, and donations to: ravenbread97@gmail.com or **Raven's Bread Ministries**, 18065 NC 209 Hwy., Hot Springs, NC 28743 or via PayPal at our website. Our website is: <http://www.ravenbreadministries.com>. Our phone number is: 828 622 3750. Our videos are posted on YouTube. An annual donation is appreciated, each giving according to their means.

Please send payment in US dollars (PayPal converts foreign currency to US dollars). All donations go into a fund to insure that anyone who wants to receive **Raven's Bread Newsletter**, or **Resources**, or **Library books** or an individual retreat space when available, can receive these services.

Raven's Bread derives its name from the experience of the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 17: 1-6, where a raven sent by God nourished him during his months of solitude at the Wadi Cherith (The Cutting Place).

A Personal Thank you

We wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to all of you who sent expressions of care, concern and support as Paul underwent shoulder replacement surgery in February. Your prayers and good wishes no doubt contributed to his steady recovery (which the therapists say is right on schedule). While getting a late start, he anticipates still being in time to hold back the encroaching vegetation around the house here on the mountain. We have been blessed with an extraordinarily beautiful Spring and everything is quite lush.

We also want to thank you all as well for your continued written submissions to the newsletter and your much needed monetary donations as well. As you are undoubtedly aware, inflation has affected our printing costs and postal rates as well.

Grateful Love to all of you!

Paul & Karen



Thoughts In Solitude

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But the question here is whether we've been so busy saving souls that we've neglected the unfolding of the God-image within them. Have we suppressed our souls, imprisoning the True Self under layers of falseness, wounding, conformity and even conventional religious practice? Is Christianity becoming a sanctum of drooping souls?

During (those) early spring days, as I contemplated the daffodil bulbs and the "true seed", I turned a corner in my waiting journey. I began to sense God calling me to the primary spiritual experience of soul-making. It was as if God were whispering to me, the soul wants to be acknowledged and nurtured. The True Self wants to bloom and grow. And the way to begin this spiritual flowering is to confront your false selves—the ego patterns you have created—and come home to who you really are inside.



**Excerpted from:
When The Heart Waits:
Spiritual Direction for Life's Sacred Questions
By Sue Monk Kidd**



BOOK NOTES AND REVIEWS



INVITATION TO SOLITUDE AND SILENCE: EXPERIENCING GOD'S TRANSFORMING PRESENCE

by Ruth Haley Barton & Dallas Willard

Much of our faith and practice is about words—preaching, teaching, talking with others. Yet all of these words are not enough to take us into the real presence of God where we can hear his voice. This book is an invitation to you to meet God deeply and fully outside the demands and noise of daily life. It is an invitation to solitude and silence.

166 pp. pbk. IVP 2010

ISBN-10: 0830835458 ISBN-13 978-0830835454

THE GREAT HOUSE OF GOD: A HOME FOR YOUR HEART

By Max Lucado

God's greatest desire is to be your dwelling place. The home for your heart. He doesn't want to be merely a weekend getaway. He has no interest in being a Sunday bungalow or even a summer cottage. He wants to be your mailing address, your point of reference, your home...always. He wants you to live in the Great House of God..

240 pp. Thomas Nelson 2012

ISBN-10: 0849947464 ISBN-13 9780849947469

SOLITUDE AND SILENCE: THE CLOISTER OF THE HEART

By Thomas A Kempis

What can the lay person learn from the life of a monk? Solitude and Silence are two pillars of monastic life that many people quickly point to as the hardest and most confusing parts of this kind of religious consecration. However, a Kempis helps us to understand that all Christians are called to some solitude and silence in our lives while not taking on a complete eremitical life.

80 pp. pbk. Tan Books 2023

ISBN-10 1505128005 ISBN-13 978-1505128000