



JOURNEY *of a*
TREASURING HEART

A Retreat for Women's Christmas

JAN L. RICHARDSON

PRELUDE

I Know How Far *A Blessing for Women's Christmas*

I know how far
you would walk
to offer what
is needed;
the lengths
you would go to
to provide for those
you hold dear.

I know how every road
you travel
begins in the hollow
of your chest,
in the chambers
of your heart;
how you measure
your steps
by the rhythm
of your pulse;
how you find
your way
across terrains
no map
could ever show.

No distance
no barrier
no expanse of time
would keep you
from propelling yourself
toward the place where
your heart has already
arrived.

But for a moment
for one small space
of time
could you pause
and in the quiet
wait
for the gifts
that have been gathering
around you,
the treasures borne
by those
who have been traveling
to welcome you
since the moment
you left home?

TREASURED IN THE HEART

An Introduction

There is a custom, rooted in Ireland, of celebrating Epiphany (January 6, which brings the Christmas season to a close) as *Women's Christmas*, called *Nollaig na mBan* in Irish. It originated as a day when the women, who often carried the domestic responsibilities all year, took Epiphany Day as an occasion to celebrate together at the end of the holidays, leaving hearth and home to the men for a few hours. Particularly celebrated in County Cork and County Kerry, the tradition seems to be enjoying a resurgence.

Whether your domestic commitments are many or few, Women's Christmas offers a timely opportunity to pause and step back from whatever has kept you busy and hurried in the past weeks or months. As the Christmas season comes to a close, this is an occasion both to celebrate with friends and also to spend time in reflection before diving into the responsibilities of this new year.

This mini-retreat is offered in that spirit. Within these pages is an invitation to rest, to reflect, to contemplate where you are in your unfolding path. At the threshold of this year, this is a time for you to consider how you want the path through this year to look like. Mindful of those Wise Ones who traveled to welcome the Christ child, we will turn our attention toward questions about our own journey. As we look at the landscape of our life, where and how do we want to travel through this year? What distinctive gift are we called to offer, that no one else can? What do we need to receive in order to do this?

THE MYSTERIES OF MAKING

The reflections in the following pages come from my book *In the Sanctuary of Women*. I have selected them from a chapter titled "The Mysteries of Making: The Book of Harriet Powers." Born into slavery in the Southern United States, Harriet Powers became a remarkable quiltmaker. Virtually all we know of her is contained in two of her creations, known as Bible quilts. Powers's quilts—one of which is in the Smithsonian Institution, and the other in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston—captivate with their distinctive style and the stories they tell. Using the technique of appliqué and perhaps drawing on the long tradition of appliqué found in the West African country of Benin, Powers stitched her quilts with bold, colorful figures of humans, animals, and celestial bodies: sun, moon, stars. Frame by frame, her quilts tell stories—including Bible stories, folktales, and local legends—that Powers absorbed, pondered, and reconstructed in an intensely personal fashion. They became a form of testimony and proclamation; in Powers's own words, she wanted to "preach de Gospel in patchwork."¹

The artful life of Harriet Powers invites us to reflect on how the creative spirit moves in our own lives. Regardless of whether we think of ourselves as artists, we belong to the One who, as the book of Genesis tells us, created us in God's own image and likeness; and so we carry the divine creative spark within us. For some of us, creativity takes more obvious and concrete forms: words, images, movement, music. For others, the creative spirit works in less tangible but no less powerful ways: creating families, forming friendships, cultivating communities.

Fundamentally, the creative life—the artful life—has to do with how we see the world, and how we respond to it. It has to do with recognizing what is around us—the beauty as well as the brokenness—and

then responding: celebrating the beauty, finding the connections, discerning how to create anew from the broken pieces. These reflections from the chapter on Harriet Powers invite us to engage core questions about the creative life to which we are called, the path we are on, what we will offer to the world around us out of our own distinctive gifts, and what we need for the journey ahead.

NAVIGATING THE PATH

There are many ways to engage these reflections. You can set aside a day—on or near Women’s Christmas, or another day that suits you. You can spread out the reflections over several days. You might share the retreat with others—a friend near or far, a family member, a small group. You could get together with friends for a cup of tea or a meal on Women’s Christmas—or, again, whenever it fits for you—and select just one or two reflections as a point of conversation together.

As you move through these readings, you may find that different readings invite different kinds of responses. For one reading, you might feel drawn simply to sit in silence or go for a walk as you engage the questions. With another reading, you might want to respond with words of your own: a journal entry, a poem, a prose piece, a letter, a prayer. A reading could inspire a collage. Or a drawing or painting or sculpture. Or—in the spirit of Harriet Powers—a quilt.

With each reflection, as you contemplate the words and the questions—including your own questions that these pages may prompt—I invite you to consider what helps you put the pieces of your life together: the experiences you carry, the scraps of your story, the fragments that seem jagged and painful as well as those that you think of as beautiful. What response—in words, in images, in prayer, in movement, in stillness, in conversation, in solitude—helps you recognize and honor the pieces and put them together in a new way?

BLESSING OF COMFORT, BLESSING OF CHALLENGE

Whenever I lead a retreat in person, I always talk about how I hope to offer a space of comfort as well as a space of challenge. I hope you will find this kind of space within these pages. If you have arrived at this point in your path feeling weary and depleted, I pray that you will find something here that provides comfort and Sabbath rest. At the same time, I pray that you will find something that stretches you into new terrain, that invites you to think or move or pray in a direction that will draw you into some uncharted territory in your soul, and there find the God who ever waits to meet us in those spaces that lie beyond what is familiar and comfortable and habitual for us.

In the Gospel of Luke, we read that on the night of Jesus’ birth, shepherds arrive at the manger with a story of angels who brought them astounding tidings of a Savior’s birth. Luke tells us that all who hear the tale of the shepherds are amazed. “But Mary,” Luke writes—Mary, who has journeyed so very far beyond her familiar terrain—“treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19, NRSV).

As you engage this retreat, may you enter into a space where you can gather up the words, the stories, the fragments and pieces, the gifts and challenges of the past year. May you ponder them in your heart, and there find treasure to sustain you and illuminate your path. May you have comfort and challenge in good measure, and travel with wisdom through the year ahead. Know that I hold you in prayer and wish you blessings on your way. Merry Women’s Christmas!



Finding the Focus

THE ONLY MAGIC

While I was in seminary, the artist and writer Meinrad Craighead came to Atlanta for a speaking engagement. Craighead, a writer and artist known for such books as *The Mother's Songs: Images of God the Mother*, spent time responding to questions after her talk. Many members of the audience wanted to talk about the creative process—how it happens, what it involves. One woman told Meinrad about her longing to spend more of her life being creative, then listed the obstacles that hindered her from that kind of life. She asked Meinrad how she could be more creative in the midst of these pressing commitments.

In her typically forthright manner, Meinrad told the woman that if being creative was important to her, she would do it. It was an abrupt response, bordering on harsh, yet it offered a stunning clarity that I have carried with me ever since.

There is no magic that will give us more time. The only magic comes in making choices about how we enter into time and how we discern what is most important. We will always encounter resistance to choosing a creative life: if not from outside ourselves, then from within. Often the inner resistance—even to the life we think we most want—manifests itself in commitments and obstacles that become excuses from pursuing what we long for. “That which hinders your task is your task,” says actor and teacher Sanford Meisner.

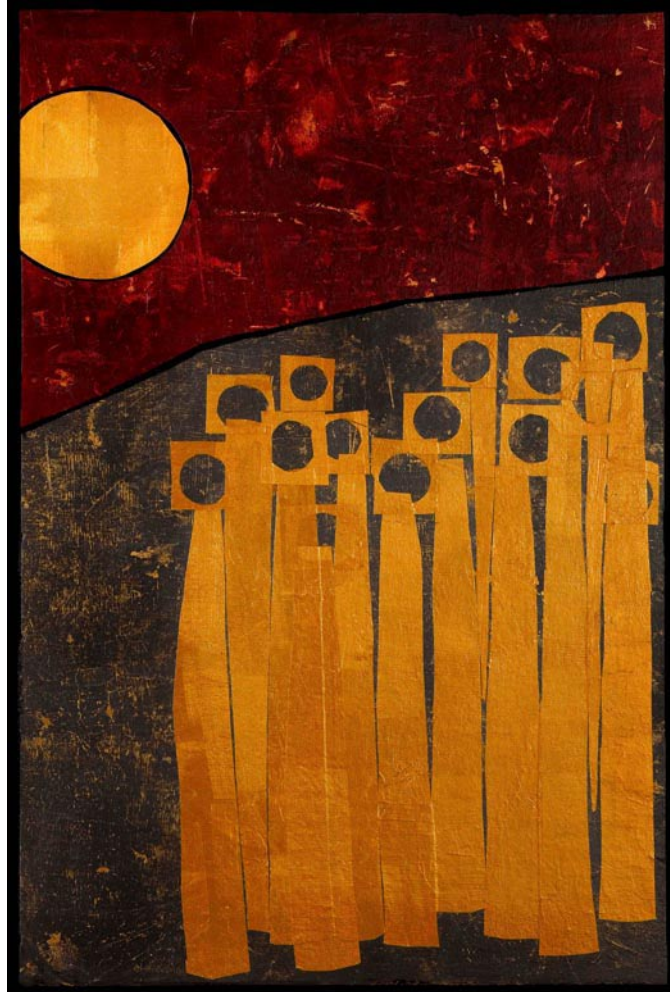
I have found it important to remember that life unfolds in seasons. At times other commitments necessarily take precedence over artful pursuits. In such times, we need either to postpone our creative desires and make peace with this (and make a plan for when we will pursue these desires again) or find other ways to attend to these desires.

An artful life is a *sacrifice*, in the root meaning of the word: it is an act of making sacred, and it requires something of us. This life continually confronts us with questions about our priorities. It presses us to choose and to abide the choices that we make. It demands a continual process of giving: giving up illusions and distractions, giving in to the God who calls us here, giving away all that hinders us from the life that God desires for us. We do this to make the sacred and the holy more visible in this world. When this truly happens, we have moments when this seems no sacrifice at all. Somehow, in the holy magic that lies at the heart of creating, there comes a point where everything we have let go of—everything we have given up, given away, and chosen against—returns to us in a form we never could have predicted or contrived on our own.

How do you enter into time? How do you discern what is most important to you, and what choices do you make in response to this? Do you encounter resistance to giving time to your creative soul? Where does this resistance come from? How might working with the resistance become part of the creative process and a starting place for prayer?

BLESSING

That you will be wise
to each season and time;
that every hour
will open its purpose to you;
that you will know
the need of the moment
and give yourself to it
with abandon
and with grace.



A Gathering of Spirits

FINDING MY TRIBE

As I write this, I am sitting on the porch of a house overlooking a river in Washington State. I have spent much of the day in this spot, writing, drinking tea, visiting with the cat who is the true owner of this porch, and surfacing for meals with the other people who have found their way to this piece of holy ground.

This sacred place is a remarkable retreat center called the Grünewald Guild. Nestled among the Cascade Mountains, the Guild was founded by Richard and Liz Caemmerer thirty years ago as a retreat center devoted to exploring and celebrating the connections between art and faith. For ten weeks each summer, as well as at other times of the year, the Guild offers classes in a wondrous variety of media including stained glass, ceramics, fiber arts, painting, and printmaking. What especially compels me about the Guild is that our creative work takes place in a rhythm of community life, with morning and evening prayer, shared meals, informal gatherings, and many conversations in the in-between places.²

As I live out a ministry that requires much explaining about what I do, and how, and why, the Guild offers me the experience of being in my element. In this place I find my tribe. Among this

diverse gathering of people from around the continent and beyond, I encounter kinship, a shared language, a camaraderie that is much more difficult to find in my daily life.

Although this kind of community is elusive the rest of the year, what I find here at the Guild helps to fuel my creative work at home. The Guild reminds me how crucial it is to seek allies on the creative path. It pushes me to ponder how to find and create an artful community in the place where I live, as daunting as this sometimes seems.

Where do you find people who sustain you on your path? Where do you meet the kinfolk who nourish your spirit and your creative work and whom you can support in turn?

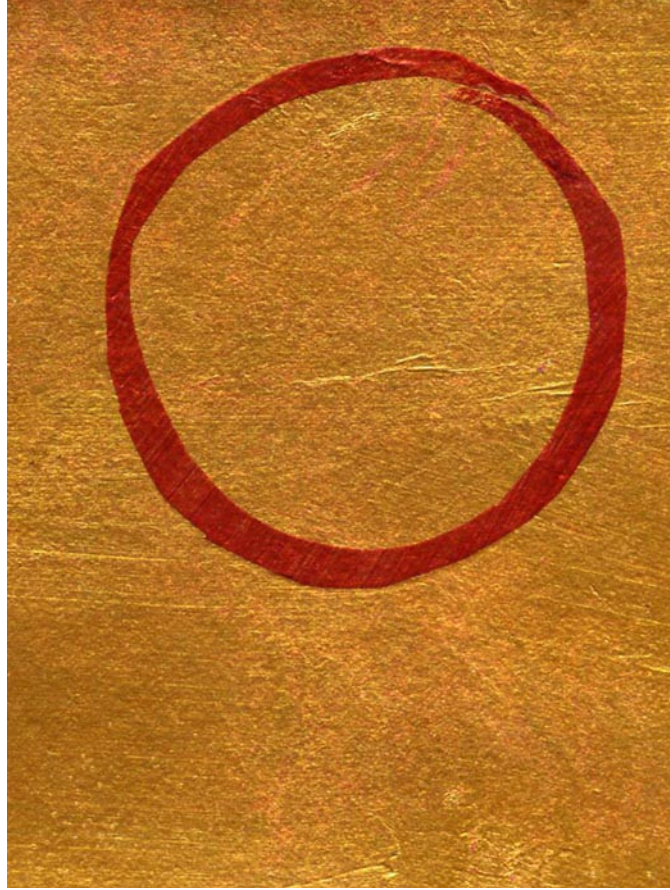
BLESSING

That we who need each other
will find one another.

That we may follow the lines
that will lead us
to the kindred of our souls.

That our tribe will grow
and prosper
and be a blessing.

That we may be the beauty
in which we long to dwell.



The Red Circle

THE RED CIRCLE

In his book *The Lives of the Artists*, the sixteenth-century painter, architect, and writer Giorgio Vasari tells the story of how Pope Benedict IX, in search of someone to create several paintings for St. Peter's Basilica, dispatched an assistant to collect samples from various artists. The candidates included Giotto di Bondone, the Italian painter who was a harbinger of the Renaissance. Of the visit to Giotto, Vasari tells this:

Having gone one morning to Giotto's shop while the artist was at work, [the courtier] explained the pope's intentions and how he wanted to evaluate Giotto's work, finally asking him for a small sketch to send to His Holiness. Giotto, who was a most courteous man, took a sheet of paper and a brush dipped in red, pressed his arm to his side to make a compass of it, and with a turn of his hand made a circle so even in its shape and outline that it was a marvel to behold. After he had completed the circle, he said with an impudent grin to the courtier: "Here's your drawing." The courtier, thinking he was being ridiculed, replied: "Am I to have no other drawing than this one?" "It's more than sufficient," answered Giotto. "Send it along with the others and you will see whether or not it will be understood."³

Giotto got the job.

The image of Giotto's crimson O particularly grabbed me because of a small, abandoned collage that had been lying on my drafting table for a couple of weeks when I encountered the story. The collage began, and finally ended, with a red circle on a gold background. After a long struggle to develop it, I gave up and turned my attention in another direction. A collage artist, however, is reluctant to throw anything away; and I did like that red circle, so I kept it around, hoping it might become the basis for another piece. Reading Vasari's story, I began to think perhaps I had stalled out because I was trying too hard to add to something that was already complete. I have become aware that although I'm no Giotto, there is something very satisfying in the sparseness of that circle. It is sufficient.

Vasari's story and that red circle set me to pondering the amount of time and energy we give to explaining, justifying, or selling who we are. We catalog and calculate our qualities in order to impress others and persuade them to hire us or love us or include us in their circle.

Plenty of situations call for demonstrations of competence and expertise. Walking into a doctor's office, a day care, a church, you want to know that the people who work there are qualified to care for your body, your child, your soul. But in a culture that sometimes pushes us to accumulate credentials and qualifications without developing the character that will sustain our expertise, it can be disarming to encounter someone who bows to simplicity instead of doing backflips to win us over.

One of the clearest examples I've seen of the power of a gesture like Giotto's came at a gathering of clergy that I attended early in my ministry. The design team had invited a potter to be the artist-in-residence during our conference and to offer a few words at our opening session. In a room full of clergy who live and minister in a system that has its own complicated culture of credentials and rewards, the potter stood before us, a small piece of pottery cupped in her hands. Gazing into the O of her bowl, she began to tell us what she had come to offer. Watching her, listening to her, I had the sense that we were encountering a woman whose life and creative work had worn away the impulse to impress, to prove, to convince. In her years of working with clay, the clay had also worked on her. Shed of pretense, the potter held out to us what she had to give.

It was more than sufficient.

In a culture that bases so much on evaluation and competition, there's often little room to squeeze around the need to demonstrate and display who we are. Whether we are selling ourselves for a job, a promotion, a membership, a mate, we live with the pressure to appear polished. That's not wholly a bad thing. Yet, in the midst of this, where might we trace a red circle of our own? What gesture or unadorned offering can we make that arises from the core of who we are? Where might we be called to make this offering, knowing others may not understand it but need it? What support and sustenance will help us do this?

BLESSING

That God will
make of your life
a circle,
an offering,
a gift
sufficient and
whole.



Born of Water, Born of Spirit

PRACTICES

In the course of working as an artist, I have learned that I encounter many of the same difficulties in my creative work as I do in my life of faith. Fatigue, loss of inspiration, isolation, the *acedia* that the desert mothers and fathers have taught us about: in my creative journey, as in my life of faith, these and other struggles have become familiar companions. I have found that the practices that sustain me as an artist and writer are the same kind of practices that sustain me as I seek God. These are some of them:

- *Living and working with intention*
What are the rhythms of life that enable me to live with mindfulness instead of reacting to whatever comes along?
- *Finding allies*
Whom do I turn to for support and sustenance? Am I willing to ask for help when I need it?
- *Revisiting my sources*
Where are the wellsprings that inspire me and to which I need to return?

- *Living with questions*
How do I recognize and resist my own attitudes of certainty that stifle the creative process?
- *Engaging in discernment*
How do I sort through the invitations and possibilities that present themselves?
- *Taking leaps of faith*
Have I become too comfortable in my practices? How might God be asking me to stretch and move with courage in a new direction?
- *Claiming a vision without trying to unduly control the outcome*
How do I discern and work toward a goal while remaining open to the mysteries and surprises along the way?

BLESSING

In your working
and in your seeking,
may you know and embrace
all that will nourish you
and sustain your pilgrim soul.



Testimony

UPON THE ASHES

At the same time that Harriet Powers was preaching her sermons in patchwork, a contemporary of Powers's named Sojourner Truth was preaching around the United States wherever she could find a place to speak. Born into slavery in New York around 1797 with the name Isabella Baumfree, she had ten or twelve brothers and sisters whom she only knew from stories told by her mother, "Mau-mau Bett"; their master had sold all the children except for Isabella and her younger brother, Peter. In 1828, after being sold and later escaping, Isabella gained her freedom and moved to New York City.

After living there for more than a decade, Isabella experienced a call from the Spirit to travel and lecture. She desired a new name that would reflect her new vocation. Saying that she had left everything behind and wasn't going to keep anything of Egypt on her, she went to the Lord and asked him for a new name. "And the Lord gave me Sojourner," she said, "because I was to travel up an' down the land, showin' the people their sins, an' bein' a sign unto them. Afterward I told the Lord I wanted another name, 'cause everybody else had two names; and the Lord gave me Truth, because I was to declare truth to the people."⁴ Sojourner Truth became a fiery preacher, orator, and abolitionist.

One day, while preparing for a speech at the town-house in Angola, Indiana, she heard of a threat that the building would be burned down if she spoke there. "Then I will speak upon the ashes," Sojourner replied.⁵ Amid the threat of destruction, she made a promise of proclamation.

I will speak upon the ashes. With her words, Sojourner Truth gives an image of the work not only of a preacher but also of an artist: to create even—and especially—amid barrenness, destruction, injustice, and pain.

In the presence of hatred and violence, creative work is an act of courage and hope. It claims a place for beauty and the possibility of wholeness that it offers.

Where do you see this creative work taking place? How might you offer or support creation upon the ashes?

BLESSING

May you speak
where the Spirit calls you to speak;
may you create
with courage and with grace.
Amid the threat of destruction
and in the presence of desolation,
may you bear witness to the God
who knows how to create anew
from fire,
from flood,
from all that lays waste
in this world.

INTERLUDE

Wise Women Also Came

Wise women also came.
The fire burned
in their wombs
long before they saw
the flaming star
in the sky.
They walked in shadows,
trusting the path
would open
under the light of the moon.

Wise women also came,
seeking no directions,
no permission
from any king.
They came
by their own authority,
their own desire,
their own longing.
They came in quiet,
spreading no rumors,
sparkling no fears
to lead
to innocents' slaughter,
to their sister Rachel's
inconsolable lamentations.

Wise women also came,
and they brought
useful gifts:
water for labor's washing,
fire for warm illumination,
a blanket for swaddling.

Wise women also came,
at least three of them,
holding Mary in the labor,
crying out with her
in the birth pangs,
breathing ancient blessings
into her ear.

Wise women also came,
and they went,
as wise women always do,
home a different way.



Knocking from the Inside

KNOCKING FROM THE INSIDE

Part of what I love best about my vocation is getting to witness what emerges when folks are given time, tools, and space to reflect on their lives. In retreat and workshop settings, I always make collage supplies available as a means of contemplation. Collage is great because anyone who made it through kindergarten has the necessary skills. Cut. Tear. Paste. Voilà! Even those who may freak out in the face of an invitation to be artful often find they can engage the collage process, especially when the papers, with their stunning patterns, textures, and colors, beg to be picked up and played with.

In my favorite collage exercise, I ask participants to think about their lives as a landscape. I suggest that they reflect on their commitments, their relationships, whatever makes up the terrain of their days, and then create a collage that evokes that landscape. Often I give them a small, four-by-six-inch piece of paper for the background, to make it as manageable as possible. It is amazing what a landscape people can fit into twenty-four square inches.

After folks have created a collage, I often do a quick process of *lectio divina* (“sacred reading,” an ancient way of praying with sacred texts) with them. A little *collagio divina*, if you will. In much the same way that we can read a written text, we can also read the visual text of a piece of art, whether created by us or someone else. I invite them to ponder their collage silently as I offer a few questions.

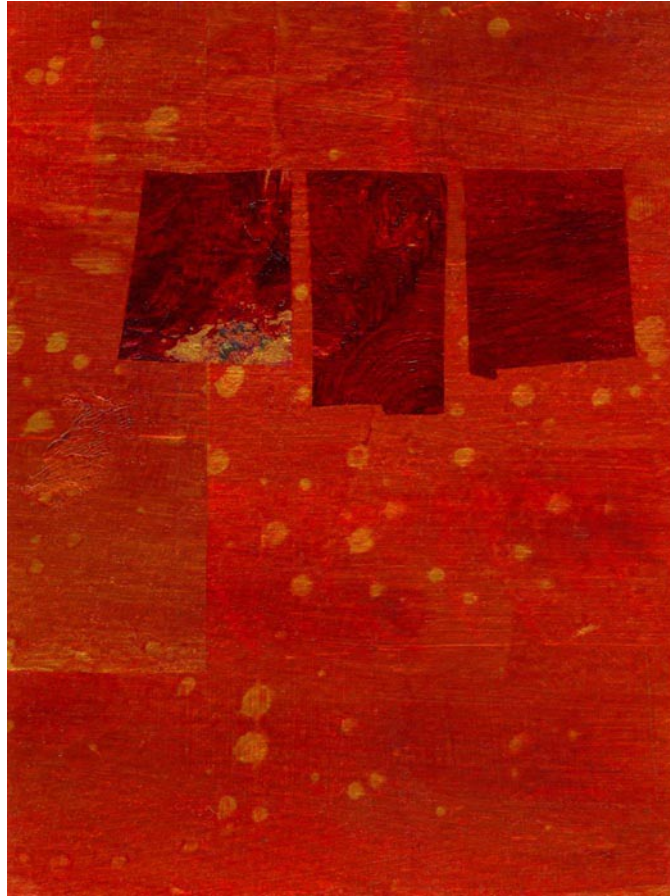
One of the questions I ask is this: “When you turn your collage—your landscape—in a different direction, what do you see?”

Things turn up in collages that we’re often unaware of at the time, and changing our perspective helps us notice them. This happens in our own lives too. Sometimes, when we need a shift, we find it by looking at our lives from a different view. Often the shift comes from within ourselves. I think of the poem by Rumi in which the poet describes how he has been making himself crazy, knocking on a door, only to discover, “I’ve been knocking from the inside!”⁶

Do you feel stuck right now? What might help you gain perspective, a different view of your life? What piece needs turning, considering from another angle, in order to better see what’s there and what’s possible? Might the needed shift be within your own self?

BLESSING

That you will see
the landscape of your life
in all its fullness.
That when you are stuck
you will be given eyes
to see your terrain anew.



Love and Revelation

MORE THAN EVER

In the wake of the attacks on the United States that took place on September 11, 2001, I exchanged some correspondence with a lifelong friend of mine who lives in New York City. A professional artist who provided my first art lessons as a child, Tom was walking to work when he saw the plane fly into the first tower of the World Trade Center. Writing shortly after the attack, he commented to me, “We need artists now more than ever.”

I have thought often about his comment in the years that have followed the devastation of that day. My artist friend, who has witnessed and shared in the grief and healing of the city he calls home, continues to create and to offer his artful gifts to the world. And hundreds of miles away, in a wee studio in central Florida, I continue to work at sharing my own creative gifts. What I fashion in my studio doesn't provide a cure for cancer or an end to poverty or a cessation of terrorism. It is, however, what I have to offer the world: an act of hope, a commitment to creation amid devastation, a practice that is not removed from the brokenness of the world but rather is a tangible, tactile, transforming prayer that arises from within it.

What my friend noted in September 2001 is no less true today: we need artists now more than ever. And not just artists, but everyone who can contribute any form of life-giving creativity. The creative life is not limited to making visible work that we can put on a wall or a stage or a screen. It also

encompasses less tangible but equally powerful modes of creativity: forming families, tending friendships, cultivating communities of hospitality and peace.

As you look at both the brokenness and the beauty of the world, what gift do you feel most drawn to give? What creative commitment have you made—or long to make, or to make again—that will claim a space for life and hope in the midst of destruction and devastation? Is there something you need in order to make this commitment and offer what only you can offer?

BLESSING

Now
more than ever
let us be the ones
who will not turn away.
Let us be the ones
who will go
farther into the wreck
and deeper into the rubble.
Let us be the ones
who will enter into the places
of devastation beyond belief
and despair beyond our imagining.

And there let us listen
for the Spirit that brooded
over the formless darkness,
and there let us look again
for the God who gathered up the chaos
and began to create.
Let us be the ones
who will give ourselves
to the work of making again
and to the endless beginning
of creation.



In the Weeds

IN THE WEEDS

Jesus' parables give us powerful examples of how the creative spirit moved through him. Jesus knew that to widen people's vision, he had to focus it in certain ways. He did this by telling stories that helped his hearers to see anew what was always before them. With these stories, Jesus trained their eyes—and trains ours—to perceive the kingdom of heaven tucked into the midst of this world.

Teaching us to see the kingdom among us requires symbol, myth, metaphor, story. It requires the visual poetry that Jesus uses repeatedly as he turns to the things of the earth to describe the things of heaven: yeast, seeds, dirt, water, fish, lilies of the field, birds of the air. He employs the ephemeral while seeking to explain the eternal. His doing so both comforts and unsettles: he turns the familiar on its head and us with it.

This is the work of the artist.

The images that Jesus offers in his parables, along with the artfulness that imbued the way he walked through this world, have helped me think about how I approach my own creative work. I find wisdom in Jesus' tale of wheat and weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43), in which Jesus weaves these agrarian images into a parable about the kingdom of God.

Matthew lets us in on Jesus' explanation of this parable, and it seems straightforward on the surface. Jesus offers an interpretive equation in which, not surprisingly, wheat=good and weeds=bad.

I'm curious, however, about how Jesus has the householder respond to the slaves who ask him whether they should gather the weeds. The householder tells them to allow the weeds and the wheat to grow together until harvest time, at which point the slaves will gather the weeds and burn them. Removing the weeds too soon would cause harm to the growing wheat.

I have long been aware that my ongoing work needs to include the cultivation of practices that support my work. Part of me needs a measured rhythm of life—like orderly rows of wheat, say. Yet this orderly part of me regularly grapples with the part that needs a strand of something that's a bit wilder, something less domesticated.

Something weedy.

I can grow dismayed by what I allow to creep into my creative life: commitments that distract me, weariness, or plain old resistance to the process. Although being an artist as well as a writer lies at the heart of who I am, I sometimes wrestle with how the work brings my inner self to the surface, confronting me with the raw, unformed stuff I carry around inside. Some days it is easier to let the weeds grow, as if they could provide a bit of wild shelter from the work of cultivating my interior crop. My spiritual director, Maru, has encouraged me to think about how I experience these times of distraction and discouragement, those occasions when I skirt the demands of the drafting table or the blank page in favor of another activity. Where I have tended to view these times as wasteful, Maru suggests that I see them as part of the process, integral to the creative crop. Wandering among the weeds serves to clear my vision and sharpen my desire. Weeds don't make for a steady diet. Eventually I grow hungry for what will sustain and satisfy, and I will do anything necessary to find my way to that sustenance. In the fullness of time, an interior apocalypse comes around: the weeds fall away and burn in the fire that comes in times of focused creating. The longed-for crop flourishes and feeds.

What is growing in the landscape of your life? How do you discern the difference between the weeds and the wheat? What do you do with the weeds? How might they become part of the work of cultivating your landscape?

BLESSING

Let the weeds in their season,
and let the wildness in its time.
Let lostness,
and let wandering
and waste.
And then let it not:
let fire
and let burning,
let the destroying
of every extraneous thing.
Let the wheat.



Tangled Up in You

THE COMPLICATED PLACES

Simply put, the creative life invites us to envision and discern what God is trying to accomplish in the world. It employs the intellect but also takes us beyond it, down into the deeper levels, to the realms of intuition and imagination. The creative process, in its many forms, involves bringing back the treasures of those realms and offering them to the world.

Here's how my husband, Gary, put it one day: "Life is too complicated to deal with only in words. If you can only deal with stuff that's simple enough to put into words, you're not going far enough. And that's where God is—in the complicated places."

BLESSING

May you go
into the complicated places
with courage
with wisdom
with the protection of God
who meets you there.



Longest Night

BEAUTY BEFORE BED

Of late I have taken to going through my old issues of *Selvedge*, a beautiful magazine produced in England and devoted to textile arts. Just before entering sleep each night, I'll pick up an issue and take in a few pages, visiting with something beautiful as I prepare for sleep. One night, it's textiles made by Amish and Mennonite women in the nineteenth century, their homespun work elegant and reverent in its simplicity. Another night, the vivid block-printed designs of Brigitte Singh, a Frenchwoman who went to India as an art student three decades ago and never left. Funky tea towels by South African designer Heather Moore. Cloth made by Hiroko Karuno, a Japanese textile artist who puts her own spin on the intricate, labor-intensive, centuries-old tradition of paper weaving known as *shifu*.

Something beautiful before bed: it is a benediction on the day, a blessing for the night to come. It is a prayer that in the coming hours, when evil is making its way in the world, there will yet be beauty to meet it, to confront it with healing, with transformation, with hope.

Where are you looking these days? Where do you find the beauty that offers grace and sustenance, that stirs your imagination and your hope, that inspires you to offer your own gifts to this world that hungers for the blessing you can give?

BLESSING

May it be
that beauty will attend you
in your waking,
in your working,
in your resting,
and in your dreaming.



NOTES

1. Lucine Finch, "A Sermon in Patchwork," in Kristen Frederickson and Sarah E. Webb, eds., *Singular Women: Writing the Artist* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 95-96.
2. For information about the Grünewald Guild, visit <http://www.grunewaldguild.com>.
3. Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 22.
4. Quoted by Harriet Beecher Stowe in her article, "Sojourner Truth, The Libyan Sibyl," in *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 164.
5. *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, 140.
6. Rumi, *The Essential Rumi*, trans. Coleman Barks (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1997), 281.

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The blessing "I Know How Far: A Blessing for Women's Christmas," which appears in the Prelude, first appeared on Jan's *Sanctuary of Women* blog on at <http://sanctuaryofwomen.com/blog/celebrating-womens-christmas/>.

The poem "Wise Women Also Came," which appears in the Interlude, is from Jan's book *Night Visions: Searching the Shadows of Advent and Christmas*.

Cover artwork: *Wise Women Also Came* © Jan L. Richardson. Originally appeared on the cover of Jan's book *Sacred Journeys: A Woman's Book of Daily Prayer* and also in *Night Visions: Searching the Shadows of Advent and Christmas*.



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The Advent Door
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