



SEEDS FOR CELEBRATION Via Negativa 2022 ~ Releasing!

Fall – the time when birds leave their summer homes and head south, letting go of the nests where they started new families. The Via Negativa, also known as the Path of Release, arrives this year as Jubilants are letting go at deep levels. As we prepare to leave this lovely nest on 46 Wall Street, we'll be tuning into our inner compass to find the direction to our next landing place. As the trees release their leaves, we'll be dropping some of our external trappings and letting our sap flow back down into our roots.

Releasing can be a challenge – full of sadness and darkness. It can also be a relief – an emptying out that lets us release hidden depths of joy and beauty. One way or the other, life invites us into letting go over and over again. Let's journey down this Path of Release together and see what we learn.

September 25 ~ Releasing: Anxiety

*What if everything really is OK? What if the future is unfolding in a beauty we don't yet understand?
What if we could let go of our anxiety about how it will all turn out?*

I am, you anxious one.
Don't you sense me, ready to break
into being at your touch?
My murmurings surround you like shadowy wings.
Can't you see me standing before you
cloaked in stillness?
Hasn't my longing ripened in you
from the beginning
as fruit ripens on a branch?
I am the dream you are dreaming.
When you want to awaken, I am the wanting:
I grow strong in the beauty you behold.
And with the silence of the stars I enfold
your cities made by time.
~ Ranier Marie Rilke, *The Book of Hours*

And Jesus said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so

clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!

~ Luke 12:22-28

October 2 ~ Releasing: Truth

Have you ever been sure you knew something, only to discover you may have been a wee tad off base? Seeking the Truth, living into the Truth, telling the Truth: all important. Being sure we know the whole truth and nothing but the truth: tricky business.

I have a thousand brilliant lies for the question: How are you?
I have a thousand brilliant lies for the question: What is God?
If you think that the Truth can be known from words,
if you think that the sun and the ocean can pass through that tiny opening called the mouth,
someone should start laughing! Someone should start wildly laughing now!

~ Hafiz

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

~ Luke 6:41-42

October 9 ~ Releasing: Words

What if the real work happens in silence? What if we are simply called to pay attention? What if widening our awareness is the most important task ahead?

“Praying”

It doesn’t have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch
a few words together and don’t try
to make them elaborate, this isn’t
a contest but the doorway
into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

~ Mary Oliver

O my Beloved, You have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
You discern my innermost thoughts.
You find me on the journey and guide my steps;
You know my strengths and my weaknesses.

Even before words rise up in prayer, You have already heard my heart call.
You encompass me with love where'er I go, and your strength is my shield.
Such sensitivity is too wonderful for me; it is high;
boundless gratitude is my soul's response.

O that You would vanquish my fears, Beloved;
O that ignorance and suffering would depart from me.
My ego separates me from true abandonment, to surrendering myself into your Hands!
Yet are these not the very thorns that focus my thoughts upon You?
Will I always need reminders to turn my face to You?
I yearn to come to You in love, to learn of your mercy and wisdom!
Search me, O my Beloved, and know my heart! Try me and discern my thoughts!
Help me to face the darkness within me;
enlighten me, that I might radiate your Love and Light!
~ Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18 (Nan Merrill)

October 16 ~ Releasing: Security

We all long for some form of security: money, a home, a relationship, a family, a career. And many of us have experienced how one or more of these things can dissolve, sometimes overnight. Where do we find a sure and steady place to stand? And what do we do when we get there?

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to Jesus, "Look, half of my possessions, Rabbi, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

~ Luke 19:1-10

I lift up my eyes to the hills-- from where will my help come?
My help comes from the BELOVED, who made heaven and earth.
God will not let your foot be moved; the One who keeps you will not slumber.
The One who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
The BELOVED is your keeper; the BELOVED is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
The BELOVED will keep you from all evil; God will keep your life.
The BELOVED will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.
~ Psalm 121

October 23 ~ Releasing: Brittleness

Bone-dry, withered up, dead as a doornail. It happens to the best of us. Our creativity or compassion or community or motivation can go cold. Stone cold. Bone cold. We may think that's it. All done. What if there is a dream awaiting us that we can't even imagine yet?

The hand of the BELOVED was on me, and God brought me out by the Spirit of the BELOVED and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. God led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. The Beloved asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"
I said, "Holy One, you alone know."

Then God said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the BELOVED! This is what the Holy One says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the BELOVED.’”

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then God said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Holy One says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” So I prophesied as God commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

~ Ezekiel 37:1-10

O God, who out of nothing brought everything that is,
out of what I am bring more of what I dream but haven't dared:
Direct my power and passion to creating life where there is death,
to putting flesh of action on bare-boned intentions,
to lighting fires against the midnight of indifference,
to throwing bridges of care across canyons of loneliness;
So I can look on creation, together with you, and behold, call it very good.

Amen.

~ Ted Loder

October 30 ~ Releasing: Visions

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the BELOVED under Eli. The word of the BELOVED was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the BELOVED, where the ark of God was. Then the BELOVED called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” and ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. The BELOVED called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” Now Samuel did not yet know the BELOVED, and the word of the BELOVED had not yet been revealed to him. The BELOVED called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the BELOVED was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, BELOVED, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Now the BELOVED came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

~ 1st Samuel 3:1-10

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.
~ Langston Hughes

November 6 ~ Releasing: Home

Home is where the heart is? Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in? What does it mean to be home? What if we have to leave home to find it?

The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall!
My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.
But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the Beloved never ceases, God's mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
"The Beloved is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in God."
The Beloved is good to those who wait, to the soul that seeks God.
It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Beloved.
~ Lamentations 3:19-26

Above the mountains
the geese turn into / the light again
Painting their / black silhouettes
on an open sky.

Sometimes everything / has to be
inscribed across / the heavens
so you can find / the one line
already written / inside you.

Sometimes it takes / a great sky
to find that / first, bright
and indescribable / wedge of freedom
in your own heart.

Sometimes with / the bones of the black
sticks left when the fire / has gone out
someone has written / something new
in the ashes of your life.
You are not leaving.
Even as the light fades quickly now,
you are arriving.
~ The Journey – David Whyte

November 13 ~ Releasing: Persistence

Sometimes releasing isn't letting go of something, but letting it out. What if the stubborn little-engine-who-could wants to be fired up to make it up the hill in spite of all the obstacles, all the nay-sayers, all the judges and disrespecters?

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not

wear me out by continually coming."

And Jesus said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

~ Luke 18:1-8

Glance at the sun. See the moon and the stars.

Gaze at the beauty of earth's greenings.

Now, think.

What delight God gives to humankind
with all these things.

All nature is at the disposal of humankind.

We are to work with it. For
without it we cannot survive.

~ Hildegard of Bingen

We shall awaken from our dullness and rise vigorously toward justice. If we fall in love with creation deeper and deeper, we will respond to its endangerment with passion.

~ Hildegard of Bingen

November 20 ~ Releasing: Gratitude

Saying thank you may be, as Meister Eckhart declared, the only prayer we ever need to say. How many ways can we learn to say it? Can we say it even when we aren't sure we feel it? If we release gratitude into the world, might we also release resentment's grip on our hearts?

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee.

As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean.

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?"

Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.

~ Luke 17:11-19

"And still, after all this time, the Sun has never said to the Earth,
'You owe me.'

Look what happens with love like that. It lights up the sky."

~ Jalal ad-Din Rumi

November 27 ~ Releasing: Hope (Advent 1)

The weeks leading up to Christmas invite us to remember several key virtues: Hope, Peace, Love and Joy. Could hope be connected to humility? Maybe finding solid ground (humus) on which to stand is a kind of hope.

Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am

not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

~ Luke 18:9-14

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chilliest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.
~ Emily Dickinson

December 4 ~ Releasing: Peace (Advent 2)

In Advent we are invited to stare straight into the possibility that everything is coming to an end – an apocalypse, if you will. It seems counter-intuitive to move toward the virtues of Christmas by facing the destruction of everything we love. But maybe the point is to build a peace that can withstand the worse-case scenario.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; the Holy One utters a word, the earth melts.

The BELOVED is with us; the God of our ancestors is our refuge.

Come, behold the works of the BELOVED; see what desolations God has brought on the earth. God makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. God breaks the bow and shatters the spear and burns the shields with fire. The Holy One says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."
~ Psalm 46

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will

does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always though
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.
~ Thomas Merton

December 11 ~ Releasing: Apathy (Hannukah)

When the Maccabees needed light to keep their prayers rising in their fight going, the oil kept going. It was a reminder that a little light goes a long way.

All praise to You, O Beloved, for You have raised me up,
and have not let my fears overwhelm me.

O Compassionate One, I cried for help, and You comforted me.
You, O Love, helped me release my soul from despair;
You gave me strength to face my fears; now love is awakening in me.

Sing praises to the Beloved, All you saints, giving thanks to Love's holy Name.
Love withdraws when we close our hearts, yet ever awaits an open door.
In the evening we may weep, yet joy comes with the morning.

In my prosperity, I had lost sight of Love, I found power in my wealth.
In your mercy, O Beloved, my foundations You shook, and in recognizing my separation
from You, I was dismayed.

I cried to You for help; to You, I pleaded for forgiveness:
"What profit in my riches if I am separated from Love?
Will emptiness praise You? Will it tell of your faithfulness?
Hear me, O Beloved, and be gracious to me! O Love, hasten to my assistance."

And You turned my mourning into dancing;
You set me free and clothed me with gladness.
My soul rejoices and is glad in You;
songs of gratitude fill My soul rising up to You, O Beloved.
~ Psalm 30

For this world is the reality of the spirit in a state of trance. The manifestation of the mystery is partly suspended, with ourselves living in lethargy. Our normal consciousness is a state of stupor, in which our sensibility to the wholly real and our responsiveness to the stimuli of the spirit are reduced. The mystics, knowing that we are involved in a hidden history of the cosmos, endeavor to awake from the drowsiness and apathy and to regain the state of wakefulness for our enchanted souls.

~ Abraham Joshua Heschel

December 18 ~ Releasing: Joy

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Holy, the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God who will come and save you."

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.

~ Isaiah 35:1-6

“The Song of Mary “

My soul sings of you, O God,

My spirit delights in your Presence.

You have cherished my womanhood,

You have honored earth's body.

All will know the sacredness of birth,

All will know the gift of life.

Your grace is to those who are open,

Your mercy to the humble in heart.

The dreams of the proud crumble,

The plans of the powerful fail.

You feed the hungry with goodness,

You deny the rich their greed.

The hopes of the poor are precious,

The birth pangs of creation are heard.

You have been faithful to the human family,

You are the seed of new beginnings.

My soul sings of you, O God,

My spirit delights in your Presence.

~ Luke 1:46-55, paraphrase by J.Philip Newell