

Restoring the Wellsprings: A Lenten Retreat into Creative Practice

Church of the Redeemer
Lent 2011

Do you ever hear it?
do you know
what your voice is
always singing?

Listen!
It sings
(like everything)
as if no song
were ever sung before like
this

It
is the song you have been singing
all your life

–James Broughton

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This booklet is an outline for six weeks of an alternative, art-based spiritual practice for Lent.

It emphasizes that our longing for creative expression is a manifestation of God's image within us—of our intrinsic goodness as the beloved of God.

It's focused around our calling to repair of the self and to repair of the world.

It encourages us to search within for the wellsprings of our most authentic joy, and of our capacity to play and to create as expressions of that joy.

It starts with the premise that we are already deeply and unconditionally loved, and already living in the experience of the Resurrection and the safety of God's love.

If you are familiar with **Julian Cameron's *The Artist's Way***, you will recognize strong parallels with her course in creative recovery. You may also see parallels with the **Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius**. Like the Spiritual Exercises, this practice is grounded in the belief that God calls us to become more fully who God has already made us to be. Consequently, we should pay careful attention to our longings and our joys as important showings about God's will for our lives.

The Commitment

We'll meet as a group every Tuesday in Lent, beginning on 15 March, from 7-9 p.m. on the lower level of the Church of the Redeemer. We'll share our experience of the week's readings, exercises, and activities as laid out below. **We'll spend at least an hour of our time making art together** that will go upstairs to decorate the narthex the following Sunday. *You need have no experience, and no firm confidence in your aptitude, only a willingness to come forward and experiment in a loving, supportive atmosphere.*

For another six weeks **from Easter to Pentecost**, our focus will shift from repair of the self to repair of the world: **we will create a studio space one morning a week to make art together with guests of our lunch program.** For those whose schedule doesn't allow active participation in these morning activities, you are invited to participate through off-site or advance practical support, and/or through your prayers.

You will need to set aside half an hour or 45 minutes a day, and another block of 90 minutes or two hours once a week, in addition to the Tuesday meetings, to do what is suggested below.

There are **two mainstays of this practice**, both drawn from Cameron's course, every day from the first meeting to the end of Lent:

1. **Morning pages.** Buy yourself a blank notebook. Every morning write longhand three pages of whatever comes to mind. Don't censor yourself: turn off the editor within! Use them to free yourself up and let things float to the surface. Then let them go, without reading them over again or showing them to anyone else. This will be your biggest commitment of time day to day, and three pages might seem like a lot. But follow your impulses as you write: record your dreams of the night before, write about movies or hobbies, plans for your day, how much you resent writing these pages.
2. **The "artist date."** Once a week, **it's your job to take yourself out to have fun** for an hour or two. Do it alone, and choose something that you might not normally allow yourself: an excursion to a gallery to look at art; a trip to a fabric store; a walk in a public garden you love, or have always wanted to visit; a ferry ride to explore the Island. This should be gratuitous and self-indulgent. **In short, you are to give up self-denial for Lent.**

On the pages that follow, you will find themes, lectionary readings, quotations to meditate on, and exercises for every week. (These readings and exercises may also become material for your morning pages.)

Week 1: Rethinking Lent: Returning to our Authentic Joy

Lectionary reading: Romans 5:15-17

Our good Lord revealed to me a spiritual sight of his familiar love. I saw that he is everything that is good and comfortable and helpful to us. He is our clothing, which wraps, embraces, and surrounds us, hanging about us in tender love, so that he can never leave us. And so, in this vision I saw that he is everything that is good, as I understand it. And in this, he showed me something tiny, like a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, or so I thought. And it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and thought, "What may this be?" And I had this answer: "It is all that is made." I marveled how it could last, for it seemed to me it could have fallen into nothingness, it was so small. And in my understanding I had this answer: "It lasts and shall last forever, for God loves it. And thus everything has being through the love of God."

–Julian of Norwich

There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique, and if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium; and be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is, nor how it compares with other expression. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open. You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep open and aware directly to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open.

–Martha Graham

The compost pile is a site of transformation, taking what has been cast off and returning it to the garden. It's not just garbage, after all. The distillation of any philosophy of composting has some connection with the positive concept of waste and death. The contribution that mortality makes to civilization is the equivalent of what composting contributes to a garden. We are all candidates for composting. So we cannot approach the compost heap without a feeling of connection.

–Stanley Kunitz

During **Week 1**, choose at least one of the following exercises:

(a) List five things that work well for you about Lent. List five things that aren't so good, or don't work for you. **BE HONEST** about both!

(b) *What if God actually loves you for who you are?* Make a list of five things about yourself that God gets a kick out of—not just approves of, but *gets a kick out of*. Make them specific to who you are as an individual—and **LOSE THE PIETY**.

Remember your morning pages. What does it feel like to do them? Can you make them into half an hour a day when you listen to yourself like someone who deserves to be heard?

Did you make time this week for your artist date? What did you do, and what was it like?

Art project for Tuesday night: Drawing with ashes. This week and every week, there will be an option to share in a collaborative work and/or to create a piece of your own.

Week 2. Taking Down the Roadblocks

Lectionary reading: Genesis 12:1-5a

Stop telling yourself, “It’s too late.”

Stop waiting until you make enough money to do something you’d really love.

Stop telling yourself, “It’s just my ego” whenever you yearn for a more creative life.

Stop telling yourself that dreams don’t matter, that they are only dreams and you should be more sensible.

Stop fearing that your family and friends would think you crazy.

Stop telling yourself that creativity is a luxury and that you should be grateful for what you’ve got.

–Julia Cameron, *The Artist’s Way*, p. 7.

Too Busy for the Party

One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” Then Jesus said to him, “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’” But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, “I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my apologies.” Another said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my apologies.” Another said, “I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.” So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, “Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.” And the slave said, “Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.” Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’”–Luke 14:15-24

The city squats on my back./ I am heart-sore, stiff-necked,/ exasperated. That’s why/ I slammed the door,/ that’s why I tell you now,/ in every house of marriage/ there’s room for an interpreter./ Let’s jump in the car, honey,/ and head straight for the Cape,/ where the cock on our housetop crows/ that the weather’s fair,/ and my garden waits for me/ to coax it into bloom.

–Stanley Kunitz

For **Week 2**, choose at least one of the following exercises:

(a) Make a list of five things about the way you conduct your daily life that may keep you from being open to your creative impulses. Each day, pick one of them. Carry your morning pages notebook with you through the day. Every time you notice that obstacle coming up in the course of the day, make a mark.

(b) List three bad memories: times when your capacity for playful abandon and creativity was squelched. Be specific, and go into some detail. Now go back to that scene in your mind to defend the artist-child who needs your protection.

(c) Identify your “blurts”—those voices inside you that say you have no business trying to be artistic. (“This is so self-indulgent.” “That would have been fine if responsibilities hadn’t gotten in the way.” “It’s too late to get the training.”) Write out ten of them. Now write out a positive statement answering back to each one of them.

This and every week hereafter, consider bringing a piece of art to share with the group that speaks to you, inspires your own creativity, speaks to the themes of the week.

How many days this week have you done your morning pages? What was it like this week to do them? Is it possible that God could be using them so you pay closer attention to who you really are?

Did you remember that artist date? If you didn’t, what got in your way?

Art project for Tuesday night: Letting go of control with wet-on-wet watercolour

Week 3. Remembering Who We Are

Lectionary reading: Exodus 17:1-7

The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves.

–C.G. Jung

It always comes back to the same necessity: go deep enough and there is a bedrock of truth, however hard.

–May Sarton

Choosing the Better Part

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me. But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.

–Luke 10:38-42

And then our good Lord opened my spiritual eyes and showed me my soul in the midst of my heart. I saw the soul as large as though it were an eternal citadel, or a kingdom of bliss, and by its circumstances I understood that it is an honorable city. In the midst of that city sits our Lord Jesus, true God and true man.

–Julian of Norwich

There isn't only one kind of artist in the world, one way of becoming an artist. There is, above all, a need to articulate your own source of being so you will recognize that source and know who you are. How could you be an artist if you didn't explore your own inner life?... The creative gift has very complex origins; you're accumulating and digesting experience, trying to discover its meanings, instead of stuffing it into a closet and moving on to whatever happens next.

–Stanley Kunitz

For **Week 3**, choose at least one of the following exercises:

(a) Parallel lives: list five lives you'd like to have. Remember to be outrageous, self-indulgent, and fanciful.

(b) List twenty things you like to do. When was the last time you did each? Record the date. Consider making one of these activities into your artist date this week.

How many days this week have you done the morning pages? Are they becoming a source of satisfaction? Or of frustration? Or are they just boring? If your answer is any of the above, everything is going according to plan. *Keep doing them.*

What does it feel like to see your weekly artist date as a responsibility to yourself?

Art project for Tuesday night: learning from Mark Rothko and Cy Twombly

Week 4. Christ Our Liberator

Lectionary reading: John 9:1-41



–photograph by John Dugdale

Pentecost

What is this Holy Spirit?
And what's it doing in the eggplant?

–David Craig

Love God, and do as you will.

–St. Ignatius Loyola

Often people attempt to live their lives backwards: they try to have more things, or more money, in order to do more of what they want so that they will be happier. The way it actually works is the reverse. You must first be who you really are, then, do what you need to do, in order to have what you want.

–Margaret Young

For **Week 4**, choose at least one of the following exercises:

(a) Experiences of grace: list three good memories of times when your capacity for playfulness and creativity was encouraged. Be specific, give details, and think about how it freed you up to be yourself *and* to be more open to others. Now go back to that scene in your mind and thank the agent of that grace.

(b) List five experiences that surprised you by bringing unexpected delight and joy. What made them surprising? How did they affect the way you felt and behaved toward others?

What if your artist date is God telling you it's safe to let the defenses down, act like a child, and play in Her/His presence? (*What if you scheduled a day-long artist date?*)

Art project for Tuesday night: a mural of handprints

Week 5. Living through the Desert

Lectionary reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Lost

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you,
If you leave it you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

–David Wagoner

And then our courteous Lord showed me a wonderful parable of a lord and a servant.... The lord sits in solemn rest and peace. The servant stands reverently before his lord.... The servant not only goes forth but in love leaps up at once and runs in great haste to do his lord's will. And soon he falls in a ditch and suffers great pains. He groans and moans and twists and turns. But he may not rise nor help himself in any way. And in all this, the worst that I saw in him was that he lacked all comfort. For he could not turn his face to look up to his loving lord, who was very near, and in whom was all his comfort.

–Julian of Norwich

For **Week 5**, choose at least one of the following exercises:

(a) Build an oasis: create an altar or sacred area in your home. Bring to it objects that you think can remind you, in times of drought, of the fertile, juicy experiences of your life. If you already have a home altar, then consciously bring objects to it that represent your experiences of personal fulfillment.

(b) List five demons in your desert: voices of temptation or condemnation that can seduce you away from your creative life. What helps you know they're demons and not angels of light?

Have you had the experience yet of “hitting a wall” with your morning pages? Do they feel unrewarding, dry? Keep going! See if there's a lesson in continuing with them even when they don't flow easily.

Art project for Tuesday night: mixed-media collage. Please bring with you this week materials that have some important personal association or meaning for you. (You might bring ticket stubs from an opera or play that you loved; a photograph; a hand-written note you received; a cancelled passport with your tourist visa to India; a fortune-cookie slip; your horoscope from the paper; banknotes in a currency no longer accepted as legal tender; pressed flowers; an old drawing you're now ready to cannibalize; cards from the deck you and your great-aunt used when she taught you to play canasta.)

Week 6. Walking at Dawn to an Empty Tomb

Lectionary reading: Isaiah 50: 4-9a

It is the creative potential itself in human beings that is the image of God.

–Mary Daly

When we open ourselves to our creativity, we open ourselves to the creator's creativity within us and our lives. Creativity is God's gift to us.... Using our creativity is our gift back to God.

–Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way*, p. 3.

Why should we all use our creative power...? Because there is nothing that makes people so generous, joyful, lively, bold and compassionate, so indifferent to fighting and the accumulation of objects and money.

–Brenda Ueland

When you look back on a lifetime and think of what has been given to the world by your presence, your fugitive presence, inevitably you think of your art, whatever it may be, as the gift you have made to the world in acknowledgment of the gift you have been given, which is the life itself. And I think the world tends to forget that this is the ultimate significance of the body of work each artist produces. That work is not an expression of the desire for praise or recognition, or prizes, but the deepest manifestation of your gratitude for the gift of life.

–Stanley Kunitz

For **Week 6**, choose at least one of the following exercises:

(a) List five people in your life with whom you can share your dreams and who will support you as you make concrete plans to fulfill them.

(b) Road to the Tomb/Road to Emmaus/ Road to Damascus: walk the Labyrinth at Trinity Square, entrance off Bay Street south of Dundas, behind the Eaton Centre, and listen for what the Stranger on the way has to tell you about using your gifts. (If you would like to do this with others in the group, be there at 5.30 p.m. on Wednesday of Holy Week.)

(c) List five people who are dead that you wish you'd met. What about them attracts you, and how could you look for those traits in those you know in this life?

This week, read back over your morning pages from the last five weeks.

Art project for Tuesday night: Death is swallowed up in victory (reworking our ash drawings)

This week, we will also talk with Simon Lewchuk, the coordinator of our lunch program, about the lunch program studio project, which will begin next week.