



# The Center for Christian Spirituality

A ministry of Chapelwood United Methodist Church

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## AT THE CENTER

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August 20, 2009

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*At the Center* is a periodic e-newsletter from The Center for Christian Spirituality. Please reply to [nsterling@chapelwood.org](mailto:nsterling@chapelwood.org) if you wish to be removed from this mailing list.

## REPENTANCE AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD: A PERSONAL REFLECTION BY JERRY

*"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand."* (Matt. 3:2, 4:17)

John the Baptizer preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand" (Matt. 3:2). Jesus followed, repeating the same message (4:17): "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand."

What did they mean by “repent?” And what was the reality called “the kingdom of heaven/God” to which they pointed?

I read scholar after scholar try to couch the imagery of the New Testament idea of the “kingdom of God/heaven” in contemporary language. Sociologists dissect the political and social context of the first century to come up with contemporary analogies. Linguists try to find vocabulary equivalent to the “kingdom of God” that brings understanding to modern minds. Theologians attempt to place the kingdom of God into the larger movement of God in human history.

I’m still confounded. Their attempts point me in the right direction, but I’m still unclear about what the kingdom of God looks like. If it’s a physical place, I may have missed it.

Further, while the word “repent” is a gospel-word, it also has been used and abused in churches and among Christians. Thus, the word “repent” is loaded with a volatile emotional charge. Some of us may connect it with hell-fire-damnation preaching, or with evangelists preaching revival sermons, or with lengthy altar-calls.

At least in my history, “repent” connoted a change in behavior, especially in areas of morality. “Turn around,” “change your mind,” or “change your behavior” was the message. “Stop doing the immoral thing you’ve been doing and start following God,” the word suggested.

That idea of changing your behavior or turning around comes from the Hebrew word often translated “repent.” The word, *shub*, literally means to turn around or to change directions.

The Greek word, used in the New Testament for repentance is *metanoia*. The prefix *meta* carries several possible meanings, including “beyond,” “outside,” “larger,” and “greater.” *Noia* is from the Greek *nous* which refers to the mind.

Actually, then, *metanoia* – or the idea of “repentance” – refers to taking on a different mind, a larger mind. It suggests movement out of a narrow living and seeing in order to adopt a larger frame of reference. We all have a narrow mind, a limited scope, a tunneled vision by which we view God, others, self, and the world. Repentance is the invitation not simply to change our mind or to change our behavior, but to see a larger God-world that is saturated with God’s presence, a world “charged with the grandeur of God” (Gerard Manley Hopkins).

And because repentance is so closely linked to the kingdom of God (by John the Baptizer and Jesus), perhaps within *metanoia* is the clue to the mysterious language of the kingdom.

I’m beginning to think that the kingdom of God is a state of being, an awareness or consciousness of God’s presence and action within me, others, and in the world. As a state of awareness, to enter or see the kingdom I have to see differently. The narrow, small ways I’ve seen myself, others, and the world have to be replaced by a broader, more expansive awareness. In effect, I’m trading in my small sight for the capability to see the largeness of God’s presence and work in the world.

*Metanoia* is the movement from the smaller to the larger, into this wider *beyond*-mind, while the kingdom of God is the state of being in this larger place, this alternative reality.

And those who enter the kingdom of God are those who take upon themselves this way of being that Jesus taught and modeled in his life.

The spiritual journey is about this movement of *metanoia* and this state of being deeply and intimately connected with God and the God-world. So the spiritual journey is about repentance and the kingdom of God.

And this is what The Center for Christian Spirituality is about. We exist to walk with persons on this journey, to provide space and opportunity and encouragement for this spiritual path.

You'll find below an assortment of prayer groups, classes, retreats, book studies, small groups, and other resources that we hope will help you in this process of *metanoia* and living into the kingdom of God. As you are open to the Holy Spirit, we invite you to take part in what draws you. That's why we're here.

The kingdom of heaven is close at hand.

Peace to you,  
Jerry

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## THREE POEMS BY WENDELL BERRY

### The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

## To Know the Dark

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.  
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,  
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,  
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

## The Silence

What must a man do to be at home in the world?  
There must be times when he is here  
as though absent, gone beyond words into the woven shadows  
of the grass and the flighty darknesses  
of leaves shaking in the wind, and beyond  
the sense of the weariness of engines and of his own heart,  
his wrongs grown old unforgiven. It must be with him  
as though his bones fade beyond thought  
into the shadows that grow out of the ground  
so that the furrow he opens in the earth opens  
in his bones, and he hears the silence  
of the tongues of the dead tribesmen buried here  
a thousand years ago. And then what presences will rise up  
before him, weeds bearing flowers, and the dry wind  
rain! What songs he will hear!

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## COVERED DISH SUPPER FOR THE CONTEMPLATIVE WORSHIP COMMUNITY – AUGUST 30 AT 6:00 P.M.

Bring a dish to share and join the Contemplative Worship Community for a covered-dish supper on Sunday, Aug. 30 at 6:00 p.m. in room YB100-101 (down the hall from the Chapel in the new Youth Building). We'll culminate our month-long focus on *Life Together* with this shared meal. Just as we share the fruit of our listening to the Word, so we share our food and our lives. Even if you are not able to bring a dish, please come and share the gift of your self.

# FALL SPIRITUAL FORMATION CLASSES BEGIN IN SEPTEMBER

SPIRITUAL FORMATION STUDY *Journeying Home from the Far Country* begins Sept. 9

This fall Jerry Webber will lead a spiritual formation study entitled *Journeying Home from the Far Country: Biblical Themes for Spiritual Transformation*. Over the last several years Jerry has taught formation studies in the fall, including the spirituality of Ephesians, the parables of Jesus, and the Gospel of John. This year's study will look at selected themes from the books of Genesis and Exodus, exploring them as patterns for the larger themes of spirituality that are being lived out in our lives. As always, the emphasis will be on prayer and integration as we live into the reality of these themes.

The study will also offer some perspectives on the place of Scripture in shaping our lives. For many folks, certain themes in the Scriptures present an impediment to authentic spirituality, rather than assisting our growth. We will explore - with some frankness - the shape of spirituality in light of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

To assist us in considering Scripture through some different lenses, Jerry is recommending Richard Rohr's book, *Things Hidden* as a supplement to his weekly presentations. He will suggest weekly readings from Rohr's book to supplement the material he presents in class on Wednesdays. Copies of *Things Hidden* may be purchased from the Chapelwood bookstore (contact Kris Jodon at [kjodon@chapelwood.org](mailto:kjodon@chapelwood.org)).

*Journeying Home from the Far Country* will be offered on Wednesday nights this fall, Sept. 9 - Nov. 18, at 6:30 p.m., in LC201. If you would like to attend, please register your intention with Nancy Sterling at (713) 354-4458 or [nsterling@chapelwood.org](mailto:nsterling@chapelwood.org). Class notes, CD's, and podcasts will be available after the sessions.

**SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS** offered on Sunday mornings in the fall

*Spiritual Foundations* is an important introductory course in spiritual formation, prayer, and contemplative practice. The class, developed by Jerry Webber, has been offered frequently at Chapelwood over the last 8 years. This fall for the first time it will be offered on Sunday mornings from 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

The class is an intensive, experiential movement into spiritual practice and personal transformation. Weekly classes include group discussion, presentations, and experiential spiritual exercises in a small group setting. Between the weekly class meetings, participants are asked to do outside reading (class curriculum *and* significant books related to appropriate themes) and to practice various spiritual exercises, including some suggested prayer forms.

Those participating in the class should plan to devote time outside class for the exercises, in addition to the time spent in class.

Because the class is offered on Sunday mornings at a time that may conflict with many persons' usual routine of Sunday School and worship at Chapelwood, Jerry is encouraging participants to consider attending Contemplative Worship at 8:45 a.m. in the Chapel before coming to class at 10:00 a.m. in LC201.

An introduction and orientation to the class will be offered on Sunday, Sept. 13, at 10:00 a.m. in LC201. This introduction should last about 45 minutes and is appropriate for persons who are trying to discern about whether or not to take the class. The first session of the class will begin on Sunday, Sept. 20, at 10:00 a.m. in LC201. The last class session will be held on Sunday, Nov. 15.

Cost for the class is \$80 and includes all materials, books, and refreshments. A limited amount of scholarship assistance is available. Please direct questions about the class to Jerry Webber (713)354-4477 or [jwebber@chapelwood.org](mailto:jwebber@chapelwood.org). You may register for the class by contacting Nancy Sterling (713) 354-4458 or [nsterling@chapelwood.org](mailto:nsterling@chapelwood.org). The class will be limited in size.

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## SMALL GROUP WORK WITH THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES BEGINS SEPT. 3

For four centuries the work of Ignatius of Loyola has been a faithful guide for persons seeking to grow in prayer and relationship with God. Ignatius was keenly attentive to God's action within himself, others, and the created world. He wrote what we refer to as the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius. The exercises present a way of listening to and praying with Scripture that is life-changing.

Over the next 9 months (Sept. 2009 - May 2010) we will offer a small group experience based on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius. The group will be limited in size, led by a group facilitator who has completed the 9 month movement of the Spiritual Exercises. Those who participate will be asked to commit themselves to weekly group gatherings (Thurs. evenings from 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.) and to the process of prayer and discernment. Persons who take part in this experience will be asked to:

- pray with and listen to the Scriptures as regularly as possible;
- bring the fruit of your listening to the group that meets weekly;
- help create a safe space where others in the group may share freely and honestly about what they hear in the Scriptures they have prayed with;
- be as present as possible to the weekly group meetings;
- be committed to the group for the duration of the 9 months.

The group will meet each Thursday evening May – Sept. from 6:30 – 8:00 in room LC201. The first group time, an orientation gathering, will be Thursday, Sept. 3. Then, beginning Sept. 10 the group will begin weekly gatherings ordered around their experience of the Spiritual Exercises.

Because of the nature of the group, its size will be limited in number. If you would like more information about the group, please contact Jerry Webber at [jwebber@chapelwood.org](mailto:jwebber@chapelwood.org) or (713) 354-4477. To participate in the group, contact Nancy Sterling at [nsterling@chapelwood.org](mailto:nsterling@chapelwood.org) or (713) 354-4458.

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## CENTERING PRAYER AND *INVITATION TO LOVE* BOOK STUDY

In his book, *Invitation to Love*, Father Thomas Keating outlines and explains the actual stages of the process of spiritual growth and the role centering prayer plays in the life of someone who seriously undertakes this prayer practice.

For four weeks beginning September 14<sup>th</sup>, a group of those individuals who have made a faithful attempt to include centering prayer in their lives will study Father Keating's book in hopes of finding the answer to some of these questions: How will it affect my life? Where does it lead us spiritually? What obstacles will I encounter along the way? Why is it necessary? How does it work?

Currently Centering Prayer is offered by The Center for Christian Spirituality four times a week in the Bride's Room at Chapelwood: Monday & Wednesday at 9:00 a.m. and Tuesday & Thursday at 9:30 a.m. Also on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of each month following the 8:45 Contemplative Worship service in the Chapel, an introduction and short period of centering is offered.

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## CHAPELWOOD KNITS WITH ESPERANZA – PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY

Chapelwood's Prayer Shawl Ministry recently participated in the Ministerio Esperanza de Cristo's Vacation Bible School program by providing an activity for the mothers, who accompanied their children each day, which would engage hearts and hands with the love of God. The language barrier was bridged by the love of knitting and the joy of women gathering together with a common goal and the hours flew by with prayer, knitting, giggling, and many puzzled expressions as we struggled for words to accompany our sharing. It was a

rich experience for everyone who participated. So much so that the organizers now plan to meet weekly for continued Bible study, knitting, and fellowship.

This is just one of the latest examples of the way in which this ministry goes far beyond the walls of Chapelwood. Prayer Shawls have been sent on Mission trips all over the world and others have been mailed or taken to loved ones to distant places – even overseas to remote areas. As of today, over 450 shawls, which have been knit or crocheted, have been distributed as visible expressions of God’s love.

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## UPCOMING DAYS OF PRAYER AND RETREAT

The Center for Christian Spirituality will offer three types of retreats over the next few months. Retreat dates and locations are listed below.

*Contemplative Days of Quiet and Centering* are day retreats in which we give ourselves to prayer and reflection in a peaceful setting. These retreat days are comprised of a rhythm of centering prayer, walking meditation, and free time for reflection. Note that on these day retreats there is very little teaching or speaking. Meals are most often taken in silence.

*Contemplative Days of Quiet and Centering* take place at the Ruah Retreat Center (in the Villa de Matel at Wayside and Lawndale). The retreats begin promptly at 9:30 a.m. and conclude by 3:00 p.m. Cost for these retreats will be \$35, which includes use of the space and the noon meal.

- Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2009
- Monday, November 9, 2009
- Monday, January 11, 2010
- Monday, March 1, 2010
- Monday, April 19, 2010

*A Day Apart for Prayer and Creative Expression* is a day retreat devoted to contemplative prayer and creative reflection. These days will be offered at Chapelwood UMC (room LC201) and will include a rhythm of prayer, *lectio divina*, labyrinth walking/prayer, and time/space for creative expression. Lunch will be served as a part of the retreat experience. The retreat will begin at 9:00 a.m. and conclude by 3:00 p.m. Cost for the retreat will be \$15.

- Friday, October 16, 2009

*Seasonal Retreats* include the *Advent Prayer Retreat* and the *Lenten Prayer Retreat*. These day retreats are themed, with each led by a facilitator who leads us into a consideration of the themes of that liturgical season. Depending on the facilitator, they will include rhythms of prayer, group interaction, and silence for reflection. The *Advent Retreat* and the *Lenten Retreat* will both be held at The Cenacle Retreat House (420 N. Kirkwood in Houston). Cost for these retreats is \$50/retreat, which includes materials, lunch, and use of the facilities for the day.

- Thursday, December 3, 2009 (Advent Retreat)

- Thursday, February 18, 2010 (Lenten Retreat)

To register for all retreats, contact Nancy Sterling at [nsterling@chapelwood.org](mailto:nsterling@chapelwood.org). Your registration for a retreat will not be complete until payment has been made. Partial scholarship assistance may be available on a case by case basis.

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## CONFERENCE OPPORTUNITY IN JANUARY 2010

### Richard Rohr/James Finley in Albuquerque – January 22-24, 2010

If you would like to take advantage of a group discount to attend the Richard Rohr/James Finley Conference, “Following the Mystics Through the Narrow Gates” in January (and have not previously notified Nancy Sterling), please contact her either by telephone (713)354-4458 or email: [nsterling@chapelwood.org](mailto:nsterling@chapelwood.org). For those who have not previously been contacted, here are some descriptive details provided by Fr. Rohr’s web site, CAC Radical Grace:

**Jesus said, “Narrow is the gate that leads to life and few there are who enter it.”**

In this conference, we will follow the mystics through the mysterious process in which we realize God is the very reality of ourselves, others and all things. Seeing God in all things and all things in God, we experience the peace that surpasses understanding.

The mystics who will be singled out as our guides will be:

- **Meister Eckhart**
- **The anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing***
- **John of the Cross**
- **Theresa of Avila**
- **John Ruusbroec**
- **Mechthild of Magdeberg**
- **Julian of Norwich**
- **Thomas Merton**

Rather than focus on any single teacher, we will instead zero in on the ways in which each mystic helps us to understand and pass through the critical phases of our journeys of spiritual awakening.

The Presenters will be:

**James Finley, PhD**, who lived as a monk at the cloistered Trappist monastery of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, where the world-renowned monk and author, Thomas Merton, was his spiritual director. He leads retreats and workshops throughout the United States and Canada, attracting men and women from all religious traditions who seek to live a contemplative way of life in the midst of today's busy world. He is also a clinical psychologist in private practice with his wife in Santa Monica, California. He is the author of: *Merton's*

*Palace of Nowhere, The Contemplative Heart and Christian Meditation: Experiencing the Presence of God.*

**Richard Rohr, o.f.m.**, an internationally known author and spiritual teacher, is a Franciscan of the New Mexico province and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque. He considers the proclamation of the Gospel to be his primary call and the related themes he addresses include Eco-Spirituality, Scripture as liberation, the integration of action and contemplation, community building, peace and justice issues, male spirituality, and the Enneagram. He is a regular contributing writer for **Sojourners**. Some of his best known books include *Everything Belongs* and *Things Hidden*.

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AND [WWW.ONLYASOJOURNER.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://WWW.ONLYASOJOURNER.BLOGSPOT.COM)

Keep posted on classes, retreats, and other offerings through The Center for Christian Spirituality website at [www.centerforchristianspirituality.org](http://www.centerforchristianspirituality.org). We try to keep the site current with the opportunities offered by The Center.

Also, you might be interested in reading the regular reflections on spirituality and contemplative practice offered by Jerry Webber at [www.onlyasojourner.blogspot.com](http://www.onlyasojourner.blogspot.com).

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THANK YOU FROM JERRY . . .

I'm grateful for your prayers and encouragement through recent months as I re-entered chemotherapy treatments and gave attention to my physical health. I had more difficulty with the treatments this spring than I've had previously. Through the summer, though, I've regained strength and have been working into a more regular routine.

Last week I went for more tests and a visit with my oncologist. My counts are holding steady, a bit below normal, but no longer decreasing.

I'm so thankful for your support through this and for understanding my need to stay clear of close contact while my immune system was low. I'm aware that I do not walk through these difficulties without your love and support.

God's Peace,

Jerry