



# THE MARK

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## MERCY



The Church of Conscious Harmony  
A Contemplative Christian Community  
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# Blessed Are the Merciful

by Tim Cook

I did not grow up in a wealthy family. We were certainly not poor, but with four kids my parents always felt pressed to get by from month-to-month. We kids always had everything we needed of the basics but my parents rarely spent anything on themselves and my dad in particular always put his own needs last. He just didn't spend money on himself. During my high school years both my parents were working, and by the time I was a junior things had gotten better and our economic situation felt, for the first time, a little expansive.

That year was 1960, the year that the Ford Motor Company introduced a brand-new model in their line up. It was called the Galaxy and its radical space age styling made it an immediate sensation in the automotive market. My dad was smitten. We had always had station wagons for as long as I could remember, but since we needed a new car at that time Dad decided to trade in our old wagon and get himself a Galaxy. He was so proud of that car, and the entire family was overjoyed to see how happy it made him. It boosted the spirits of all of us because it made us feel like we'd taken a step up the social ladder. I was given the job of cleaning and maintaining it in exchange for using it from time to time to go out on dates. On the weekend of our high school formal dance I washed, waxed, polished and had it utterly spotless as I prepared it for my date.

She lived a short way out of town near a four lane highway. As I waited for the traffic signal to change at the beginning of her road, a car pulled up in the lane next to me and stopped beside me at the light. I recognized one of the kids from school driving the hot rod I had always admired. Vroom...vroom..... vroom.... vroom...vroom...vroom; I heard the invitation of his engine and when the light changed I stood on the accelerator, knowing for sure that I could take him. Both cars burned rubber and took off side-by-side. As we hit (I'm invoking my 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment rights here) mph he began to pull ahead and I lost my concentration. Before I even knew what was happening my dad's dream car was fishtailing from side to side. A moment later it tore down a row of guard rails as the entire right side of the car was peeled off. I was unhurt though shaken to the core. My best friend, Frank, who had been following me in his dad's car, saw the whole spectacle and after making sure I was alright drove to a nearby phone to call the police.

The policeman was very kind as he made out his report. "How fast were you going?", he asked. I replied that I couldn't be sure because I hadn't been looking at the speedometer but that I guessed that it was perhaps 60 or 65 mph. "Did you say 45?", he responded. No, I answered, seeing that the damage to the car was inconceivable for a 45 mph accident, "I think it was

closer to 60 or 65." His response surprised me, "Son, don't you think you've got enough trouble already? The speed limit here is 45. Did you say that you were going 45?" "Yes officer, I was going about 45," I replied with relief.

After the wrecker dragged my dad's dream car away, Frank and I picked up our dates very late and went to the dance, but the sense of doom was so great that none of us had any fun so we left early and Frank drove me home to meet my fate. Dad answered the door, surprised to see me home so early, and asked what had happened. When I told him that I had destroyed his Galaxy, his first question was whether I was OK. Assured that I was, he asked if I'd been racing. "No," I lied. I knew that he could tell that I was lying and his response put me on the spot. "You go straight with me and I'll go straight with you," he said simply. I told him the truth, "Yes, I was." What came next just astounded me: "Pretty dumb, huh?" He put his arm around my shoulders and led me into the house and never said another word about it. He knew that I knew just how much that car meant to him and that I was already ashamed and suffering the consequences of my foolishness. He was merciful to his son.

Christ reminds us of how we are inclined to do the best for our children. He points to God, the source of all the generous qualities we extend to those we love and asks us to consider just how God is

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inclined to act even more generously to us. "As bad as you are, ... You're at least decent to your own children. So don't you think the God who conceived you in love will be even better?" ( Matthew 7:11 *The Message*)

He makes it even more explicit in the Parable of the Prodigal Son: *There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, 'Father, I want right now what's coming to me.' It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt. He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten the corncobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any. That brought him to his senses. He said, 'All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.' He got right up and went home to his father. When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.' But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My*

*son is here - given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' And they began to have a wonderful time. (Luke 15:11-24 The Message)*

I have felt the surprising experience of God's mercy time and time again as I was treated better than I deserved. Just as when I met a merciful policeman and came home to a merciful father after destroying the family car, I also came home to a merciful Father when I turned to God after wrecking my life. Nothing was held against me. Lessons were learned and growth came out of the desperation. All charges were dropped and my life started anew. Mercy is clearly more than exacting justice. That pattern is repeated at least twice every day as I enter into God's silence in Centering Prayer. Letting go of thoughts and

distractions, I sink in to my true home in my heart, freed for the moment of the hustle and bustle of the "distant country" of my head. At rest there I instantly feel the welcoming embrace of the Spirit and the merciful realization of my true identity as a fully forgiven manifestation of Christ and a Son of our Creator/Father.

We have just completed the year in which we dedicated our community aim at The Church of Conscious Harmony to the study and experience of the concept of forgiveness. And just as I have in previous years, I learned a great deal about the subject of our annual aim. My big take away on the subject of forgiveness was the realization that I truly need to experience the reality that I am forgiven before I am able to extend true forgiveness to anyone else.

*continued on page 5*

## **Guidelines for Christian Life, Growth and Transformation**

Fr. Thomas Keating, in his seminal work *Open Mind, Open Heart*, lists 42 principles underlying the Christian spiritual journey. Fr. Keating asks that these principles be read according to the method of *Lectio Divina*.

One principle will appear in these pages each month.

25<sup>th</sup> Guideline



The spiritual radiation of a community depends on the commitment of its members to the transformational journey and to each other. To offer one another space in which to grow as persons is an integral part of this commitment.

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# Lord Have Mercy On Me

by Barbara Cook

“Yes, God is a just God, but He is not just just; He is merciful”. That is a playful and truthful quote by Fr. Thomas Keating. God’s mercy is more than strict justice. God nature is always lawful and, of course, there must be laws that govern the universe or there would be no order but simply chaos. Examples of the laws are: the law of gravity - if you drop something it will fall; and, you reap what you sow - when you sow corn you expect corn to grow and not a harvest of rocks or cotton candy. The Golden Rule also expresses a law: treat others as you would like to be treated—because we live in a lawful universe, what you put out you get back. That’s justice.

But God is not just just; he is merciful. We need only recall the parable of the Prodigal Son in the Gospels to get the depth of God’s mercy. Jesus, who knows God intimately, depicts God as Father, but one who is more like a most loving and merciful mother. When the wayward son turns toward home, the father not only runs out to greet him but throws his arms about him. He does not ask the son to account for his foolish self-centered life, or chastise him in the slightest but, instead, puts his ring on his finger, giving the son his own identity; puts a cloak around him, signifying his protection; gives the son sandals, indicating understanding; and then kills the fatted calf and has a party for him to celebrate his return home.

There is nothing that sounds like there is any *justice* in the entire story. Instead, there is just mercy, mercy, mercy! That is the kind of God we have. Jesus the Christ wanted us to get it that our God, the one He called not only Father but Abba, meaning poppa or daddy, is our Father, too.


When I turned to God I got that kind of response. I knew that He knew everything about me and my entire life, micro second by micro second, and that He loved me, in spite of all that I had or had not done. Many of you have probably had that same kind of experience. That is the essence of mercy.

The spiritual journey is a long journey in time rather than space. It involves more than simply knowing about God’s mercy. It means to live from it as a constant experience. If we consent to it, it enables us to move from being selfish and totally self centered to being a Christ centered being, a son of God. In His great mercy, God has totally equipped us to participate in this radical transformation of our being...if we simply consent.

Fr. Thomas has said that change is the name of the game in Christianity. If we don’t want to change we’d better find another religion.

Since that most likely won’t happen, and since we know that God is like a merciful parent and since we are coming into a new

opportunity with the new year, let’s go for it, wholeheartedly, and accept our Father’s plan for our growth and transformation. Let’s commit to the vehicle of transformation we’ve been given, a twice daily practice of Centering Prayer, as the basis for relationship with God our Father. If you don’t know how, take a Centering Prayer class this year and begin your journey. You could also dive into doing 10 days of retreats, this year and every year. That is where deep intimacy with God occurs and spiritual healing abounds. Attend Lectio Divina service on Sunday and read scripture daily. The monthly issue of the *Magnificat* is an excellent place to discover more about our beloved Abba. Make your commitment to your growth and healing in God and see for yourself what our merciful Father will do in response. Participate more deeply in your faith community and join with your brothers and sisters as we deepen in life, love and light. As living cells in The Body of Christ we encourage each other on the path as we share the journey into becoming sons and daughters of the living God. Be counted in God’s plan for redemption. It works if you work it, and you are worth it.

The practice of Centering Prayer prepares us for the spiritual gift of contemplation, which opens us to the contemplative life where we “see” God’s love, mercy, and compassion, as well as His justice and order through the x-ray eyes of faith. 

I've known since I was a kid that no matter what I do or have done; God has always already forgiven me. But knowing that as a theological concept is not the same as feeling it as an experience. To experience it I need to realize just how much I need it. That means that I need to be aware of just how often I miss the mark. Through the Work practice of self-observation I have seen how often I am mistaken, how often I judge others and how often I forget to feel gratitude for the abundant graces that God is always pouring into my life. Observing my inner world so clearly makes it difficult for me to hold others to a standard that I have yet to attain or to expect them to behave toward me more lovingly and generously than I am to others. It is humbling and liberating to realize just how much I am like all

the others in my life in one way or another. It enables me to let go of the burdensome and wearying habit of judging and reacting to others. So the focus of this last year has been a great blessing to me. I love feeling how much I have been forgiven and I also love feeling how much more forgiving I feel. Our community aims are powerful transformers of our consciousness.

Our community aim for 2010 explores the idea of mercy. Christ has made it crystal clear that God is always merciful. What do we do with that knowledge? A good start would be to make efforts to extend it. Remember what Jesus said about it: *"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."* (Matthew 5:7) A year from now, when we look back at this new beginning, I know we'll understand more about the God-given grace of mercy. ☺

## SEEDS:

The beginning is now.

To assume that my superficial ego—this cramp of the imagination—is my real self is to begin by dishonoring myself and reality. Then I am left with a choice between a servile adjustment that submits to facts and manipulates my ego-concept to defend it against subversion by the facts, or else a rebellious attitude which denies the facts and tries to flout them, again in the interests of the ego-image.

"Adjustment" becomes a constant play of "yes" and "no," an organized system of ambivalences, circling around one central ambivalence—a relative and contingent ego-image trying to constitute itself as an absolute. Here what we first intend as an absolute "yes" becomes inexorably an absolute "no."

But our life continues as a more and more desperate struggle to keep ourselves in focus as an *affirmation* not as a *negation*.

Such a project is simply and utterly futile.

We must go back to the beginning. What beginning?

The beginning of our thought? Or the real beginning which we cannot reach, which is too close to ourselves to be seen?

How can we ever "go back" to it? Back where?

The beginning is *now*.

By Thomas Merton

Originally published in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, p. 242

## January Calendar

Visit [consciousnessharmony.org](http://consciousnessharmony.org)  
for a complete listing of events

### Special Events

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat  
Jan 16 8:30am-4pm  
No need to pre-register. \$15  
Bring a potluck dish to share for lunch.

Fr. Carl Arico - Talk on 'Mercy'  
Jan 11 & 12 7:30-9pm  
Preregister \$20

Introduction to Centering Prayer  
Jan 23 8:30am-4pm Lunch included.  
This class will meet for 6 consecutive  
Monday evenings at 7:30pm.  
Pre-register in the office. \$75

Simple Explanation of Work Ideas  
6 Thursdays beginning Jan 7 7:30pm  
Pre-register in the office.

Lessons In Truth  
12 Wednesdays beginning Jan 6 7:30pm

The Gospel & The Work  
12 Wednesdays beginning Jan 20 7:15pm  
Contact the office for application details.

### Monthly

Tuesday Enrichment 7:30pm  
Jan 5 Sacred Chanting  
Jan 19 Gurdjieff Music

Community Workday  
Jan 30 9am-12noon

### Weekly

Prayer Circle  
Wednesdays 9:15am

Contemplative Lunch  
Wednesdays 12noon

Mid-Week Communion Service  
Wednesdays 6-7pm

Introduction to the Work Class  
Thursdays 7:30pm

### Daily

Weekday Centering Prayer Service  
M-F 7-7:35am in Theosis Chapel

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# An Invitation ...



MERCY



We believe ...

God is One, eternally present in the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, active within us, as us.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, eternally present as the Logos, the coming of Divine Light to the world.

We are all one in the Body of Christ.

Man is created in the image and likeness of God.

Man's basic nature, like God's nature, is absolute good.

Humanity is asleep and called to awaken.

Self-knowledge and daily spiritual practice are necessary for those who wish to awaken.

Transformation into conscious unity with The Living God is possible in this life.

Indeed, *theosis*, or divinization of the flesh, is the aim and purpose of a human life.

Transformation is only possible through the power and grace of the Holy Spirit.

God is Love and His Love is eternally present.

Love bears all.

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*What if you knew you were totally dependent on God's mercy,  
confident that that mercy is boundless?*

*What if you were convinced that you had the infinite mercy of God always with you?*

*What if you were at the mercy of God, rather than life's circumstances?*

*The invitation for the 2010 annual aim of mercy is to know this as living truth.*

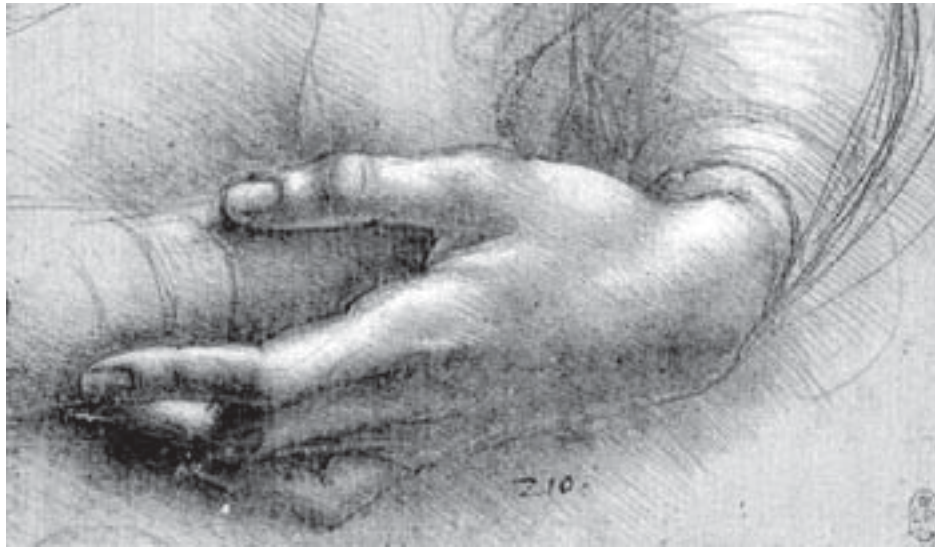
You are invited to join in community  
... to participate in intention and will to God  
... to renew your commitment to the spiritual journey,  
moving ever deeper together as a community  
of intention, practice and devotion.  
... and in so doing, manifest

TRUTH  
BEAUTY  
GOODNESS  
MERCY

for the love of God, our Father, for the glory of His Kingdom on earth  
and so that our joy may be complete.

AMEN.





*Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'*  
MATTHEW 9:13

The whole journey might be summed up as humble hope –  
not the emotion of hope,  
the expectation that things will get better,  
or the desire for certain goals that are possible but hard to attain.  
The theological virtue of hope is based not on what we've done,  
whether good or bad, but simply on the fact that God is infinitely powerful  
and infinitely merciful right now ...

It is neither of the past or the future; it thinks nothing of reward;  
it simply is in the present moment, totally dependent on God's mercy,  
and confident that that mercy is boundless.

If you're convinced that you have the infinite mercy of God, what  
more do you need?

You have everything. Everything is contained in that hope.  
Therese says that 'we can never have too much confidence in God  
who is so powerful and so merciful.' And she writes,

If I had on my conscience every conceivable crime, I would lose  
nothing of my confidence,  
but with my heart breaking with love,  
I would throw myself into the arms of God,  
and I am certain that I would be well received.

In this view of humility, our weakness becomes the motive for  
boundless confidence in giving ourselves over to God. We know that  
whatever happens, the love of God is always with us  
and that He will turn even our failures into perfect love.

Thomas Keating, *Divine Therapy & Addiction*

## CCH Bookstore

### Year of Mercy

Two books for Classes  
starting in January

Lessons in Truth  
By Emilie Cady



Simple Explanation of Work Ideas.  
By Maurice Nicoll

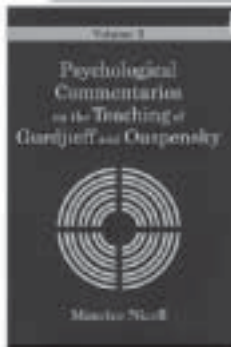


What is Self  
By Bernadette Roberts



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11:30-12:30



## The Work

*This is what mercy means...*

Now all reconciliation of the opposites depends on individual thinking from yourself. Let us say that my Papa says to me: "Never shake hands with a person who does not believe in God." Suppose I remain under the psychological orientation of what Papa told me, I would always tend not to shake hands with a man who does not believe in God. On the other hand, I may tend *only* to shake hands with those who do not believe in God. But do you not see that it is the same thing? It is still the opposites because I have not begun to think for myself about the whole question. Suppose suddenly that after a certain time I have a moment of illumination and I say: "What am I doing? What does it mean, a person who believes in God or who does not?" This is the beginning of the Work acting on me. And this makes a difference in your relationship to other people. You cannot get an expansion of consciousness as long as you are in the acquired opposites. A person is neither good nor bad, nor am I. Once you can see this in

yourself, then in your relationship to other people, you begin to find a Third Force, a way of taking people and yourself as not being wholly evil or wholly good. This is the beginning of mercy in you and it is what mercy means. Mercy is not violence and as long as you are in opposites you are always violent. Someone says: "What, he does that kind of thing! I won't have anything more to do with that person." And someone in the Work says: "But don't *you* do it?" And after a lot of humming and hawing I think: "Well, I am perhaps like that myself." So try always to think what mercy means, because it lies between the opposites. Think very much about what external considering means, one aspect of which is seeing others in yourself or seeing your own faults in the other persons—always an irritating thing. 

Page 1374-1375, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, by Maurice Nicoll. For more information and experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the *Introduction to the Work* classes held every Thursday at 7:30 pm at The Church of Conscious Harmony.



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# Hope

by Mary Anne Best

I affirm ...

If we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance.

ROMANS 8: 24-25

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*It is to the prodigals – to those who exhaust all their strength in pursuing what seems to them good and who, after their strength has failed, go on impotently desiring – that the memory of their Father's house comes back. If the son had lived economically he would never have thought of returning.*

Simone Weil, *Notebooks*

We are all familiar with the parable of the prodigal son – the story of one man who leaves his father's house to squander his fortune and another who remains to fulfill his obligations. The one son demands his inheritance to live his own way, according to his own lights, apart from all obligations to the giver—the father who gives him his freedom. But in time the bottom drops out of his life, and the son is not 'lucky' enough to have the means to go on living riotously until he reaches the point of despair. The exhaustion of his resources, his self-sufficiency, and his hope forces the son to give up his way of life. Looking after someone else's swine makes him realize that he would be

better off at home, for there even the hired hands have something to eat. So he decides to return to his father and confesses his fault.

The father responds to a wayward son's return graciously. He does not meet him with the rebuke he deserves, nor does he ask for any bargains to be made in exchange for a lowly place in the household. Incredibly, he runs out to meet his son before any plea can be made. The younger son's repentance arises from his exhaustion and his desire ... but what of the elder son who remained at home with his obligations fulfilled?

The elder son is furious when he learns of his father's reception of the wastrel younger brother for the very reason that he himself has been responsible all his life, held himself accountable, and met his obligations. Thus, one pitfall of the ethical, so-called righteousness life is the confidence that our obligations have been met. Another is simple weariness. The elder brother does not see that the prodigal's relationship to the father

is grounded solely in the father's generous love, as is his own. Had he reached the point of dismay, been reduced to despair because of his obligations, this son too might have been driven to his father's love – just as his brother was driven by exhaustion and hunger. As it was, the son stands with confidence before his father, and declares his own obedience with a deep sense of grievance against this father's generosity. Because he lives from his own achievement and not from this generosity, he cannot believe it when his father says to him, *Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine yours (Luke 15: 31).*

As long as we rely on our own strength and natural endowments we do not live from the sheer gratuity of the Father's love. Confidence in our ability to meet our obligations can thus be as dangerous as waste and prodigality. Both sons have a void, an emptiness at the center of their being, which is there to be fed by the father's graciousness.

*continued on page 10*

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*Hope... continued from page 9*

Many are weary of obligations. We feel pushed and pulled from every side by obligations that never seem to end, by the burden of these obligations, and by the guilt at the fact that we resent them. That guilt can drive us to try even harder, but the load is heavy and to carry it seems more and more futile all the time. It is just at this very point of weariness that we too can become open to the graciousness of God, and can open to Jesus' words, *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28)*. We can then cease to be weary – not because we have thrown off our obligations, but because we are being carried and strengthened by the Father's love that has now found access.

The danger of 'well-being' is that it may blind us to the fact that we too – all of us – are creatures ever dependent on the Father's graciousness. As long as our confidence remains intact, our success at meeting obligations remains a barrier to living from divine love. We cannot understand its graciousness to others and we can even become angry and bitter at the mercy shown to 'worthless' people.

All that we are, all our natural endowments, are given to us by the Father's gracious love, and we are pleasing to Him simply in our recognition of this. We exist only because a Father's love graciously creates us ... and His mercy sustains us ... and His desire is that we be related to Him by love. God's mercy is to reconnect us in our inmost being to His love, and only His

graciousness can do it. Such a love only asks to be received, only asks to be lived by, only asks to be consumed as food. This is captured in a lovely poem by George Herbert:

Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,  
guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack  
from my first entrance in,  
drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning  
if I lacked anything.

'A guest,' I answered, 'worthy to be here':  
Love said, 'You shall be he.'  
'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,  
I cannot look on Thee.'  
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
'Who made the eyes but I?'

'Truth, Lord; but I have marred them; let my shame  
go where it does deserve.'  
'And know you not,' says Love, 'Who bore  
the blame?'  
'My dear, then I will serve.'  
'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my meat.'  
So I did sit and eat.'

George Herbert, 'Love,' *Poems of George Herbert*

To live by our Father's love is to know our own poverty – either in the midst of famine, as the prodigal did, or in the midst of plenty as the elder brother did. Herein lies our hope.

*Lord, make me know Your ways.  
Lord, teach me Your paths.  
Make me walk in Your truth, and teach me  
... in You I hope all day long  
... Remember Your mercy, Lord,  
and the love You have shown from of old.  
from Psalm 25*

This article was excerpted and edited from Diogenes Allen, *Traces of God*