



THE MARK

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Herenow

TIMELESS PRESENCE

by Tim Cook

My earliest awareness of the inexorable passing of time came at the same age that I became aware of Christmas and Christmas presents. It seemed as though the span between Thanksgiving and Christmas crawled at an agonizing snail's pace. The countdown felt endless.

The next impression of passing time that I'm able to remember was the summer before 3rd grade—three whole months of no school. At first it felt like unlimited freedom to play and play and play with my neighborhood friends; but as the months progressed, summer too seemed to drag on and on and I felt glad to return to school and my classmate friends.

Time, from then on, just became an interval between the events that I enjoyed doing and the things I didn't want to do. It sped by when I was enjoying myself. And time crawled when I was not having fun ... or when I was fearfully anticipating something I dreaded doing ... or when I was waiting to get caught for having done something I shouldn't have been

doing. As a university student my experience of time unhappily expanded as I became aware of the seemingly endless future in which I was going to choose a career that I would then have to do forever. Since I had absolutely no idea of what that might be, I became deeply depressed and dreaded the seemingly endless future that stretched out before me. I felt trapped and sentenced to a dreary eternal prison.

My experience of time went on pretty much that way through college and beyond until 1968 when everything changed. One day, while having lunch with a coworker, he gave me a book that changed my life forever. It was called *The Wisdom of Insecurity* by Alan Watts. The author pointed out that the beauty of music was only possible because we let go of each particular note in order to be blessed by the next one. The beauty of music was in its flow. In an instant I was shown that I had been "living" my life completely backward, clinging to the experiences I liked and pushing away what I didn't. Of course there

was no music in my experience of life because I had been trying to stop the rhythms of time from flowing. I had been creating my own unhappy experience of being imprisoned in time by clinging and aversion.

I began haunting all the bookstores in Toronto; combing through sections on spirituality, which had never been in my awareness before. I had always been a reader but my tastes were generally history or *Catch-22* (by Joseph Heller, read it five times) and the like. But now I was discovering and devouring books that offered me living ideas and they were changing my entire experience of life. One summer afternoon I pulled my car into the parking lot of the W.H. Smith bookstore on Yonge St. in Toronto, unaware that my life was about to make another enormous change in consciousness and my experience of Reality. As I browsed through the titles in the spirituality section I noticed a book with an unusual shape and a very strange cover. It was a square, dark blue volume with a simple, wicker

seated chair in the center, enclosed in a linear webbed design that was surrounded by a circle of print that repeated the words, REMEMBER BE HERE NOW ... REMEMBER HERE BE NOW...REMEMBER BE NOW HERE NOW ... REMEMBER BE HERE NOW.... Intrigued, I picked it up and opened it; only to find that the inside was even stranger than the outside with course brown paper pages and uneven block printing and unusual drawings. I remember looking around the store to be sure that I wasn't seen by anyone as I felt extremely self-conscious in my suit and tie looking at such a weird looking book. After flipping through the pages, I realized that this book was not for me so I put it back and browsed further along the shelves. A few minutes later, I was surprised to find myself going back and picking it up again. Nope, not for me; I put it down again. This cycle happened twice more before I finally realized that I really didn't want that book. I left the store, got into my car and was pulling out onto the street when I spontaneously put the car into

reverse, parked, went back into the store, bought the book and headed to a nearby park where I sat down beneath a great oak tree and began to read.

Hours passed. I couldn't put it down and as I read on I felt my heart begin to open and I wept at the beauty, goodness and truth of this amazing gift from God that was being revealed to me. I was given new eyes to see the world, new ears to hear life's deep meanings, a heart that could actually feel and a brand new experience of excitement and anticipation at the adventure of a spiritual life that was changing my whole vision of the future. For the first time, I really wanted to live and truly looked forward to it.

Time changed for me too—until that moment, I had never even conceived that there was a “here now” to “be” in. Time had always been a continuous line extending from a dim, depressing past to an unknown, dreaded and distant future. But **now**, I was **here**, simply here; with nothing lacking and nothing in excess. The moment itself felt timeless and full. I was

utterly astonished at how I felt. I knew then, without doubt, that I always and only wanted to feel that way and to live, always here, always now; where ever I was and whatever I was doing.

The book had been written at the Lama Foundation, the intentional inter-spiritual community that has become a place of annual pilgrimage for the youth of our church community for the last fifteen years. It is the place where I experienced my first silent retreat with blessed Ram Dass, where I first experienced and began to long for a spiritual community, where Fr. Thomas Keating led his very first Centering Prayer retreat and where Pierre Elliott taught the Lama residents the elements of the Gurdjieff Work and led them in the practice of the Gurdjieff Movements, the Sacred Dances that we teach at the Church of Conscious Harmony. I am so utterly grateful that my car could not leave the W.H. Smith parking lot that day and am truly **amazed** at the life and the events and experiences that were to unfold

from a “chance” meeting with one strange looking book.

That meeting marked the beginning of an entirely new way of life for me and subsequently for many of you who have been blessed by your participation in our contemplative Christian church community. Together, we are continuing to learn to live our lives in time that’s interrupted twice a day, every day by the Great Silence of eternity. In the silence of Centering Prayer, we directly experience the here, now Presence of God; and as we grow ever deeper in that experience, we find more and more that we experience the simple hereness and nowness of God and our own lives where ever we are and no matter what we are engaged in doing.

And it’s not just us. Knowledge of the gift of silence and the blessing of always being here now are spreading all over the globe. Barbara and I experienced it profoundly a couple of years ago in Rome with 70,000 people led by Pope Francis. It looked like the U.S. was about to attack Syria. The drums of war were beginning to beat, warships were moving into position and a feeling of inevitability was rising in the new media. The Pope put out a call to the people of Rome to gather in

Vatican Square to join in a prayer for peace. We arrived early enough to get seats near the stage. Behind us the wide boulevard was packed solid with people standing as far in the distance as we could see. Leaders from every spiritual and religious tradition were seated with him on the platform in front of St. Peter’s Basilica. The service went on from 7 to 11 p.m. with a beautiful rosary, choirs and many prayers. The Pope, himself, never spoke. He simply led us in venerating an enormous, ancient icon of The Virgin Mary and a long Adoration of the Eucharistic Host displayed in a glorious sunburst monstrance. At about 10 p.m., about three hours into the service, we were invited to enter into silent prayer. And for the next 20 minutes, 70,000 people, most of whom had been standing for hours, entered the Great Silence together. You could have heard a pin drop. No words will ever describe that experience as 70,000 of us were simply gathered in a magnificent, massively shared community experience of the silent HERE NOW Presence of God. It felt like we were the whole world praying together for peace.

And, of course, the fearfully anticipated attack never happened.

God is always here. God is always now. Are we? ☺

CCH BOOKSTORE

Community Reading in August



The Cloud of Unknowing
With the Book of Privy Counsel
translation by Carmen Butler

Titles supporting this month’s
theme of ‘Herenow’



I Asked for Wonder
by Abraham Joshua Heschel



Zen and the Birds of Appetite
by Thomas Merton

Everything Belongs
by Richard Rohr

The Attention Paradox
by Bob Hunter

Bookstore and Library Hours
Open Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm
Sunday 9:30-10 am & 11:30 am-noon

RETREATS CHANGE LIVES

by Barbara Cook

I'm writing this article just after returning home from our summer Centering Prayer retreat at the Cedarbrake Retreat Center and I'm still feeling amazed by it all. By the power of the Holy Spirit our hearts and minds were deeply touched and we were guided through a very complicated retreat schedule that worked amazingly well for all, retreatants and staff alike. What made the retreat complicated was offering six types of retreat programs, which are usually held separately, all at once. Our retreats usually have two levels: one for people who have not experienced long retreats before, this track is called an Intensive; and a Post-Intensive track for those who are more experienced. In an attempt to make Centering Prayer retreats more accessible to people whose family or work responsibilities make it difficult to get time away, we offered both levels in 5-, 6- and 10-day formats. And it all worked seamlessly.

Even though I am a veteran of many retreats, I'm still amazed each time I see the power of God's Spirit working in the lives of the

retreatants, converting hearts and manifesting deep and profound healings. It has become obvious to me that it doesn't really matter who is serving and who is attending. What's important is that we open ourselves to His Beloved Presence. It is also clear that our ongoing retreats at Cedarbrake are accumulating a presence of intimacy with God that increases each time we return to those blessed grounds. What a boon that is for those who hunger to be transformed into Christ.

It is interesting to note that even though we had numerous retreat tracks going on at once, there were never more than 12 people there at a time and half of them were from other cities and states.

I always feel happy when contemplatives from other areas make use of our retreats, because that's what Fr. Thomas Keating had hoped for when he asked us to give retreats here.

He wished for The Church of Conscious Harmony to provide a place for people from our area to participate in Centering Prayer retreats and grow deeper in their

relationship with God; without the burden of travel and added expense of air travel to the monastery in Snowmass. He wanted to decentralize the retreat possibilities.

Fr. Thomas and his experienced staff, the mothers of all retreats, Pat Johnson and Mary Ann Mathieson, came from Colorado to Austin and initiated our entire retreat program in 1993. Since then we have hosted 5-7 retreats each year. And I have had the great joy of growing in intimacy with God and with my True Self as I have participated in these life changing retreats simply by being there and serving. All Glory to God!

The transformations that we experience and share are graceful gifts from God. Our part is to simply consent and participate. Our willing desire for relationship with God is necessary if we wish to open to His plan for our lives and deepen His active presence in our lives. But it's not just for ourselves alone that we pray this way, because there is no such thing as private prayer. One of the key principles of the Work of Inner Christianity, which we teach at CCH, calls us to

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.

13TH GUIDELINE



Our basic core of goodness
is dynamic and tends to grow of itself.
This growth is hindered by the illusions and emotional hang-ups
of the false self, by the negative influences
coming from our cultural conditioning,
and by personal sin.

SEEDS

Meditation is a twofold discipline that has a twofold function.


First it is supposed to give you sufficient control over your mind and memory and will to enable you to recollect yourself and withdraw from exterior things and the business and activities and thoughts and concerns of temporal existence, and second—this is the real end of meditation—it teaches you how to become aware of the presence of God; and most of all it aims at bringing you to a state of almost constant loving attention to God, and dependence on Him.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, page 217.

continued from page 5

make efforts not only for ourselves and for God's glory, but also for others in the community.

Once we learn that blessed principle, we take it home with us into our Centering Prayer practice every day — for God, for others and for our own spiritual development. We've come to understand that unless we dedicate our practice to all three of these lines of relationship, we don't grow into Christ. Self-oriented prayer is simply unreal. Our lives are God's lives and we are one with every member of the human race. Centering Prayer gives us the experience of Life beyond the self-interests that deaden our spirit. And it is this expanding community of prayer partners that blesses each retreat.

As Buddhists say, we must practice it with the strong intention of someone whose house is on fire. Our practice must be informed by the awareness that we have a limited time. Of course we will sometimes feel inner resistance to the call to prayer. Then we can simply pray to God for the desire to practice on all three lines of relationship—for God, for others and for ourselves. God will respond abundantly. Remember Jesus' admonition to seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness and all will be added. 



ANNUAL AIM: THE SELF

KNOW THYSELF

All of us ... are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory. 2 Corinthians 3:18

THE HERENOW by Marie Reed

The greatest problem
is not how to continue
but how to exalt our existence.
The cry for a life beyond the grave
is presumptuous,
if there is no cry for eternal life
prior to our descending
to the grave.
Eternity is not perpetual future
but perpetual presence.
He has planted in us
the seed of eternal life.
The world to come
is not only a hereafter
but also a herenow.

Abraham Joshua Heschel,
I Asked for Wonder

~

*Behold, now is
a very acceptable time;
behold, now is the day of salvation.*

2 Corinthians 6:2

Everybody has a story. Most of the details aren't very important, but here are some highlights of how I've been guided from then to now.

My husband, Joel, and I moved to Austin when we retired and two friends kept telling us about this wonderful church we should visit. When we first visited The Church of Conscious Harmony on an Easter Sunday, it felt like I had come home. We signed up for an Introduction to Centering Prayer class a few weeks later. And we're still here. The classes, teachers and opportunities have been so incredible. Frs. Thomas Keating, Carl Arico, Ronald Rolheiser, William Meninger; ministers Tim and Barbara Cook; and all the other wonderful teachers and mentors who have lit our path and guided us along the way have been amazing.

Some of the most significant teachers have been those ordinary individuals in my life who showed

me an extraordinary way of being or of looking at myself. My spiritual path wasn't always within a church, though there were many different churches along the way. I was reading, studying and exploring different ideas and ways to understand my relationship with God. Some of this was enlightening and some was confusing. Eventually, a deeper understanding seemed to come together here at CCH.

Motivation Changes Everything

I grew up believing that I was only allowed to take up space and breathe air because of what I could do for somebody else. It was easy to see what people needed and I took care of those needs. I didn't do this in a healthy way, but rather from necessity. Somewhere along the way, I learned that I didn't have to do these things, but could do them because I wanted to. Motivation

changes everything. Giving up the sense of obligation was liberating; without obligation, serving others was joyful and rewarding. At times, I fall into old patterns, or as my husband has described me as a “codependent caretaker type two on the Enneagram,” but I now know there is the power to choose, and when I am centered and connected, this is done—not by me, but through me.

Wishes are Powerful

While my friends were choosing various life paths with big ambitions to change the world, I couldn't even imagine how that might look for me. My family expected me to get married and have kids, preferably with some local farm boy, and not attend college or have a career. Any job would be temporary and insignificant. So I married an Air Force pilot to escape — not a very wise choice, but the perfect first relationship for someone who could sublimate everything to the role of caretaker by keeping house and catering to his every whim.

In this role, it was impossible to imagine changing the world, but there was hope that I could have some impact on the parts of the world that I came in contact with, however small. This lesson came from a friend with the wonderful ability to make whoever she was with feel like the most important person in the world. Over the years, I have tried to follow her example in

dealing with others. For example, when I worked in a doctor's office, we could see 100 people a day, and of course, many of those people were in pain and cranky. I learned to pray every morning, asking to be emptied of my ego, my false self, and filled with God's love, so that I could see the Christ in everyone and pour that love on everybody I came in contact with. It was a wish and wishes are powerful. With continued practice, it became easier and easier to see the Christ in others.

Give Freely and Receive Joyfully

At times, feelings of selfishness arise and I do not “give freely and receive joyfully.” It's been a difficult practice to learn. A few years ago, Joel decided that we would put dollar coins in the car to give away. At first there was judgment about who to give to. If someone was smoking, for example, they must not need the money for food so I passed them by. Eventually I let go of the judgment and saw a person in need regardless of appearance. And in this openness, I have had some spiritual experiences with people on street corners. One day a man said, “Thank you...again.” I was so surprised when he said he had an amazing memory for faces and that I had given him money before. One man asked me to pray for him; and when I agreed, he gave me the most radiant smile and said he would pray for me too. One man asked

if I had an old clarinet in the attic, because he was a musician and if he could get an instrument he might be able to get work. When we give freely and receive joyfully, we can see Christ in each person.

In learning to be generous, I once loaned a friend some money to start a small business. It was a time when funds were tight, but I wanted to give her this opportunity. I never shared that it was an amount that I could live without in case the business failed. She had to postpone payments several times, and despite her business failure, she eventually repaid me. Where's the generous part? I was willing to make the loan a gift without reservation. She told me later that it was a great blessing to know I had faith in her and gave her a chance. When the “never enough” mentality holds us back, it seems impossible to be generous. When we live with an attitude of abundance, generosity seems easy and natural.

We are taught that words have power beyond our imagination to bring things into being. A coworker sat at her desk and cried day after day, obviously in deep trouble. None of us knew what was going on, though we did know she was a single mother with a small child, small salary, and overwhelming responsibilities. We felt helpless. One day I took her to coffee and told her that we were worried and would help her if we could, but we simply didn't know how.

I suggested that somebody else, maybe a professional, could help. Years later, she said I had saved her life. I had no idea what she was talking about. She revealed that she had been suicidal and when I gave her permission not to be okay it allowed her to seek the help she needed.

In God's Time

Each of us is on our own spiritual journey. My "helper" type personality cannot make it easier or different for you. I can only be on my own journey. We may lean on each other, but we each have to stand alone. I can pray for you and wish that you pray for me. This is a big lesson for those who always want to help. We can't! We can only be here now and do our best. We need to assume that everyone else is doing their best no matter how it may appear.

This may be the most important part of my spiritual journey. I know that God answers all prayers; He has a sense of humor. The answer may be NO; eventually I may understand why and be very grateful. At times, my prayers are answered in ways I don't even recognize until I look back, and it's all in God.

When I was 26 years old I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Many years later I learned that my five year survival rate was less than 50%. I was grateful not to have known this statistic at that time, since I had

just helped care for my adopted dad as he died from cancer. I remember sitting by his side as he asked, "Why does it have to take so long? I'm ready, so why so long?" My prayer was similar when I was diagnosed: "God if I'm going to die now, that's okay. But please don't let it be long and painful." When I told Barbara Cook this story, she said my prayer was answered. True, but I don't really know since I'm still here.

I expected to be a mother and grandmother. It seemed that was not meant to be, but prayers are answered in His time. We met a family with two daughters who wanted grandparents and they wanted us. We adopted each other. Then last year Joel's daughter came back into our lives. I couldn't have imagined all this when I was young, yet the answers to my prayers were answered.

Be Here Now

Be fully present to what each day brings. Everyone you meet will be your teacher. Everything that happens will be an opportunity for spiritual growth. We can remember what has already happened and see the lessons and growth in retrospect. When today is a memory, it will be tomorrow and we will get to do it all over again. Only by being here now can we experience all there is.

Each morning when I wake up I give thanks for whatever that day may bring.



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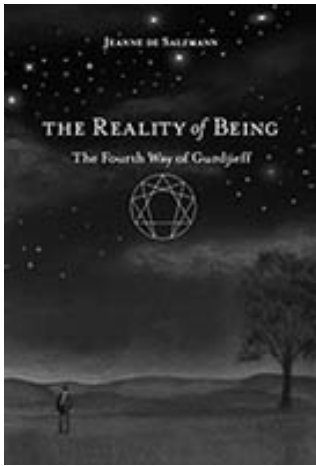
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THE WORK

OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

My Father is still working, and I also am working. John 5:17

THE AWARENESS OF “BEING HERE”

In moments of greater attention, I have an awareness of “being here”—a look, a light, a consciousness that knows. Consciousness is here. I cannot doubt it. And yet I do not trust it, I do not feel it as “I,” as my essential nature. I believe I can look for consciousness, see consciousness, know it. We take consciousness as an object of observation. But we cannot see consciousness. It is consciousness that sees and that knows. I realize this if I experience it as coming from behind my body or from above. There is no observer, there is a knowing. Yet if I experience consciousness as in my body, it seems that the “I” is the body and consciousness an attribute of the body.

I begin to feel what it means to be true, that is, the moment when my thought knows itself *as it is* and my feeling knows itself *as it is*. Another kind of thinking appears ... and there is a feeling of my essence, a feeling

that is not of my form but that can contain the form. I have then a new thinking and a new feeling that see the fact, that see *what is*.

So, the only reality for me today is in my effort to be present to myself. Nothing else is real. Everything is distorted by the veil of my mind, which prevents me from being in contact with the nature of things. I must first go toward my own nature, awake to the consciousness of “I,” and be attentive only to this. Consciousness is always consciousness of self. We can call the Self whatever we wish—the seat of consciousness, even God. The point is that it is the center, the very core of our being, without which there is nothing.

I have to learn to concentrate my attention toward this center and stay here. I need to understand this act of Presence, this active movement of Presence, which is always threatened by a passive movement in the opposite direction. I am aware of a reality that I

cannot possess. It is my self, what I am in the depth of my being. Yet I feel that to recognize it requires something of me ...

I begin to realize that what I am trying to approach is not only mine, not only in me, but immense and much more essential. In front of this, my tensions let go one after the other until the moment I feel, as a gift of unity, a collected Presence. This brings with it a question—a question of existence. It is in doubt at each moment, never certain, never assured, always so unknowable that it requires everything of me. Now I exist with a sense of a mysterious force that cannot be named, which has led me to this unity. To what influence am I opening? ... I wish to know. I am here. I am not closed, imprisoned in one part of my being. I am conscious of being a whole. ⚠

Jeanne de Salzmans, *The Reality of Being – The Fourth Way of Gurdjieff*, pages 39-40. 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 p.m. at The Church of Conscious Harmony.

Joy Comes with the Morning

A Psalm of David. A song at the dedication of the temple.

*I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up
and have not let my foes rejoice over me.*

O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me.

*O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Sheol;
you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.*

*Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints,
and give thanks to his holy name.*

For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

As for me, I said in my prosperity, "I shall never be moved."

*By your favor, O Lord, you made my mountain stand strong; you hid your
face; I was dismayed.*

To you, O Lord, I cry, and to the Lord I plead for mercy:

"What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit?

Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?

Hear, O Lord, and be merciful to me! O Lord, be my helper!"

*You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;
you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,
that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent.*

O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!

Psalm 30

I reflect on the verse that always
bring tears to my eyes: *Weeping may
tarry for the night, but joy comes with
the morning.*

I do not know how long this life

will be or what it will bring. There
is much more to learn about myself
and I know that each and every day
will provide more opportunities.

Here and now. ☸

MULTI-DAY CENTERING PRAYER RETREAT AT CEDARBRAKE

Sep 11-16

6-day Forgiveness theme led by Mary Dwyer

\$615 (double room) \$690 (single room)

"Being on a multi-day silent retreat provides a unique opportunity for intimacy with God. A true safe haven for your spirit where nothing from the outside—no phone calls, emails, letters, media—can hijack your consciousness away from the work God has in store for you. The silence alone works miracles, and when combined with tools like the Welcoming Prayer or Forgiveness Practice, you are empowered to embark on a new level of being in the world with all the world presents. It's healing and transformative. Just do it!"

~feedback from a 2014 Welcoming Prayer Retreatant

Contact 512.347.9673 or officemgr@consciouharmony.org to register.

AUGUST CALENDAR

Visit consciouharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

SPECIAL EVENTS

Aug 15-16

Commuter Retreat

8:30 am-5:30 pm, 8 am-5:30 pm

\$100 pre-register in the office

MONTHLY

1st Sundays

Bring non-perishables for Caritas

Aug 18

Gurdjieff Music 7:30-8:30 pm

WEEKLY

Sundays

Lectio Divina 8-9 am

Worship Service 10-11:30 am

Youth Program 10-11:30 am

Fellowship 11:30 am

Wednesdays

Prayer Circle 9:15-10 am

Contemplative Lunch noon-1 pm

Contemplative Communion Service 6-7 pm

Thursdays 7:30-9 pm

Work of Inner Christianity Class

Fridays 7:30-8:45 pm

Devotional Service

DAILY

Mondays-Fridays 7-7:35 am

Centering Prayer Service in Theosis Chapel

Recordings of services are available
through the Bookstore and online at
www.consciouharmony.org



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THE GRACE OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

*And when the disciples
raised their eyes,
they saw no one else
but Jesus alone.*

Matthew 17:8



Notice that the disciples, after He touched them,
“saw no one but Jesus.”

This observation describes the fruit of the interior touch
of the Spirit ... which leads and moves us
... according to the will of the Spirit.

The fruit of the touch of Jesus is to see Him
in everything that happens.

Thus, as the disciples return to the plain, they take with them,
not the experience of Jesus’ glory, which was so consoling,
but something even more valuable:
the transformation of consciousness

that is the result of their experience on the mountain....

They moved beyond fear and the domination of any emotion
and are now able to live life on the plain in union with God.

They can live in the marketplace from their inmost center,
their True Self ...

The grace of the Transfiguration is not just a vision of glory,
an isolated experience of divine consolation, however exalted

... Its primary purpose is something greater:
to empower us to live in the presence of God
and to see the radiance of that presence

in all events, people, the cosmos, and in the universe.

Thomas Keating, *Reawakenings*