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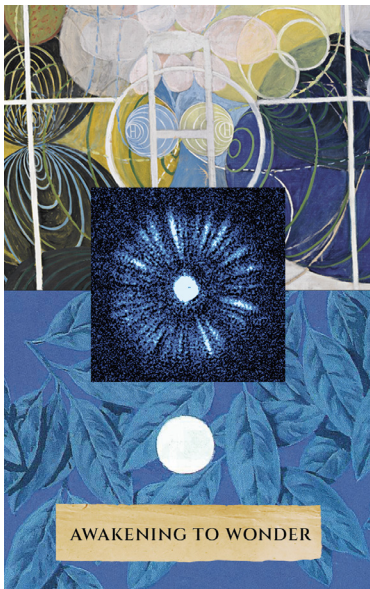


# The Mark

A Publication of The Church of Conscious Harmony ❖ A Contemplative Christian Community



AWAKENING TO WONDER



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... then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12

## ANNUAL AIM: HOLY UNKNOWING

AWAKENING TO WONDER BY LOUIS T. WHEELER

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Awe is an intuition  
for the dignity of all things,  
a realization that things  
not only are what they are  
but also stand, however remotely,  
for something supreme.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Who is Man?*

*Just as you do not know  
how the breath  
comes to the bones  
in the mother's womb,  
so you do not know  
the work of God,  
who makes everything.*

Ecclesiastes 11:5

We have spoken of man's life as going on a journey.

The journey is really into the center of himself  
by the way of self-knowledge. ...

When man studies the construction of the cosmoses

he can see that the power is in the center –  
he can find this in the electron and the atom –  
and that when it is released there is very great force.

This gives him the clue to his own being:

if the power in the center can be released, he can change his cosmos.

He uses his mind to discover this possibility.

If he links his mind and his heart, this discovery will be linked  
with his essential feeling that he is seeking something, a secret that he  
has lost, that he wants to remember – he wants to discover his meaning.

... When the psychological mind – the inner part of the center – is  
developed we can draw from Greater Mind.

Beryl Pogson, *Mind and Energy*

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Engaging over these last few weeks with our annual aim and monthly topic, I find it often begins with a reflection on my commitments. What gets

underway is an eye-opening moment of contemplating wonder's deficits, and a greater yearning awakens. Leaning in with an unchanging depth of

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brutal honesty, I must remember to maintain a higher level of preparedness to embrace that which arises. This not only strengthens a longing for clearly refined observations about Holy Unknowing, but how to accept whatever resurfaces in its proficiency or bewilderment.

When given room to maneuver and put forth greater efforts to comprehend all manner of things, I wonder if we will continue to further create sustainable ways to recover awe's deficiency? Or will we permit mystifications to thwart our labors and capacity to gain a fresher perspective on matters that deepen our aptitude. I have found that for a sense of reverberated awakening to take place, accomplishing authentic acts that "will" my wonderment upward helps to enhance my being's purpose *as if* it were. Essence becomes even more informed, transcending candid awakenings that delve into the nature of Christ Consciousness. Furthermore, it leads towards an unlocked heart of gratitude with permission to love one another unconditionally and the proclivity to approach newly awakened joy in an unidentified way.

An impulse longing inside my being wishes to captivate and rescue the key that unlocks the cabinet (if you will) of unknown wonder, hidden within an enlightened heart. However it may manifest, I trust in daily divine practices as a means for opening up to unknown revelations. Through God-devotion, we are gracefully permitted to wonder more freely about gifts acquired by the fruits of the spirit, to awaken more fully.

Returning to this year's community aim, I wish to wonder more deeply about Holy Unknowing. The Journey School's online glossary defines "Real Wish" as a primary way that increases our consciousness to become transformed. When we ask to receive, it is not always in the way you think it should appear. In Christianity, a wish is related to the inner faith and the power of our thoughts, affecting wonder's existence.

What we must discover about the Holy Unknown will assist in showing our ability to remain present and diligent as this year progresses. The late philosopher, poet, and priest John O'Donohue pointed me in the direction of the unrevealed nature of wonder when he said that "absence is

the sister of presence." This powerful phrase is initially what activated this query related to this year's aim. Confronting that which quite often appears to be absent is not enough for us to acknowledge the aptness about the unknown, nor why there are vacant moments in our spiritual journey's path. We must clearly practice reminding one another and ourselves daily how crucial it is to keep awake. O'Donohue also conveyed such a reminder in the book *Walking in Wonder: Eternal Wisdom for a Modern World*: "May you experience each day as a sacred gift woven around the heart of wonder."

The Holy Spirit has a meadow of marvels that awakens the child in each of us by revealing what is necessary to discern, gazing outward in meaningful reflection, as with the Virgin Mary's annunciation. It was the perfect exemplification, moreover, becoming a symbolic gesture of forthright awoken mind and a young heart filled with eye opening wonder. As a child, I simply permitted interactions of connectivity to stay present, even when I stumbled about in my youth. My inner compass guided me towards a macrocosm of awe and

wonder. Being a curious boy, I not only was enthralled by E.B. White's story of *Charlotte's Web*, but by the author's suggestion to "always be on the lookout for the presence of wonder."

Growing up on one of the last farms encroached upon by Silicon Valley, I may have been unaware of the accelerated changes that would soon occur. My youthful wonders much preferred glancing up at the stars, being near Swiss chard crops or listening to a murder of crows converse secrets that I wished I understood from inside my grandfather's walnut orchard. Maybe it was a warning that the ranch would soon be uprooted to make space for a parking lot. Regardless, there was enough time and an endless sensation of wonderment that opened up my being.

Catherine L'Ecuyer describes my upbringing of sorts in a world of paradoxical truths, when she wrote: "We suggest wonder as the center of all motivation and action in the child. Wonder is what makes life genuinely personal. Beauty is what triggers wonder. Wonder attunes to beauty through sensitivity and is unfolded by secure attachment.

When wonder, beauty, sensitivity and secure attachment are present, learning is meaningful."

L'Ecuyer quantifies Jesus' declaration in a similar way. "... *I'm telling you, once and for all, that unless you return to square one and start over like children, you're not even going to get a look at [or wonder about?] the kingdom, let alone get in. Whoever becomes simple and elemental again, like a child, will rank high in God's kingdom. What's more, when you receive the childlike on my account, it's the same as receiving me.*" (Matthew 18:3-5, *The Message*)

Permit me to conclude with a few "wondering questions," a method taken from our Godly Play children's program that so eloquently invites one to wonder:

What will you be praying and wishing for on your spiritual journey this year?

I wonder how you plan to use your ability to discover and explore the Holy Unknown.

Engaging in reawakened longings to wonder, how can you freely do so like a child?

I wonder how you will create an intention of divine curiosity in the upcoming year. ☺



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## 2024 ANNUAL AIM: HOLY UNKNOWING

AN INVITATION AND REFLECTION FOR ALL

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At the beginning of each year, an annual aim is presented to the Church community. All are invited to join into:

- ✦ renewing your intention and will to God,
- ✦ participating in a year dedicated to “Holy Unknowing,” and
- ✦ moving ever deeper together as a community of intention, practice and devotion.

*All glory to God!*

As a part of the annual aim, a special theme is presented each month to support a focused study of the aim. This month, we reflect and look deeper at “Awakening to Wonder,” while last month’s theme was “Seeing Through a Glass Darkly.”

Some of the ongoing ways to participate in the annual aim are:

- Engage with the The Journey School’s weekly curriculum and Thursday evening class
- Create a daily practice, which may include Centering Prayer, Scripture, and conscious movement (tai chi, yoga, or walking)
- Study and apply the ideas of the Work of Inner Christianity
- Attend a Eucharistic worship service
- Attend church offerings, groups and classes
- Meet with the abbess or designate for spiritual companionship
- Intentional volunteer service for our Church community, inquire to join a committee or team
- Attend Centering Prayer retreats
- Tithe

Please prayerfully consider any or all of these offerings, which are available throughout the year.

More information about The Journey School is online at [consciousnessharmony.org](http://consciousnessharmony.org).

To learn more about the 2024 annual aim “Holy Unknowing” or to participate and receive a beautiful packet of the monthly themes, please contact the Church office. ☺



**PRAXIS**  
FAITH INTENTION PRACTICE  
 IN COMMUNITY

# FOUNDATIONS

## THE FIRST ANNUAL AIM

BY MARY ANNE BEST

Welcome to the new *Foundations* column, which will appear monthly throughout 2024 to shed light on the foundational principles, aims and intentions of The Church of Conscious Harmony that ground its teachings, offerings and operations. This space is for sharing a selection from previously published materials or an historical perspective with you that highlights something significant from our foundation.

In January 2003, the Church’s first annual aim was announced. This twelve-month program was instrumental in growing the church campus and the community. We continue many of the initiatives that were launched that blessed year and are grateful for everyone who participated. Here are some of the key excerpts from the original 2003 invitation.

“A new year. A new beginning. A new opportunity to grow in community. Praxis in Community. What was begun ... as a five-year experiment in Christian community is now a living community of 300+ practitioners on The Way. How blessed we are.

“Now it is time to complete the sacred space we have been given, to

build the Praxis Center ... to house four offices, an expanded bookstore and a multi-purpose/conference room. The Path of Intention will be extended around the Praxis Center and up to the parking levels.

“We are being called to participate to our fullest in a “Praxis in Community Campaign” ... our fullest spiritually, financially, in practice, from the heart, and in the One.

- To grow as a community of intentional practice
- To raise \$300,000 in 2003 through contributions and pledges
- To manifest the Praxis Center, a building of purpose and beauty

“We wish ... and need 100% community participation to everyone’s fullest. To whom much has been given, much will be asked. You are invited to ...

- Prayerfully consider your participation from your abundance and intention. ... For everyone who participates, they will receive a set of 12 “practice cards” – each contains a particular practice which we will focus on as a community for a month. For your gift

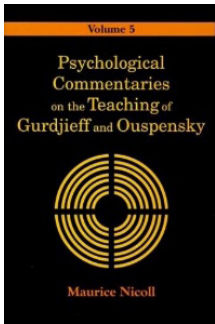
of \$1,000 or more, you may inscribe a stone for the Path of Intention. The goal is to inscribe 300 new stones.

- For some of us, \$1,000 is a significant stretch; for others, it will be relatively easy. If you fit the latter, you are invited to participate as an underwriter by contributing to ... ensure that we meet our community goal of \$300,000.
- Lastly, each morning in January, please pray for our community of praxis that our works may be in thanksgiving, honor and glory of God. May God’s Will be done.

“... There will be a table in the fellowship area each Sunday in January staffed by members of the board to answer any questions about the campaign or construction plans.”

And thus, it was so in that blessed year of 2003. The year of the first annual aim. Twelve months. Twelve practices:

Self-observation	Study
Forgiveness	Centering Prayer
Lectio Divina	Stewardship
Welcoming	Tithing
Yes & No	Gratitude
Sabbath	Joy ☺



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

## THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

GROWING ESSENCE BY SANDRA ELY

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Everyone is born with Essence, but as small children it is quickly covered over as we begin imitating life and acquiring a false personality. In Maurice Nicoll's *Psychological Commentaries*, he writes about growing Essence from several perspectives. He reminds us that to change one's life, you must first change yourself and be willing to take in new knowledge, new impressions, and new truth. Thinking in a new way can change a person. As you read the excerpts below, ask yourself questions. Express a wish to know more. This is the power of awakening to wonder and wishing to know yourself deeper, discovering more of the Holy Unknown within.

“What in me is Essence? What is Personality? It might be said that Personality is the grown-up side and Essence the ungrown side of ourselves. The point however is that the grown-up side is not really ourselves. It fits like a tight costume round us but can under certain circumstances be stripped off. The real person then appears, quite unlike what the Personality made him appear *to himself* and *to others*.

“We know that Essence manifests itself openly and

uncovered until about three or four years of age. Then Personality begins to surround Essence, masking it, and takes charge. Personality is formed by imitation and education, by praise, by fear of consequences. But it is not the individual himself. The real person—the Essence—remains covered over and passive.

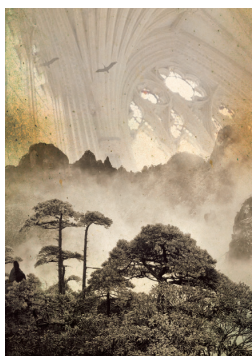
“What is done through Personality is done through the force of external circumstances. That is, life drives the machine of Personality. External circumstances make you act as you do. You may imagine you are free. But you are not free. Whatever you do is due to external circumstances acting on your particular kind of acquired Personality.

“How to make Essence grow is the real esoteric problem—how to make the real grow in us so that there is no duality of acquired Personality and born Essence. The difficulty is that Essence cannot be *compelled* to grow. . . . Why? Because each child is a self developing organism by creation. That is, it can only develop itself. Since Essence cannot be persuaded directly, by outside force, Personality is formed round Essence.

“Only understanding can make Essence grow... So Essence

can only grow through new knowledge—a special knowledge that is, in short, esoteric teaching. And this must first come in *via* the Personality—from outside—from peculiar external circumstances. The Personality transmits it. It means the death of Personality eventually. But Personality does not know this. The new knowledge has a force behind it not derived from life. Mr. Ouspensky used to repeat again and again that it is impossible to escape from Personality and buffers save through a special force and that we have not this force ourselves. We have to get in contact with this force. Then Personality can gradually become passive when it must, so that Essence can grow. Then it becomes a matter whether *you* wish to follow understanding or not. Essence is lazy—like all primitive peoples. Laziness is a very deep powerful thing. That is why the Work says that once you really *understand* why a thing is wrong and still do it, you in a real sense sin—that is, miss the mark.” ⚠

For more experience with these Work teachings, you are invited to join the Thursday evening online classes 7:00–8:30 p.m. hosted by The Journey School. A glossary of Work terms can be found on our website.



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*But whenever you pray, go into your inner room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:6*

## CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

MAKING SPACE

BY SANDRA ELY

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We believe that sitting in the silence and stillness of Centering Prayer is a foundational practice and way to work with our annual aim of “Holy Unknowing” and our monthly aim of “Awakening to Wonder.” To further reflect and work with these aims from the contemplative prayer dimension, here is a connection from our emeritus minister Barbara Cook. Originally published in February 2014, exactly 10 years ago, the invitation to make space for God is timeless. See how this applies to you and your journey!

“God cannot fill what is already full. I’ve noticed that very often when a silent space opens up during a conversation, one of us, serving our social nature, will tend to jump in with an idea or plan. That tendency can be of great service ... On an inner level, however, it is often best to leave spaces unfilled with our personal actions, ideas and words. That makes room for the inspiration of Spirit to flow in with other, perhaps unimagined, possibilities from the infinite *potential* of Creation. ... These silent spaces can be a providential opportunity to practice


‘active passivity,’ an intentional attitude of expectant openness.

“Our Godly Play program has helped many of us to practice this attitude by introducing us to the practice of wondering. The well-prepared storyteller shares the story with the circle of children and then asks “wondering questions” instead of giving his or her understanding of their meaning. Then both the storyteller and the children get to listen as the Holy Spirit gradually fills in the silent spaces with answers and insights that can nurture and amaze everyone. Without quick pat answers, the Spirit is given space to lead. Godly Play teachers find this way of blessed openness serving their home and work lives too.

“I’ve noticed that it’s my personality or my false-self that can’t stand the silent spaces and wants to simply jump in to fill them. Our social nature is powerfully inclined to fill any vacuum. But in Centering Prayer, we are learning to purposely open up, mind and heart, to become a space for God. By sitting with God for 20-30 minutes twice a day, we are practicing the active relaxation of that ‘must-fill-the-space-muscle.’

By simply allowing space between the ceaseless words of mind chatter, we practice listening to God’s first word, silence. We listen to nothing (nothing). Gradually that deep listening becomes a natural background of peace and freedom for the activities of our ordinary lives.

“The deep relaxation that comes with Centering Prayer allows for the progressive emptying of self and makes way for the Spirit. ... Doing nothing on purpose is certainly counter cultural and it may seem like backward thinking to those parts of us that already feel overloaded and too busy to take time out, but the truth is quite the reverse. By resting in God, we not only develop new energy and awareness, but we also do our part to take a bit of stress and tension out of our overstressed world. ...

“By doing our daily time of prayer and taking time for annual retreats, we are actually making a space for God to flow. ... When we are not so full of ourselves, God can heal us and even do his work through us. I wonder what that might look like in each of our lives. I wonder.” 

For more information and events involving Centering Prayer, please check our website. The offerings are plentiful, including daily services and monthly retreats.



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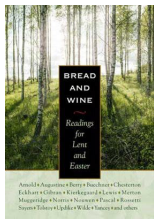
# BOOK LOOK

## READERS FOR THE LENTEN JOURNEY AND THE EASTER OCTAVE

The Lenten spring has come.  
The light of metanoia is being offered to us.  
Let us enter the season of Lent with joy,  
Giving ourselves to ... cleansing our soul and body,  
Controlling our passions as we limit our food,  
And striving to live by the virtues inspired by the Spirit.  
Let us persevere in our longing for God  
So as to be worthy upon the completion of the forty days  
To behold the most solemn passion of Christ,  
And to feast with spiritual joy  
In the most holy Passover of the Lord.

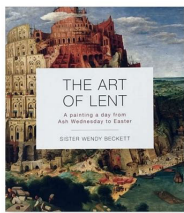
Byzantine Lenten Office

Many like to participate in the Lenten journey by reading from a special daily reader to enter into deeper meanings of this sacred time. Here are three recommendations for us:



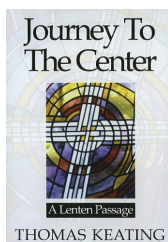
*Bread and Wine, Readings for Lent and Easter*

An inspiring anthology of 72 reflections by 72 writers, ancient and modern. It includes meditations from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Søren Kierkegaard, Meister Eckhart, Kahlil Gibran, Kathleen Norris and many others.



*The Art of Lent, A Painting a Day from Ash Wednesday to Easter* by Wendy Beckett

A beautiful book of art, meditations and contemplation for 40 days.



*Journey to The Center, A Lenten Passage* by Thomas Keating

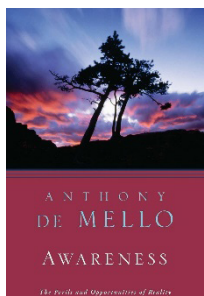
This classic, originally published in 1999 from the works of Fr. Thomas up to that time, includes a Scripture quote from the daily liturgy, with a reflection and a prayer. ☺

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# CCH CORE BOOKS

The Church of Conscious Harmony, recommends 23 books as essential reading for growth and transformation on the spiritual journey. Copies are on display in the Praxis Center. One core foundational book will appear in these pages each month.



## *Awareness*

by Anthony de Mello

Mixing Christian spirituality, Buddhist parables, Hindu breathing exercises, and psychological insight, de Mello's words of hope come together in *Awareness* in a grand synthesis. In short chapters for reading in quiet moments at home or at work, he cajoles and challenges us to leave this go-go-go world of illusion and become aware. To identify our most submerged, darkest feelings, accept them but not let them rule us, and allow this new awareness of self to change us. And this only happens, he insists, by becoming alive to the needs and potential of others. Here, then, is a masterful book of the spirit, challenging us to awaken in every aspect of our lives. ☸

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## COMMUNITY READING

JANUARY-MARCH

*An Unknown World:  
Notes on the Meaning of the Earth*  
by Jacob Needleman

This reading is both mind and heart opening, with ideas of the Work and contemplative Christianity, setting the context for our year's aim of Holy Unknowing. ☸

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## COMMUNITY PRACTICE

JANUARY-MARCH

PRACTICING HOPE

Each day, ask yourself how shall I practice hope in this time? In this place? Be open to what arises and practice it in small, ordinary ways or perhaps in bigger, extraordinary ways. Planting a daily seed may lead to an abundant harvest. ☸

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# FEBRUARY SUNDAY MESSAGE THEMES

## THE PATH OF THE BEATITUDES: A LENTEN JOURNEY

Preparing for and entering Lent we will journey through the Beatitudes in the Sunday talks. Maurice Nicoll stated in *The New Man*:

“Now in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ begins by telling his disciples *not what to do* but *what to be* before a man is capable of gaining the Kingdom of Heaven. The Sermon opens with the words: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom.’ Christ is speaking what a man must *be*, what he must first of all become in himself. A man must become quite different in himself to reach the Kingdom. He must change his mind, change in himself .... Its ‘earth-meaning’ is quite, indeed utterly, different from its ‘heaven-meaning,’ and unless its earth-meaning is allowed to grow and develop into new and ever-new meanings, it can make no connections with the higher level and so is dead.” ☉

# FEBRUARY CALENDAR

For more details,  
visit [consciousharmony.com](http://consciousharmony.com)  
or call 512-347-9673

## SPECIAL EVENTS

Beelzebub's Tales Reading Group  
with Robin Bloor (online only)  
Mondays, Feb 5-May 20 7-8:15pm  
Open to all. Register online. \$160

†Half-Day Centering Prayer Retreat  
Feb 14 1:30-5pm Register online

†Ash Wednesday Service  
Feb 14 noon & 6pm

†Contemplative Lenten Services  
Wednesdays Feb 21-Mar 27 6pm

❖Song & Silence Enrichment  
Feb 17 9am-3pm Register online. \$30

## MONTHLY

1st Sundays Caritas Donations  
Bring non-perishables to CCH  
or donate to [caritasofaustin.org](http://caritasofaustin.org)

## WEEKLY

Wednesdays

- ❖Communion Service in Sacristy 7:40am
- ❖Contemplative Lunch noon-1pm

Thursdays

- \*The Journey School Class 7-8:30pm

Saturdays

- \*Centering Prayer Support Group 7:35am

Sundays

- †Centering Prayer & Lectio Divina 8-9am
- ❖Intercessory Prayer 9-9:20am Room 211
- †Worship Service 10-11:30am
- ❖Youth Program (preK-12) 10-11:30am

## DAILY

- †Centering Prayer Service 7-7:35am
- \*Centering Prayer 6-6:20pm

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\*Please join these services, groups, and classes via online video options.  
Contact the website for accessible links and more information.

†In person and online ❖In-person only at CCH

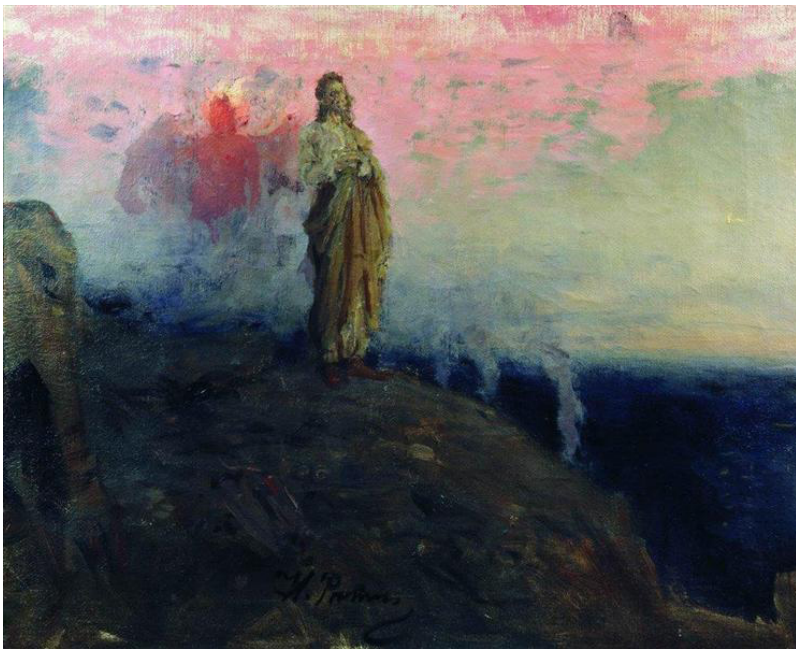


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*Follow Me, Satan (Temptation of Jesus Christ), Ilya Repin*

*Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.*

Isaiah 58:8

## LENT

We are about to enter the Easter season, beginning with Lent on Ash Wednesday. Lent provides us with the focus and the healing influences we need to continue our restoration to the feeling of wholeness and oneness with our Creator. We begin with a reminder of just how small and in need of help we are. As we receive our ashes, we hear the words of a difficult to remember truth, "... dust you are and to dust you will return." Those words are our reminder not to linger in zones of dark unconscious. We were made good, made for the light, made by the Light ... and Christ restores us to the personal experience of our basic core of goodness.

Tim Cook, *The Mark* March 2014