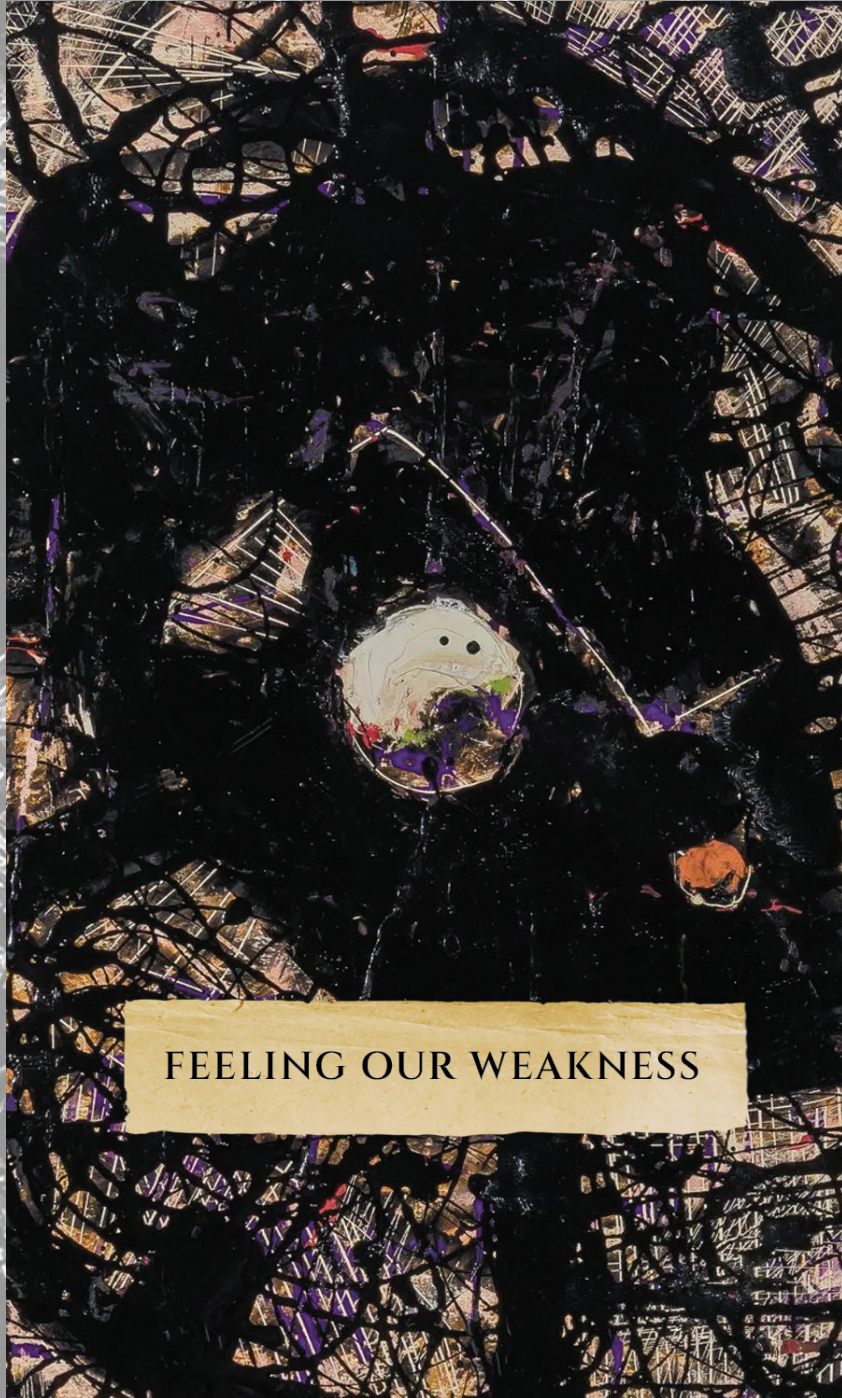


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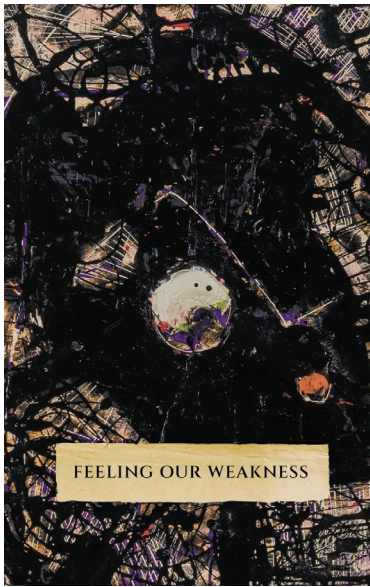


The Mark

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



FEELING OUR WEAKNESS



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

ANNUAL AIM: HOLY UNKNOWING

FEEL OUR WEAKNESS, FOLLOW THE LIGHT

BY CAMILLE BUNTING

Our Father, we turn to Thee
in the quietness
of this meditation period.

It is but natural that we expose to
Thee the things in us
that seem most worthy and good
that we may delight Thy Spirit
and joy Thy Heart.

The unworthy and the ugly things
in us we almost instinctively
seek to hide, to cover up,
that we may seem pleasing
in Thy Sight.

But deep within us
we know that this is not enough.

We know that somehow
we must be totally exposed to Thee,
holding back nothing,
seeking refuge behind
no protecting screen or darkening
shadows. ...

We lay bare all that we are
to Thy love and Thy understanding,
O God our Father.

Howard Thurman,
Meditations of The Heart

*Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has
a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

Colossians 3:13

“Feeling Our Weakness” is a perfect topic for my 76-year-old self. It is something that I have rarely felt until recently, and it can be quite frightening. I never thought I would be this old because I had held an image of aging as a downhill slide into infirmity. I now realize the impression of weakness is one of perspective. As a younger person, my focus was skewed toward the physical dimension of life. Whereas now, as my physical self has weakened, my focus is more on the spiritual dimension. Truly, my focus is on living as a spiritual being without a physical body. In the afterlife, weakness will be gone. But what can we do until we get there? I think we follow the light even amid our weaknesses.

Although I was raised a Baptist, what truly ministered to me was nature. Of course, I was not aware that such “ministry” was happening, but I was drawn to trees, water, rocks and mountains. Over time, that attraction led me to a career as an outdoor experiential educator who taught and conducted research for 28 years at Texas A&M University. I have climbed thirteen of Colorado’s 14,000-foot peaks. None required roped climbing, but each was done one step at a time. I have also carried a 60+ pound backpack for many miles in the mountains and each trip was completed one step at a time. In fact, when going uphill carrying weight, many steps were done with what is known as “the rest step.” This is the process of putting one

foot forward and up (as in climbing stairs), transferring your weight to that foot while straightening your knee and hip, and after your weight is completely on that front foot and leg, only then move your other foot forward and up. This might sound obvious, but it is not how we typically walk or climb stairs. The pause between steps is where the name “rest step” originates. It gives the body a better chance to maintain an aerobic (with oxygen) state for a longer period rather than having to stop to “catch your breath.”

My innate tendency is to live in an anaerobic (without oxygen) state. This is not just a physical tendency, but is also true for me emotionally, mentally and spiritually. I know that Mother Nature does not work this way, yet so often I try to speed things up to avoid feeling impatience. I continually need reminders to pause, breathe and allow the process to unfold. Centering Prayer is a practice of letting go and resting in the conscious experience of not being in charge. The same gentle pace of allowing is also encouraged in the Work of Inner Christianity as we observe ourselves and allow the process to permeate our being.

In 2004, my spiritual journey got a boost. It was a challenging time in my life professionally and personally. I was overwhelmed taking care of my mother and aunt who were in their nineties. On a Friday afternoon, I drove from College Station to

downtown Austin to meet with an eldercare attorney. I was stopped by about 25 motorcycle police officers who had closed all travel through an intersection. Not knowing what was happening we just sat there. Typically, I would get out of my car, approach the closest officer, ask permission to do a U-turn, and go to my appointment another way. However, I just sat there doing nothing for 10-15 minutes. I was not antsy or irritated, but peaceful and calm. Then, about 25 more motorcycle police officers arrived with two black Suburbans and they all turned into the Erwin Center parking lot. I had no idea what was going on, but the intersection opened, and I made it to my appointment with time to spare. The next morning, I read in the newspaper that the Dalai Lama had spoken at the Erwin Center the night before. The significance of this hit me like the proverbial ton of bricks. I immediately realized the peace radiating out from the Dalai Lama had created the calmness in me at the intersection. I also knew I had to learn to meditate! I pursued meditation with the Austin Shambhala Meditation Center. At some point, I heard about Centering Prayer and read *Open Mind Open Heart* by Fr. Thomas Keating. Next was a ten-day Centering Prayer retreat at St. Benedict's Monastery in

Snowmass Colorado with Fr. Keating. A few years later, I moved to Austin and decided to take a friend's suggestion to visit The Church of Conscious Harmony. I felt like I had found the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow – a source of strength.

Through lived experiences, my perspective on aging continues to change. I no longer see it as a downhill slide into weakness, more like a mountain climb with a backpack and ever shifting weight. I believe the light within draws us upward toward a closer conscious unity with God, but not on an escalator. We must put forth effort, take the steps and bear the load using the rest step on this climb. Just as everything in nature occurs as a result of a process, following my light within requires patience as it too is a process. There must be growth time, and next steps are not always immediately evident.

When the next right action is not visible, it can feel like weakness. A Scripture close to the heart of the Welcoming Prayer comes to mind. *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit.* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-19) The meditative practice of Centering Prayer is central to patiently honoring God's timing and surrendering to the process of following our Divine light upward. ☸

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

THE MEEK SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH

BY BARBARA COOK

Originally published in *The Mark*, April 2007, this article beautifully aligns with our monthly theme.

I used to think that the Beatitudes were guidelines that only a mature Christian could live by. But after practicing Centering Prayer for some years, I know that they are the instructions that lead to maturity. They teach us how to become totally self-giving, like the Father, as demonstrated by Jesus. Once when Fr. Ronald Rolheiser was here, he stated it clearly: “If you want to feel like God, act like God.” Be totally self-giving too.

When we act from the false self, our self-centered, selfish place, we tend to think we are God and we act in a controlling way, thinking we know best. Then we have to protect and defend our thoughts and actions, which requires us to act superior and brash. I know that from personal experience. That kind of action has a certain, recognizable, inner taste and it is certainly not meek.

As a Westerner, I have often confused the idea of meek with

weak. Weakness can be a character defect, but meekness is not. Nor was Jesus suggesting that we become passive. Look at St. Paul and Jesus; their strength came from God and they acted from faith, so they did not have to reactively defend themselves in the difficult situations that confronted them.

Centering Prayer teaches us to be non-reactive. We practice “listening” and we learn to take the listening disposition into everyday life. We listen interiorly to God first, then to what is being said or done outside of us. That lets us stay open to the true wisdom of the heart and helps us avoid simple mechanical reactions. Sometimes it leads us to do nothing in response, but this nothing is not passivity; no response takes strength and discipline. Remaining meek and calm makes for clearer responses and conscious action.

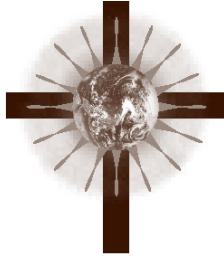
Formerly, when I read “The meek shall inherit the earth,” I associated earth with this planet we live on. Now my understanding is

that it refers to this organic body I am living in, the body temple. I now know that when I am living from the false self and its ideas I am not in unity with my deeper self, God, others, or my body.

It is by learning to become passive to our false self and its self-centered reactions and programs for happiness that our God self is exercised and grows into maturity. If we want to feel like God, we must learn to think and act like God: generous, unconditionally loving, all forgiving, patient.

By sitting in Centering Prayer twice a day and simply opening to God’s Presence we are letting go of and becoming passive to our false selves. By not continually reinforcing our false selves, they become more able to actually be meek. We can then inherit the earth and be of one body, soul and spirit – a unity with our true selves, God and all creation. ☉

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



FOUNDATIONS

A LIFE IN CHRIST BY MARY ANNE BEST

The year was 2006. The call went forth to explore and deepen our awareness of what it means to live a life in Christ as our yearly aim. We wondered: How does ordinary life with all of its routines, commitments, responsibilities and distractions become imbued with Divine Presence? How does one have a home in Christ? How does one find intimacy with another in Christ? What is our relationship to money in Christ? How do we experience work in Christ? How do we experience a life not divided into “ordinary life” and “spiritual life” – a life where there are no compartments, a life beyond any boundaries of the “secular?” How do we move beyond our sits, our studies, our devotions, our prayers, our practice – to live a fully integrated life *en Christo*? Together we intended to discover what it is to be *en Christo* in the midst of any and all aspects of modern, contemporary life as a good household on The Way. In fact, *A Life in Christ* is a life of Self-remembering, a life where we know and live our true reality in every moment of everyday life.

We studied and aimed for *A Life in Christ* in the following practice areas of our ordinary lives:

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------|
| First Things First | Community |
| Food of Impressions | Rest |
| Home as Sacred Space | Work |
| Intimacy | Social Concern |
| Money | Food |
| Tithing | Family |

We were prompted by words from *The Mystery of Christ* by Fr. Thomas Keating:

“To act out of this truth is to make Christ grow not only in ourselves, but in others. Thus, the humdrum duties and events of daily life become sacramental, shot through with eternal implications . . . The *kairos*, ‘the appointed time,’ is *now*.”

Such was the invitation in 2006. Such is the invitation in our present lives.



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THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

BE REAL, BE OPEN BY SANDRA ELY

As students of the Work, we know plenty of Work ideas that can be applied in any given situation. The real transformation occurs when we put forth effort and apply the Work to our ordinary lives. This effort can be real-time or later, whenever attention is available in all centers (intellectual, emotional and moving) to complete observations and interrupt patterns. Our merciful God gives us infinite opportunities to practice as we grow in Being and gain understanding.

As for Working with this month's theme of "Feeling Our Weakness," yes please! These three words fall on multiple associations. For example, I observe the giants of Pride and Vanity come into play. Can I apply brutal self-honesty without getting distracted? I may find myself thinking of solutions, avoiding pain and discomforts, and making up reasons to justify. How about observing a desire to point out *their* weakness instead of acknowledging my own? With grace, I can awaken and hold space for others. Embodying and feeling whatever arises is a way to be open.

Take François Fénelon, a seventeenth-century controversial theologian and spiritual thinker who was surrounded by the splendor and decadence of the most powerful court


in Europe. Yet, he chose a different path that took him through enormous inner suffering – losing his job, fame, money, and many of his friends – and into a relationship with God that few have known. As you read Fenelon's words today, notice which Work ideas arise and how you may apply them to your Being.

"When you feel that your heart is sinking under trouble, be simple and frank in saying so. Do not be ashamed to let your weakness be seen, or to ask help in your urgent need. By doing this you will advance in simplicity, in humility, and in trustfulness. You will go far to root out self-love, which keeps up a perpetual disguise in order to seem cheerful when it is really in despair.

"If you nurse your troubles in silence, they will grow stronger and finally overpower you, and the unreal

courage that self-love creates will cause you a world of harm. The poison that goes into the system is deadly. The poison that comes out does no great injury. You must not be ashamed of seeing a free discharge from the sore in your heart.

"I would give no consideration whatever to certain expressions that escape you, and that are merely the utterances of suffering in spite of your real self. It is enough if such expressions teach you that you are weak, and if you learn not to hide and cherish your weakness, but bring it to the light so that it may be cured."


May Fenelon's wisdom inspire further exploration on feeling one's weakness. 

For more experience with the Work teachings, please join the Thursday evening online classes hosted by The Journey School.

COMMUNITY PRACTICE

APRIL-MAY

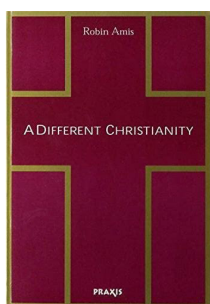
PRACTICING RESURRECTION

Taking in impressions in a new way, in any moment, any circumstance, gives rise to something new. A daily practice of Centering Prayer plus embodying self-observation, non-identification and Self-remembering in Christ increases one's essence and Being. How else will you practice resurrection to serve the highest Good? 

CORE FOUNDATIONAL 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.

A Different Christianity: Early Christian Esotericism and Modern Thought
by Robin Amis



Robin, a friend of CCH, frequently journeyed to Mt. Athos to research and translate the Truth. This book presents the original core of esoteric Christianity with its concern for illuminating and healing the inner life of the individual. It provides insights into the problems of studying and following the spiritual path outside a monastery. ☸

COMMUNITY READING

APRIL-MAY

I AM NOT I BY JACOB NEEDLEMAN

This small inspiring book is a worthy companion to the community practice of practicing resurrection. Needleman unpacks the great question of the human heart, “Who am I?” with the great answer of the human spirit, “I Am.” He chooses the literary form of a dialogue with his younger self, which seems to nurture a rebirth of the author, while offering us a fresh look at humanity’s search for Truth in a living universe. ☸

SERMON THEME FOR EASTER-PENTECOST

REDEMPTION AND RESURRECTED LIFE

During the Octave of Easter, we look to what it is to receive a new life – a life richer through the experience of suffering, failings, sorrow, struggle, loss and death, and arising ultimately unto Love. ☸

MAY CALENDAR

For more details,
visit consciousharmony.com
or call 512-347-9673

SPECIAL EVENTS

†Emptiness as Spiritual Practice Workshop
led by Douglas Christie
May 3 6-8:30pm & May 4 8:30am-12:30pm
Register online

❖Sacred Embodiment Retreat
led by Sharon Johnson
May 11 9am-4pm Register online

❖Adult Baptism Classes
Saturdays, May 11-18 9-10:30 am
Baptism: Sunday, May 19 Register online

❖Youth Communion Baptism Classes
Sundays, May 5-19 10:20-11:10 am
Baptism: Sunday, May 19
Contact Deborah Hale for details

Half-Day Online Centering Prayer Retreat
May 25 9am-noon Register online

MONTHLY

1st Sundays Caritas Donations
Bring non-perishables to CCH
or donate to caritasofaustin.org

WEEKLY

Wednesdays

❖Contemplative Lunch noon-1pm
†Contemplative Service 6-7pm

Thursdays

*The Journey School Class 7-8:30pm

Fridays

❖Communion Service in Sacristy 7:40am

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

—————
*Please join 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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ASCENSION AND PENTECOST



Gloria in Excelsus Deo!

The grace bestowed by the Ascension of Jesus is the
divinization of our humanity ...
Our life is a mysterious interpenetration
of material experience, spiritual reality
and the Divine Presence.
The key to being a Christian is to know Jesus Christ
with the whole of our being.
It is important to know His sacred humanity through
our senses and to reflect upon it with our reason,
to treasure His teaching and to imitate Him.
But this is only the beginning ...
It is to the transcendent potential in ourselves – to
our mind which opens up to unlimited truth, and to
our will which reaches out for unlimited love – that
Christ addresses Himself
in the Gospel with particular urgency ...
We are in God and God is in us, and the unifying
force is the Spirit.
To live in the Spirit is the fulfillment of
every law and commandment,
the sum of every duty to each other,
and the joy of oneness with everything that is.

Thomas Keating, The Mystery of Christ