

The Practice of Beginning Again

March 12, 2023



A Beloved Community
Practicing the Possible Through Prayer

Rev. Diana Johnson, with Lucinda Alton, RScP, Chris Johnson, RScP, Angela French, & musician Dalton Fitzgerald

Taizé

Call to Awareness – 3 Bells

Lucinda – Opening Prayer

Rev. Diana – Welcome...if you're new with us here this morning... my name is Rev. Diana Johnson, and I am the Pastor and Spiritual Director of Mystical Heart Spiritual Center. We are an Interfaith Community that teaches Universal Principles and Practical Spirituality. I want to welcome you Home to our Community, and Home to the Guidance and Wisdom of your own Mystic Heart.

I'd like to thank Dalton Fitzgerald for offering our music this morning.

We begin our meditative journey this morning by joining our voices, deepening our intimate Connection in Spirit.

Dalton – Chants

 **Welcome Home to Your Mystic Heart**, written by Diana & Chris Johnson

 **A Blessing to the World**, written by Karen Drucker & Rev. David Bruner

Rev. Diana – So let's begin by making a Conscious Connection with the Global Community, gently allowing the eyes to close if you are comfortable doing so, and taking a couple of deep breaths...letting go of everything that led to this moment...mindful that this moment is the only moment...

Forming in our minds a global web of consciousness...feeling and knowing our connection to all of Life...sensing the Radiant Light of Spirit that shines from within each one of us, and honoring that Light in all other beings...human, other-than-human, plants, rocks, soil and water, stars and planets...one Light...

The Essence, Substance, and Intelligence of all that is, flowing through each one of us now, offering Its Wisdom to our time together this morning. We feel our oneness with All That Is...

Sensing our oneness, we acknowledge our responsibility to one another as human family, and as caretakers of our beautiful and life-giving planet. Centered in our Oneness, we turn now to **New Beginnings**.

The great poets of the world have bidden us, "Begin Again." Rainer Maria Rilke invites us to "Resolve to be always beginning – to be a beginner!" And from the Sufi poet Rumi,

“Come, even if you have broken your vow a hundred times. Come, yet again. Come, come.”

The Buddhist tradition invites us to maintain a Beginner’s Mind.

The Lakota and other Indigenous people of our continent, invite New Beginnings as they begin a prayer to the seven directions: “We invite and honor the East, where the sun comes up, and so the direction of new beginnings, hope, promise, and potential. Pray that you may be open to receiving these gifts this day.”

“Monastic Spirituality calls us to return to the practice of showing up, of being still, of opening our hearts to an encounter with the holy.” The Desert Fathers and Mothers tell this brief story: “Abba Moses asked Abba Sylvanus, ‘Can a man lay a new foundation every day?’ The old man said, ‘If he works hard, he can lay a new foundation in every moment.’” (The Soul of a Pilgrim, Christine Valters Paintner)

And so, just as the many world’s tradition share one view or teaching about control...that human control of outer conditions is an illusion, and that self-control is what we can and should be responsible for...the world’s religions and philosophical teachings seem to share a belief in **The Practice of Beginning Again**.

Life as a Pilgrimage, or a Journey of Transformation, is a place of new beginnings. Not only every morning, but every moment, offers a chance to begin again.

Will there be days when I don’t feel like going to my quiet space to seek Guidance on my next steps, or to pray Peace into my day and into the world? Days when my monkey-mind seems to steal my attention over and over? Days that seem to actively conspire against Peace, where our calendar is just too full to cultivate genuine Presence? Of course. Our inner dialogue will often try to sabotage our most sincere efforts. When this happens, and it will happen, our Practice is to simply notice and acknowledge, and begin again. We bring the fire of intention back to our Practice...we refuse to be side-tracked...we commit to showing up...again.

This is the essence of humility. We remember that, in the spiritual life, we are always beginners. There is no ultimate destination, no way we will ever arrive. The more we think we have it all figured out, the further we are from true growth or forward movement. Humility demands that we always approach our journey with a spirit of openness.

Committing to a spiritually focused life means letting go of the ego’s power over us. Without even realizing it, we often begin a new Practice such as prayer or meditation with self-centered motives. Subconsciously, we want to feel better about ourselves, or to be special I some way. Over time, these subconscious motivations will rise to the surface. Our ego may experience resistance or disillusionment. We may want to walk away. It is at this point that we find it easy for other things to get in the way. In these times, we recommit. We start over. As Thomas Merton reminds us: “There are only three stages to this work: to be a beginner, to be more of a beginner, and to be only a beginner.”

I encourage you to be gentle with yourself. Remember that real transformation takes a commitment to showing up for yourself and showing up for Spirit. When the Practice falters, simply remember that the wisdom of the world's traditions...simply begin again, free of expectations.

We are creative beings, filled with the best of intentions. We have grand visions and longings to express ourselves in the fullest way possible. We begin a new project – painting a picture, writing a book, composing a song, or planting a new garden bed – with enthusiasm and full of commitment to see it through. Somewhere along the way our energy starts to wane; our creative energy and vision turns to frustration; there are apparent roadblocks to our completion. We begin to feel a sense of failure.

This is the time to ***Practice Beginning Again***. Take yourself to your Quiet Space. Acknowledge your feelings...cry if you need to...maybe write all that you are feeling down in a journal to be reviewed (or discarded) later. And then, when you have cleared the doubt, anger, sadness, or other life-denying feelings from the prominent place in your awareness, sit back...breathe...relax your body...invite Guidance for your Higher Wisdom...and ***Begin Again***.

Chris – Guided Meditation

Throughout the ages, spiritual teachers have reminded us that when in meditation our attention gets kidnapped by a random thought, we simply bring it back...

We don't reprimand ourselves... that would be another kidnapping... we rejoin our meditation by shifting our focus, recentering, and beginning again...

We begin again hundreds of times a day... We breathe in... then out, completing one breath... Then we begin breathing again...

We blink to moisten our eyes... then blink again... We swallow... then swallow again... We take a step... then another... and another...

The longer we live, the more we recognize recurring themes in our lives... Divine opportunities to handle familiar situations more skillfully, this time...

To do so, it is important to guard against reacting habitually... to resolve to respond in a more loving way than ever before... This is the essence of spiritual growth...

In the Sacred Silence, I invite us to contemplate a recurring life pattern we are working to evolve... From a Beginner's Mind, craft a new response... one that infuses more Peace, Love, and Grace into the situation...

Silence – 3:00

On this Pilgrimage we call Life, we pass through many thresholds... Each one is a new beginning... a new world... calling forth more evolved responses from us...

Our responses to Life create the world we see... Every thought, word, and action have an effect on the Whole... What kind of future are we generating?...

Bringing the highest and best of who we are to every situation, we create the New Heaven and the New Earth... a Love-Soaked World... That is the meaning of humankind's dominion...

We give thanks for this time of Blessed Communion with Spirit and with our Beloved Community... for the Spiritual Gifts of courage and guidance...

As Rev. Diana continues her Taizé message, we open our hearts, minds, and souls to fully engage the Practice of Beginning Again...

Rev. Diana

I've heard it said that there is no failure...there is only giving up. Another idea to consider is that each of us has a life impulse and a death impulse. Every choice that we make moves us either toward that which brings us a sense of aliveness, or that which drains us of our life energy. The challenge is that sometimes these two principles are hard to tell apart. It can be easy to mistake that which is destructive for that which is life-giving. For example, is watching a movie moving me toward greater life energy, or is it really draining me? Is it serving to create rest and rejuvenation, bringing true peace, enjoyment, and renewal to my day? Or am I using it to numb out, creating an escape or diversion from what would really feed my soul? It is not the activity we choose, but the motivation and attitude behind the activity that matters.

Or life impulse calls us into community with ourselves, with others, and with the divine. This life impulse leads us to nourish ourselves well, knowing that this beautiful body is the vessel for our work in the world. It is essential to treat it with the profound dignity it deserves. We are grounded in our wholeness and make choices from this place. Our life impulse calls us to continue the difficult yet soulful journey we have begun. It calls us to remember the invitation whispered and reminds us the path is still waiting.

(Christina Valters Paintner)

Our death impulse leads us to retreat from the world, separate ourselves from others through divisive ideas, to numb ourselves through poor quality nutrition, mindless media consumption, and by living in victimhood, always feeling betrayed by life. It leads us to make choices from our woundedness or to lash out at others rather than seeking understanding. This is different than the purposeful and nourishing withdrawal into silence that we sometimes need...that feeds our soul. Intention is key.

Dalton – Musical Meditation

 *Spirit's Prayer*, written by Gary Lynn Floyd

Rev. Diana – Closing Prayer

Coming back into this space, we open our eyes, our hearts, and our minds. Take a look at who is here celebrating with you this morning. This is your Spiritual Family...one of your support systems. These are some of the people who care about you, who are there for you if you need anything.

Offertory

As we close our Taizé Meditation, we offer the opportunity for you to share of your financial good in support of the work we do should you choose to do so.

If you're joining us online, you can find a Donate Button and our mailing address at mysticheart.org. And we thank you in advance for your gifts.


Dalton – Offertory Music

 ***Here Goes Nothing***, written by Daniel Nahmod

Rev. Diana – Blessing for the Offering

Closing remarks – Spring Tea, tickets, and raffle – still supporting Farmers' Footprint with lunch donations – check your bulletin or the website for activities coming up – please consider spending a service now and again with Traci and the kids. She has sign-ups next door.

Dalton – Closing Song

 ***A Soul's Blessing***, written by Chris Johnson

Conscious Conversation

Call to Awareness – 3 Bells

Lucinda – Opening Prayer

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I'd like to thank Dalton Fitzgerald for offering our music this morning. Are you ready to get us on our feet?

Dalton – Opening Music

 ***Welcome to the Mystic Heart***, written by Diana & Chris Johnson

 ***One Big Family***, written by Robin Hackett & Gary Lynn Floyd

 ***Song –Metta Chant***, written by Tienne Beaulieu

Rev. Diana

I invite you to remain standing and take a moment to feel the Presence of Spirit in your body...the Life moving through...the Love filling you up...and join me in our Sacred Practice of Visioning for a ***Love-Soaked World***.

...where all humans are embodying and living from Peace, Joy, Abundance, Generosity, Justice and Freedom as Living Principles that guide our lives...where all humans practice Loving Kindness and Compassion, honoring and caring for one another, and for our beautiful planet as the Sacred Home that she is.

We are creating a world where all needs are met...where all beings have plenty of nourishing food, the safety of a warm and comfortable home...where mental/physical health, education, and healthy relationships are ensured by social systems grounded in Wellness and Wholeness... where right livelihood, creative contribution, and a sense of belonging are known as Gifts of the Spirit and experienced by all...

A world in which all beings are valued and respected for their inherent Goodness and Light...where the Peace we cultivate within shows up as a world free of hatred or violence.

We are creating a world that knows no greed, where there is abundance in having *enough*...where every being *deserves* and *receives* all that is needed for a full, rich, and contented life.

In this new world of our creation, every person is a caring and conscious vessel through which Generosity flows. By the Power of our collective intention, we write a new story...we create a world that works for all beings. Like the prophet Nehemiah, we are “doing a great work, so that (we) cannot come down.” We *will not* lower our Vision, no matter the appearance. Knowing with our whole hearts that such a world is not only possible, but *inevitable*, we stand firmly in, for, and AS Peace, Love, and Compassion in action.

We open our hearts, our doors, and our arms in Radical Welcome, erasing all lines of apparent separation. We create a Bigger Table, to which all are invited, and at which all have an equal voice. Our Powerful Vision is moving into form and experience here and now...we feel it, we know it, and we give thanks...we let it be. And so it is! Amen!

Dalton – Musical Meditation

One Heart, written by J.D. Martin

Rev. Diana – Let’s take a moment to look around and notice who is sharing this space with you this morning. This is one of your support systems, your Spiritual Family should you choose it.

Do you ever feel like the Universe is always listening? That whatever you are thinking, saying, intending, or doing is noticed? That God, Great Spirit, the Universe, or Infinite Intelligence has a sense of humor? And that it uses what you are giving your attention to, to move you just a little further down your path? Yes, No? Or is it just me?

I’d like to share a story with you about my own life to get our ***Conscious Conversation*** going this morning. Our theme this month is ***New Beginnings***. Pay close attention to that because it’s part of the story.

By the end of last year, I had chosen the topics for January, February, and March for 2023...January was **Rooted**, and dealt with being still and listening for what was to come next; February was **Pilgrimage**, and spoke to the idea of life as continual spiritual transformation; and March is **New Beginnings**, with last week's title being **This is Soooo Uncomfortable**.

So, in January I picked up a copy of the Science of Mind Magazine because I still enjoy some of its articles. On the cover was a man named John Pavlovitz who had been voted in as CSL's Spiritual Hero for 2022. The name rang a bell, so I turned right to the article. Long story short, I had already read two of his books. And I had another one on the shelf that I had not yet read. It was called **The Bigger Table**, a leadership book that was addressing the need for spiritual communities to serve as safe spaces for all people to come together, to one table, with equal voices. I read it cover to cover, then bought a copy for each Core Council member and Prayer Practitioner, so that we could have a conversation.

What I discovered is that Mystic Heart was already doing the things the author was calling for. They had developed organically. But I figured that there was always room for improvement.

Next scene in the story...I start using the metaphor of the Bigger Table in my classes and Sunday messages.

Fast forward to February...**Pilgrimage**. Each week we talked about different aspects of making a sacred journey...**Packing Lightly, Crossing the Threshold**, making a **Pilgrimage of the Heart**, and taking **One Step at a Time**. Remember that my life, my journey of transformation, my Pilgrimage, revolves around my study and practice that leads me to create Services and Classes that will support the growth and evolution of our community and its individual beings. I am a vessel for whatever Spirit has to say in any given week by means of me.

You might be wondering where this story is leading. Here it is. We get to March and my first topic of the month is **This is Soooo Uncomfortable**. Do you have any idea what kind of an invitation that is? Spirit wants to make sure that I am walking the talk. Without details, here is what happened. I wrote a service two weeks ago that triggered some folks, apparently many folks. This was, of course, not my intention. But what did I think was going to happen when I first made public that we were consciously seeking to create a Bigger Table; then that we had evolved to become an **Interfaith Church** by official designation; and finally, planned two services titled **One Step at a Time** and **This is Soooo Uncomfortable?**

What was the intention? To create an opportunity for some triggers around religion to be healed. To offer a new interpretation for some old language. What ended up happening? I did harm...something I said I would never do. **10:56** And it was **Soooo Uncomfortable** to face that and to make amends. But of course, that is an example of **The Practice of Beginning Again**.

All is well...my story has a happy ending. Why do I share this with you this morning? Most importantly, to assure you that you are safe here. If you were triggered two weeks ago, or at any time, I apologize. I meant no harm. And second, to assure you that no matter how far you travel on this spiritual journey, there is no point of arrival...no time when your work is done...no time when my work is done. Finally, it is to remind all of us that no matter what happens, we can always ***Begin Again***.

Now it's time for you to share your Wisdom. What are some of the Spiritual Qualities that we must call forth when we are Beginning Again?

Whatever is said...what does this quality offer our process?

(Acceptance of what has happened and forgiveness, of self and/or others; honesty...speaking authentically; Love...communicating-both speaking and listening-openly, and respectfully, from a loving and compassionate place; Trust...assuming the highest intent; humility; Peace; Gratitude)

Is there anyone in the room who is joining me in making a New Beginning? Would you like to share?

Okay. Are we ready to pivot? I love that we are an Independent Interfaith Community, the only one in Shasta County. I love that we are seeking to find common threads of Truth between belief systems, that we are building bridges between religions and religious language.

What are the challenges of the work we are doing?

I would love to have your feedback on this process of creating A Bigger Table. What is your interpretation of that phrase?

Do you think that it's possible to function as an Interfaith Community?

What are the qualities we must call forth when we are seeking to build bridges like these?

What are the common threads we have discovered between world traditions so far?

(that there is something greater at work here – we are ultimately not in control of our surroundings and circumstances, only in how we experience them; that we are responsible for our own thoughts, words, and actions, and for whether we use them to build up or tear down; and that every moment offers the chance to Begin Again)

What other common threads might we find?

(Love, compassion, peace, unity, beauty, gratitude, forgiveness)

We are in the Season of Lent, approaching the Spring Equinox...new life, new growth; a time of releasing what no longer serves us; fasting from old habits and patterns; and adopting new ways of being and seeing; feasting on what feeds our hearts and souls. We honor this season of New Beginnings, as we come together in Communion and in

Community. We share this journey of transformation, as authentic beings, seeking the support of others willing to practice the vulnerability, courage, and commitment it takes to build bridges, to practice Radical Acceptance, and to build a Bigger Table where all are welcome and have equal voice.

Closing Prayer: I close today with a Mohawk Prayer:

Oh Great Spirit, Creator of all things; Human beings, trees, grass, berries. Help us, be kind to us. Let us be happy on earth. Let us lead our children to a good life and old age. These, our people; give them good minds to love one another. Oh, Great Spirit, be kind to us. Give these people the favor to see green trees, green grass, flowers, and berries this next spring; so we all meet again. Oh, Great Spirit, we ask of you.

Know with me that...

Offertory

Each Sunday, we invite you to join in the celebration of the work we are doing in the world by sharing of your financial Good, should you choose to.

If you are at home, you can go to **mysticheart.org** to use our Donate Button or to find our mailing address.

We also have a Gracious Giving Program for those who would like to make a heartfelt monthly commitment of support so that we can more effectively plan for our growth. You can find more information on our website.

As we move into this time of giving, hold these words close to your heart and know how much we appreciate your gifts:


As I awaken to the God within me and all around me, I see Abundance everywhere I look. I consciously step into that flow of Abundance by this act of giving. I offer this gift freely in the spirit of Love, blessing and sending it forth to heal and prosper. It is evidence of my deep faith. It does good work in the world and blesses all of Creation. I give from a consciousness of Abundance! And so it is! Amen!


Dalton – Offertory Song

Invisible Hands, written by J.D. Martin

Lucinda – Blessing for the Offering

Angela – Invitations

 Michael Bordeaux and the Mystic Heart Book Club is continuing through the month of March with **Lunch with Buddha** on Tuesdays from 3:00-5:00 pm.

 **Kavalya Poirier is offering Functional Movement through Yoga** on Thursdays, 11 am – 12:15 pm. There is a sliding fee scale for the class: \$30-\$50 for the three remaining classes this month. We still have room for those willing to commit on a monthly basis.

- ♥ **This Wednesday, March 15th from 6:30-7:30 pm, Sherry Barret will be offering our next Sound Bath Meditation.** Suggested donation is \$10-\$20.
- ♥ **Fast Track to Wellness** with Rev. Diana meets on Thursdays from **12:30 – 2:30** pm. This is a physical health and wholeness support circle. Drop-ins are welcome.
- ♥ **Metaphysical Bible Study** with Chris Johnson meets on Thursdays from 3:00 – 5:00 pm. Drop-ins are welcome.
- ♥ **Please sign up with Traci to assist with the Junior Mystics once every 4-8 weeks. She has the sign-up sheet next door...many hands make light work.**

Looking Ahead...

- ♥ **Saturday, March 18th from 1:00 – 3:00 pm,** Ellie Thompson and Kris Fortier are hosting their ***Spring Tea, which is the next Celebrating Community Event.*** Three tickets left. Raffle tickets are also on sale today.
- ♥ **Wednesdays, March 22 – May 24 from 2:00-5:00 pm,** Rev. Diana's last class of the 'school year', ***Conversations with the Divine: An Exploration of Prayer.*** The suggested donation is \$95 for 10 weeks or \$10/class session. Contact Rev. Diana to.
- ♥ **Sunday, April 9th – Easter Sunday Release and Renewal Ceremony – 10:00-11:30, a single service for this week only.**
- ♥ **2nd Annual Spring Retreat at Coram Ranch in Shasta Lake April 20-23, 2023.** Payment in full is due by April 1st. Rev. Diana will be reaching out with more info.

Planning way ahead because we want you to be there...

- ♥ **Friday, May 19th , 6:00-9:00 pm, Our Annual State of the Heart Gathering.** This is what might otherwise be called our Congregational Meeting...except we like to turn it into a potluck and music jam. You will, of course, learn how we've done this past year, how we're doing now, and what our plans for the future are. This year's Gathering is once again being hosted by the very gracious Gary and Angela French. More information will be available soon.

Prayer Requests, Practitioner available after service, Information Cards for new people

Dalton – Closing Song

- ♥ ***Love Be with You***, written by Lainey Bernstein, RScP, & Gary Lynn Floyd

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