

A Living Work of Art

Sunday, May 28, 2023



A Beloved Community
Practicing the Possible Through Prayer

Rev. Diana Johnson, with Lucinda Alton, RScP, & Chris Johnson, RScP

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 welcome you home to our Spiritual Community (should you choose it). I welcome you home to the Guidance and Wisdom of your own Mystic Heart.

This morning we center our reflections and contemplations on turning our life into a **Living Work of Art**.

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

Taizé Chants

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

 **Dropping Down**, written by Karen Drucker

Rev. Diana – Dropping Down a little bit deeper, into the Inner Chamber, taking a long, slow, deep breath...feeling the brief pause, and then letting it go...feeling the Presence of New Life entering your being with every breath in...and then sending that Life out into the world on the outbreath, creating an atmosphere of Love, Peace, and Wholeness, both within and without...

Taking another moment to follow the breath as it settles into its own natural flow, and then slowing it just a bit...

...And now allowing your awareness to move away from the breath, grounding even more deeply into the silence...right here, right now...feeling your Oneness with the Creative Intelligence of the Universe...and acknowledging your Oneness with the global community...

Sensing a web of consciousness that surrounds and infuses the planet, each of us a radiant point of Light in that web...every human, every creature, every plant...part of the web, and radiating with God's Light...every rock and grain of sand, every drop of water, infused with Presence, with Sentience...and moving our awareness still further into the

cosmos, recognizing the wind, the clouds, the stars, the planets...as part of one Light, one Life.

Acknowledging our connection with all of life, our collective Work here is empowered...Our collective prayer and meditation leave an imprint of Peace, of Love, of Grace, on the world, on the cosmos, for all time.

By our coming together, sharing in prayer, meditation, and visioning, we are learning to see every life as **A Living Work of Art**. Each of us, engaged in the Creative Process...in every moment.

It is easy to imagine that there will be a point in time, sometime in the future, when our life will finally be the way we want it...a time when we will have mastered the Art of Living...when our life will more closely resemble **A Living Work of Art**. Not now...we're not quite there yet...but then. What we have forgotten is that there is no such time here on earth, in this physical body, when our creative process will be complete. In fact, there is no time here on earth but Now. "All past and future is somehow present in the Now. Only what is Now actually *is*; what *was*, or *will be*, is not." (*You Are Here*, Br. David Steindl-Rast)

Can we learn to see every moment as a point of creation? Can we somehow remember that our lives *are Living Works of Art*?

By our very nature, we are creative beings, made in the image and likeness of the Creator. As Spirit expresses in the macrocosm, so do we express in the microcosm...in our own lives, and in the world. We sometimes forget that artistic creation is a messy process. I would bet that there has never been a great painting without a lot of paint spilled, brushes and clothing soiled...that there has never been a great novel without many, many crumbled pieces of paper...that there has never been a musical masterpiece created without a great number of scribbles and re-writes...that there has never been a beautiful garden without the handling of a lot of dirt.

And each of these artists has had life experiences, some beautiful and some less-than, that make them who they are...that have informed their desire to create...and affected the outward expression of their creation. Life is messy business, and the making of your life into **A Living Work of Art**, into a thing of great Beauty and Inspiration, requires time...attention... intention... dedication... openness... acceptance... reflection... patience... perseverance...flexibility.

Where to begin...right where you are. From right where you are in this moment, what would be required to live a more artful life? What might you have to let go of? (Pause) What might you have to accept, or even welcome? (Pause) How might your time and energy be redirected in pursuit of a more beautiful and inspiring expression? (Pause)

Chris – Guided Meditation

We tend to think of a work of art as a finished product... a completed painting... a published book... a finished composition... The *Mona Lisa*... *Toccata and Fugue in D*

Minor ... A Midsummer Night's Dream... none of these has changed in hundreds of years... they are completed works...

But what about a work in progress?... Might something be a work of art even while the artist is still working on it?... The opening arpeggios of the *Moonlight Sonata* showed Beethoven's genius long before he composed the final measures... And might there be art forms that never reach the stage that we call completion?...

Jazz and improvisational theater require the artist to create *in the moment*... to rely on intuition to provide what is most beneficial *right now*... And while the song or play may be performed again under the same name, the actual performance is never the same twice... they change with each rendition...

Mother Nature is a consummate artist... her forest cathedrals, majestic mountains, sunrises, and sunsets are truly works of art... Something within us responds to her Beauty with awe and reverence... and yet, She is never done... her canvas is forever changing...

As her children, we create the same way she does... Our deep-seated beliefs and feelings are mirrored by our world... and, like Her, we are never finished... We may reach a plateau and rest a while... acknowledging an accomplishment with satisfaction... But soon we turn our gaze to the path ahead... to our next opus... In these moments of Shared Silence, let us contemplate our current *work of art*... what we've done well... where we are... and what is seeking to be birthed through us *now*...

Silence – 3:00

As we return our awareness to this time and place, we embrace our life as a continuous work of art... We give thanks for the Divine Creative Power that flows through us... and creates as us... And we align ourSelves with the Beauty and Power of Spirit, knowing that they flow into our creations... Thank you, God, for everything and everyone...

Centered in Love, Peace, Beauty, and Joy, we apply our Holy Creativity to make our world a kinder, more compassionate place... We recognize the place where we stand as Hallowed Ground... and our siblings as saints... The Realm of Heaven is indeed at hand...

As Rev. Diana continues her message this morning, we open our hearts and minds to even greater inspiration... and we allow ourselves to be guided into the next phase of our *Living Work of Art*...

Rev. Diana

Recalling a question from last week, what is it that brings me alive? This is a good place to start when beginning a life of Conscious Creation. How can I arrange my life to make more time for what brings me alive? (Pause)

Another guiding question might be what is my deepest longing? (Pause)

What am I specially gifted for? (Pause)

What opportunity does Life actually offer me here and now to fulfill my longing and use my gifts? (Pause)

In her book *The Breath of the Soul*, Sister Joan Chittister emphasizes the importance of prayer and meditation as tools in living an artful life, but warns that these are not enough:

Only when the life I live mirrors the prayers I say is there any real integrity to the life I am living. If we thank God for the good that comes to us but do nothing to bring that same good to others, what is the use of the prayer? If we believe that a spiritual life is the rudder by which we steer our way through life but show no signs of the relationship between what I pray and what I do, what is the use of it all? I am not here to preen on being spiritual. I am here to develop the spiritual life that makes me a spiritual presence in the life of the world. Anything else, even prayer, is self-gratification not spiritual growth.

We are here to co-create an experience that we call human life...to give Spirit the opportunity to express Itself...Its Soul...as our individual soul. We bring into this world a life that has never existed before. It is absolutely unique in every respect. It offers us gifts as well as challenges. But more importantly, it offers us the opportunity to reflect, to choose, to learn, and to choose again. When we use these capacities consciously and wisely, our life becomes **A Living Work of Art**...not without the messiness, but rather, an inspiration to others and a Guiding Light in the world because of our willingness to integrate that messiness into a thing of great beauty.

Musical Meditation– *Pray Me*, written by Diana and Chris Johnson

Rev. Diana – Closing Prayer

Right here in this moment of Now, I choose to create **A Living Work of Art**. I know that there is really only One Thing going on here, and that is God expressing and experiencing Themselves as all of creation. As a perfect, intentional, and irreplaceable strand in the All That Is, I set about the heartfelt Practice of bringing my gifts forward...of letting my Light shine as the Highest Possible version of who I came here to be...in Service to my soul's journey, and in service to the Whole. In every moment of Now, I do what is required of me by the Presence within...I become flexible in my thinking, Graceful in my actions, gentle and kind in my words. Day by day, I Am more attuned to my inner Guidance, and I more willingly follow. I live my life with humility, and from the Spiritual Authority granted me at birth.

I Am so grateful for this life...for each one that has chosen to share this time with me...and for the endless shower of blessings that Grace my life in every moment. I trust that Spirit is forever within and all around me...that this is so for each one listening...and that the blessings continue to flow as we move through each moment of Now.

I release my Word, in full faith in its Power, knowing that it is creating, even Now, a new experience in our world...a new story in which the entire human family and the world that it inhabits and serves is **A Living Work of Art**. I accept it...I feel it...I know it. I let it be...

And so it is. Amen...Sathu...Ashay...Aho!

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.

Offering

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.

Offertory Video – *Cheap Food = Abusive Food* by Molly Engelhart

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaWO3omybBY&t=11s>

Rev. Diana – Blessing for the Offering

Closing Song

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

Conscious Conversation

Lucinda – Opening Prayer

Rev. Diana – Good morning and welcome, or welcome back...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. We welcome you home to our Spiritual Community and to the Guidance and Wisdom of your own Mystic Heart. **(No pause)**

Opening Music

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

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

 ***Song – I Am Opening Up in Sweet Surrender***

Feel free to stay standing or whatever serves you in noticing the Presence of Spirit into our bodies, as we join in the Sacred Practice of envisioning a ***Love-Soaked World...***

...where all humans are embodying and living from Peace, Joy, Abundance, Generosity, Justice, and Freedom as Living Principles, practicing Love, Kindness, and Compassion, honoring, and caring for one another, and for our Sacred Mother Earth.

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 accepted as Gifts of the Spirit and enjoyed 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. By the Power of our collective intention, we write a new story...we create a world that works for all beings.

We *do not* lower our Vision, no matter the appearances in the world, knowing with our whole hearts that such a world is not only possible, but *inevitable*. As one by one, each of us aligns our actions to support our vision, it is coming into form and experience now...and we trust that this prayer is a creative act in its Graceful unfolding.

We open our hearts, our doors, and our arms in Radical Welcome, erasing all lines of apparent separation. In keeping with our Vision, we create an open and loving community to which all are invited, and *in* which all have an equal voice. Trusting in the power of prayer, we say Thank You, Spirit, letting it go and letting it be. And so it is...Amen...Sathu...Ashay...Aho!

Let's take a moment to look around and notice who is sharing this space with you this morning. Take a moment to really see one another.

If you were with us at Taizé this morning, you know that we have been looking at making our life into **A Living Work of Art**. Doesn't that sound good? Are you interested in having a Conscious Conversation about that?

For those who weren't there, we reflected the idea that, by our nature, we are creative beings, made in the image and likeness of our Creator; and we acknowledged that Creating Art is a messy process.

And we spent time in contemplation of some questions...what would living a more artful life require of you? What might you have to let go of? What might you have to accept, or even welcome? How might your time and energy be redirected in pursuit of a more beautiful and inspiring expression?

And we closed with a quote from Sister Joan Chittister, that leads directly into my topic of Conversation for today: "Only the life I live mirrors the prayers I say is there any real integrity to the life I am living. If we thank God for the good that comes to us but do nothing to bring that same good to others, what is the use of the prayer? If we believe that a spiritual life is the rudder by which we steer our way through life but show no signs of the relationship between what I pray and what I do, what is the use of it all? I am not here to preen on being spiritual. I am here to develop the spiritual life that makes me a spiritual presence in the life of the world. Anything else, even prayer, is self-gratification not spiritual growth."

This topic can feel a little bit pokey. We can get a little bit defensive when we hear words like these. Again, this is not the part where Sister Joan comforts the afflicted, which she does often. It's where she afflicts the comfortable. And it is really easy to get comfortable, isn't it?

What are some of the reasons we have for not reaching out in service to the world?

(I don't have anything to offer; I'm not sure what's mine to do; I don't have the time, money, energy; I don't have it together enough; I'm not even good at self-care yet – I don't have it to give)

Do you think that one of reasons might be staying in our comfort zone?

Okay, prepare to be poked...Might these actually be excuses we use to avoid looking at/taking responsibility for the condition of our world?

It has become really popular and accepted to put self-care first as a reason for not going out beyond ourself...or to use not having it together enough, or not having enough time. But I have to wonder...

Will I ever have it completely together?

Won't I always be able to give myself just a little bit more self-care? Will I ever have more time than I have right now?

Isn't it really more about moderation and balance?

And what about our motivation?

I'm not saying that we shouldn't put ourselves first. I am still learning the importance of taking care of myself, and what that looks like. No one else is going to take care of meeting my needs and it's no one else's job.

But can there be a fine line between self-care and self-expression, and narcissism?

And it's definitely true that if we don't have our personal stuff together, we might do more harm than good in trying to help others. But again, isn't there a point at which we have it together enough to not be dangerous, and at which point we have the responsibility of trying to make the world a better place?

I'd like to share an audio clip from Tami Simon's Insights at the Edge where she is interviewing Rainn Wilson, who has just written a new book called *Soul Boom*. Feel free to grab your notepads for our discussion afterward. **10:52** Notice anything that pokes you, any questions that come up, or responses to what is said.

Audio Clip from Rainn Wilson: Standing for a Spiritual Revolution

<https://resources.soundstrue.com/podcast/rainn-wilson-standing-for-a-spiritual-revolution/> **30:24 – 36:56 (6 ½ minutes)**

Okay, what's on your mind? (Open discussion)

Closing Prayer Isn't it great to be able to just share and be heard? It's time to close our Conversation for today. Let's close in prayer.

Speaking my Word for myself, I know that as we are truly One Life, it serves to bless all who listen. There is only One Thing going on here, and that is Spirit expressing and experiencing Themselves in, through and AS all of creation. I Am, each of us is, a perfectly imperfect, intentional, and irreplaceable piece of the One Source, made in Their image and likeness. And so each of us is already creating **A Living Work of Art** by way of our life. As each of us acknowledges the act of creation that is forever at work, we commit to bringing more and more conscious awareness to the process. As one creative expression of Spirit, I engage daily with my God, in prayer, meditation, study, service, and celebration...grateful for my growing ability to hear and follow Guidance. I know that the purpose for my growth, and for my life, is to share my gifts, making the world a more beautiful place. This is my walk, my journey...the only path with meaning in my life.

I am so grateful to have people of like heart and mind to share this journey. I give thanks for each one and know that our collective Practice bears fruit in each of our lives.

In this sacred moment, from a place of deep gratitude and faith, I release my Word, trusting that it has already begun moving into form and experience in each of our lives. And so, I let it go...I let it be...and so it is! Amen! Sathu! Ashay! Aho!

I invite you to bring your awareness back to your body, to your senses, to the atmosphere in the room. And when you are ready, open your eyes to re-enter the space. Welcome back.

Affirmation for the Offering

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!

Here is someone who continues to make his life **A Living Work of Art**.

Offertory Video


 **Paul Simon – Seven Psalms Album Trailer**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiDc4DbFQZY>


Lucinda – Blessing for the Offering


Invitations


 **The Mystic Heart Book Club, Functional Movement through Yoga, Fast Track to Wellness, and Metaphysical Bible Study** are all meeting at their normal times this week. Drop-ins are welcome.

 **Support your local farmers, and your own physical health, at the Saturday Farmer's Market every Saturday, 7:30 – noon.**


Looking Ahead...

 **Saturday, June 3rd from 10 am – 4 pm**, Mystic Heart will be participating in the Pride Festival. Sign up to work a shift in our booth or help out as a volunteer in the food booth.

 **Saturday, June 10th from 1:00-3:00 pm, Praying in Color with Ellie Thompson.** We will be using decoupage to prayerfully create a beautiful, one-of-a-kind flowerpot. Suggested donation: \$20.

 **Wednesday, June 28th from 6 – 8 pm, Common Threads of Truth with Rev. Helen Cummings.** The focus of this first presentation in a series will be Buddhism and the Common Threads of Truth it shares with other traditions. There will be Q & A and simple refreshments. Donations are gratefully accepted. Bring a friend!

Looking Far Ahead...

 **Next year's retreat at Coram Ranch is booked. What you need to know for now... Dates: Thursday, April 25th – Sunday April 28th, 2024.** Please talk to Rev. Diana for more information, and to begin monthly installments this month.

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

Closing Song

 **Love Be With You**, written by Lainey Bernstein, RScP, & Gary Lynn Floyd

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