

Practicing the Presence

Sunday, June 16, 2024

Rev. Diana Johnson, IM. RScM, with Chris Johnson, RScP



An Independent Interfaith Community
Practicing the Possible Through Prayer

Taizé

Rev. Diana – Let us follow the sound of the bell into the Stillness Within.....**3 Bells**

Chris – Opening Prayer

Rev. Diana – Good morning...Happy Fathers' Day. If you're new with us here this morning, my name is Rev. Diana Johnson, and I am the Pastor and Spiritual Director of Mystic Heart Spiritual Center. We are an Independent Interfaith Community that teaches Universal Principles and Practical Spirituality. We open our doors in welcome, trusting that you will be led to the Guidance and Wisdom of your own Mystic Heart. We begin our Taizé with Musical Prayer.

Rev. Diana & Chris – Taizé Chants

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

 **One Breath at a Time**, written by Karen Drucker

Rev. Diana – Grounding more deeply into our Center, we feel gratitude for the multitude of gifts we are given this day... taking a long, slow, deep breath in, filling your heart with love...and as you exhale, releasing that love into the world... Now slowly inhaling a deep sense of Peace... and exhaling, sharing Peace with all that is... Abiding in the Presence of the One...

Remember with me now that all of Creation is the expression of Spirit... the body of God... Each of us is a unique thread in the beautiful tapestry of Life... A strand of consciousness weaving in and out of one another to reveal the splendor of our Unity... This morning we connect in consciousness with each other as human family, and with our Global Community... with our plant and animal siblings... with our Mother Earth, her waters, her minerals, her mountains, her weather... with our Grandfather Sky, his clouds, his stars, his planets, his galaxies... All expressions of The Infinite Nature of Spirit... each absolutely necessary to the whole...

As we acknowledge that we are all of One Essence, One Substance, One Source, we grow in compassion, empathy, and understanding. Firmly grounded in this awareness, we recognize that all that we offer into the world in thought, word, or action, affects the Whole.

With our hearts and minds consciously centered in Spirit, our collective prayer and meditation leave an imprint of Presence on human evolution, and on the world, for all time...

This month, our contemplations are centered in ***New Beginnings***, and this morning's reflections point us toward ***Practicing the Presence***.

We hear this phrase so often...***Practicing the Presence***. Do we really know what that means? There may be more than one way to interpret these powerful words...many aspects to Presence...many levels of Practice.

First, let's consider the simple, but often challenging, Practice of simply being present. We may enter the spiritual journey with busy minds, lacking the ability to direct our own thoughts, or attend to our tasks consciously. At some point we feel a shift...more and more of the time, we are able to bring focused attention to what is before us. We might call this mindfulness...purposefully giving our attention to something or someone. Practicing this kind of presence brings our minds and bodies into alignment, both working toward a common purpose.

Once we have become aware of our tendency towards monkey mind and done the work to become more present in the Now, we begin to enter a deeper state of presence...the ability to use the tasks of daily living as our devotion.

Brother Lawrence from the Carmelite Order of the Catholic Tradition used this kind of focused attention, but deepened his Practice further by engaging the heart. He served his monastery as a dish washer.

Through his devotion in attending to this task, he discovered some insights into the spiritual disciplines. The most effective way Brother Lawrence had for communicating with God was to simply do his ordinary work, obediently and out of a pure love of God. He believed it was a serious mistake to think of our prayer time as being different from any other. He often taught that "we ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed." (The Practice of the Presence of God)

We might say that another way of ***Practicing the Presence*** is to offer our work as devotion. Now we are able to see our Service to one another and the world as Sacred Work.

Like Brother Lawrence, Joel S. Goldsmith, a 20th century mystic, wrote of ***Practicing the Presence***. His approach differed in that it made use of the contemplation of scripture. Goldsmith says, "Every person who has known dissatisfaction, incompleteness, and frustration will someday learn that there is only one missing link in this entire chain of harmonious living. That is the practice of the presence of God – consciously, daily and hourly, abiding in some great spiritual truth of scripture, and it makes no difference which scripture: Christian, Hebrew, Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, or Muslim."

He took to heart the idea that keeping one's mind centered in thoughts about God would naturally lead to inner stillness and harmony.

We might say that another way of ***Practicing the Presence*** is to offer our thoughts and contemplations as devotion. Now we are able to keep our thoughts intentionally focused on the Sacred.

Here is where it gets really juicy...we can use the power of the mind and the imagination, in conjunction with the heart to sense the Presence of Source Energy coursing through our bodies...to invite Spirit to make Itself known as felt experience... to welcome Its Guidance and Wisdom as thought, emotion, and intuition...to expect that whatever is happening in our experience is part of the answer to our prayers...to witness God's Grace as our lives. This is where we put our human habits and tendencies into the back seat.

From this perspective, ***Practicing the Presence*** is a lived experience. We call into expression the Christ within... "It is not I, but the Father within, that doeth the work." At this point our work is to surrender, to allow Spirit to work in, through and AS us. The way is made easy as we simply submit ourselves to the Grace of God. This doesn't mean that we are not making effort...doing work...it simply means that there is a Power greater than we are responsible for our effort...fueling that effort...and that we are *aware* of this Power and *surrendered* to it.

Chris – Guided Meditation

We have heard that Spirit is *Omniscient*... All-Knowing... Infinite Consciousness... and that God is *Omnipotent*... the one, Infinite Power in all of Creation... And that this Creative Source is *Omnipresent*... fully present throughout all space and time... So, how do we practice the presence of Something that already *is* present?...

Perhaps *practicing the presence* is really about *remembering* that wherever we are, *God is*... Whatever happens, Spirit is in the midst of it... reminding ourSelf that if we are not experiencing the Divine Presence, it is not that God has forsaken us... perhaps it is we who have turned our back...

I paraphrase the poem *Footprints* ... "One night I had a dream... that I was walking along the beach... with my Creator... I saw scenes from my life... in each scene, I saw two sets of footprints in the sand... one set mine... the other God's... As the last scene flashed before me, I looked back at the footprints in the sand...

I noticed that often there was only one set of footprints... usually during the very lowest and saddest times in my life... I said, "God... I don't understand why, when I need you most you would leave me." Spirit replied, "During the times when you saw only one set of footprints, it was because I was *carrying you*..."

The Divine Presence is with us always... there can be no spot where God is not... but it is up to *us* to seek Spirit... When we reach out to the Creator, they reach back toward us... As we share our three minutes of Silent Contemplation, I invite us to *seek the*

*Presence of Spirit with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our might...*ⁱ Let us move ourselves in consciousness from absence to *presence*... from human to *divine*... from this world into the *Realm of Heaven*...

Silence – 3:00

O Divine Beloved, thank you for this time of deep communion... Thank you for your unceasing Presence in my life... and in the life of this, my Spiritual Family... We gratefully accept your many blessings... May we never forget that you are with us always... May we never forget who and Whose we are...

We Practice the Presence by staying grounded in every *now* moment... *What time is it?*... Now... *Where am I?*... Here... *Where is my Creator?*... Within me and all around me... *Thou art ever with me*...

Returning now to Rev. Diana's Taizé inspiration, we bring ourselves fully present... For it is in being fully present to what is before us... our Pastor... our Beloved Community, our Life... that we are truly *Practicing the Presence*...

Rev. Diana – “Seeing they do not see,” These were the words of Jesus in the book of Matthew. (Matthew 13:13)

Later, the apostle Paul says that you must have “the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know” (Ephesians 1:18).

What does it mean to have the eyes of the heart open? The inner person, the real me, sees and knows things that are not identical with what the eyes of the body can see. Pascal said, “The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. We feel it in a thousand things” (*Pensées*). There is a spiritual seeing through and beyond natural seeing. There is a spiritual hearing through and beyond natural hearing. There is spiritual discerning through and beyond natural reasoning.

If we continue Practicing the Presence, a deeper sense of devotion develops within us. Our invitation becomes *Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord*.

Let's close in musical meditation and prayer:

Musical Meditation

Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord, by Jordan G. Welch

<https://youtu.be/SIGP65YuRss>

Rev. Diana – And so it is...Amen!

I invite you to Come back into the awareness of your body...notice the atmosphere in the room, and when you feel ready, gently opening your eyes and allowing your gaze to take in whatever is before you.

Feel free to look around and say good morning to everyone 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 and are there for.

Rev. Diana – Love Offering

As we close our Taizé Meditation, we offer the opportunity for you to share your financial good in support of the work we do in the world. If you're joining us online, you can find a Donate Button and our mailing address at mysticheart.org. We thank you in advance for your gifts. We acknowledge and give thanks for the infinite abundance of Spirit. We are Living in the Overflow!

Offertory Video – *Living in the Overflow*, by Charity Gayle & Joshua Sherman

<https://youtu.be/lmAfEI-lbgc>

Rev. Diana – Blessing for the Offering

Feel free to grab a cup of something warm next door and meet us back at 10:30 for a Conscious Conversation. We'll bless you on your way with

Rev. Diana & Chris – Taizé Closing Song

A Soul's Blessing, written by Chris Johnson

Conscious Conversation

Chris – Opening Prayer

Rev. Diana – Good morning and welcome, or welcome back...and welcome to those joining online. And Happy Father's Day! If you're new with us here this morning... my name is Rev. Diana Johnson, and I am the Pastor here at Mystic Heart. We are an Independent Interfaith Community that teaches Universal Principles and Practical Spirituality. We open our doors in welcome, trusting that you will be led to the Guidance and Wisdom of your own Mystic Heart.

Rev Diana & Chris – Opening Music

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

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

 ***Opening Up (in Sweet Surrender)***, written by Rainbow Spirit, Oregon

Rev. Diana – Let's take a creative journey...calling upon the full power of both mind and heart...engaging the body...and joining with one another in the imaginal realm, in service to the creation of a ***Love-Soaked World***.

See and feel with me now, a world in which all inhabitants of this planet live from our Highest Potential... Kindness, Generosity, and Compassion... Peace...Cooperation.

In this new world, all people honor and care for one another, for all of the life forms that share this beautiful planet with us, and for Mother Earth Herself.

We *remember* that we are connected to all of Life... that we are dependent on the planet to sustain us, and on one another.

By aligning our every thought, word, and action with our vision, we are creating a world in which all people are well-fed... have the safety and comfort of home and a deep sense of purpose and belonging. A world in which health, education, and healthy relationships are supported by social systems grounded in Integrity, Compassion and Wholeness.

Valuing every being for its uniqueness... we practice living truly Authentic lives where vulnerability is celebrated... there is no need to defend or protect. The work we are doing within ourselves shows up as a world free of hatred and violence.

We recognize the abundance that surrounds us... greed is a thing of the past, as generosity flows freely in every direction, and all beings gratefully receive all that is needed to live physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually fulfilling lives.

The planet and its beings thrive like never before as we learn to recognize the sacred in everyone and everything... and we walk in reverence and gratitude for all that we have been given.

We maintain this Vision day by day, moment by moment; we align our actions with our Vision, living these changes first in our own lives, with our families, friends, and neighbors... and one neighborhood, one community at a time, a new world is being born. In this process of profound change, this Beloved Community stands as an open and welcoming place for all who seek support, belonging, Family.

By the power of our deep faith and inspired action, this prayer is acted upon, answered even as it is spoken, for Spirit knows our heart's desire and intent. In full expectation of its Graceful unfolding...we release our prayer to the Creative Power and Intelligence that I call God... to the One that gets it done... Let It Be!... Amen!

Bringing awareness back to the body, to the room, to this beautiful life, and to the amazing beings who share this space with us this morning...look around to say good morning to your Spiritual Family.

Our theme this month is ***New Beginnings***, and the topic of Conversation today is ***Practicing the Presence***.

This morning during Taizé, we spent time reflecting on the different meanings this phrase can take on. Practicing the Presence can simply mean being fully present where we are...giving our full attention to what we're doing and who is before us. We talked about Brother Lawrence and his ability to use his daily tasks as devotional practice, and how he used his work to enter a deeper state of Presence. We talked about the contemplation of Sacred Scripture as Devotional Practice...keeping one's mind centered in thoughts about God, and the inner stillness and harmony that comes from this Practice. Finally, we reflected on the deeper Practice of using the power of the mind and the imagination, in conjunction with the heart to sense the Presence of Source Energy coursing through our bodies...of inviting Spirit to make Itself known as felt experience... of welcoming Its

Guidance and Wisdom as thought, emotion, and intuition...of expecting and trusting that whatever is happening in our experience is part of the answer to our prayers...and of witnessing God's Grace as our lives. And we acknowledged that this deeper Practicing of the Presence is where we put our human habits and tendencies into the back seat. From this perspective, **Practicing the Presence** is a lived experience...We're calling into expression the Christ within...

The last couple of weeks we've talked about some of the things we have to let go of if we're going to be fully present, even in terms of mindfulness and giving focused attention to who and what is before us.

What were the main things we talked about letting go of? (Regret, resentment, our stories or narratives, and our resistance to change)

These are not the only things that get in the way of living in the moment, and of **New Beginnings** in our lives. It's important to remember that not all of our narratives are detrimental. Some stories serve us, and some stories don't. And within every story we can position ourselves as any character. Some characters serve us, and some don't.

Today I'd like to focus our conversation on a particular character and story that is one of the most disempowering of all...one that we have to let go of if we're going to Practice the Presence...experience New Beginnings...and step into our Spiritual Authority as Divine Humans.

Anybody want to guess which story I'm talking about?

(victim consciousness)

This is one of our most disempowering narratives.

What do I mean by victim consciousness?

(it's not my fault; I can't help it; it happened *to me*)

How does this disempower us?

(It removes my ability to change my experience; it removes my sense of agency; it removes my sense of responsibility; If I think the cause of my pain is another person, then I believe the solution to the pain also lies in the other person.)

If I'm a victim, then I'm not to blame. And that feels good...I'm right, someone else is wrong. I get to strengthen my righteous indignation muscle. But I have to remember that indignation is never righteous...it is never in alignment with my Highest Good.

Spiritual Teacher, Michael Berg, on the Spiritually Hungry podcast, spoke to how disempowering this story is...that when I'm playing the part of the victim, I have no ability to make anything better. He said *the victim* is the lazy story. It takes away the responsibility to create my own best life...that going through life as a victim is self-handicapping. You have no tools with which to change, or even a belief that you *can*

change. It takes a lot of energy...negative energy, but energy, nonetheless...to be a victim.

Our narratives have the tendency to come true. When we focus our awareness and our words on being a victim, that's who we become.

So, let's say that something happens to you that you have no control over, because these things do happen. What is a more powerful narrative than playing the victim?

(In the grand scheme of things, my soul needed to go through this challenge; I am never a victim. I can learn to be grateful for the challenges when looking through this lens.)

It's not about what happens to us; it's about how we view it and experience it. We believe the stories that we tell ourselves. ***Practicing the Presence*** means being mindful of our stories. And remember...we do not actually see reality, not in totality; we only have our own perspective. So our stories are biased. And we have a bias toward remembering the negative as opposed to the positive. It takes diligence to self-monitor and willingness to admit that our opinions, beliefs, and memories may be inaccurate. We might actually be wrong!

I would like to wrap up with a teaching from the Kabbalah. It says that every word we say, every bit of our story...the whole thing...is read back to us as we transition to the next experience.

What do you think about this?

(I think I need to be really careful what goes through my mind and what comes out of my mouth.)

Is this a reassuring idea?

Remember that our stories can be re-written. We can take time to remember Who and Whose we are.

What is the Truth about us? What is the Truth about you?

I Am created in the image and likeness of my Creator.

How will your life be different when you are living more of the time from that story?

Let's close in prayer...

Let's move into the heart space...deeper and deeper inward...

Allow yourself to return to the Truth about your...

To your Divine Center, your True Nature...

At the heart of all that is...One Source...One Life...One...

Forever Loving, forever giving of Their Infinite Nature

Becoming all of creation, experiencing Life as me, as you, as all that has ever existed and all that will ever be.

I Am, You Are, made of God Stuff...there is nothing else.

Created in the image and likeness of Source...

Pure, unblemished, Whole and Complete...

We know this as we open the eye of the heart...

Take a moment to feel and know your own Divinity.

We give thanks for this beautiful day, and all of the blessings that are constantly showered down upon us, and around us.

We give thanks for the opportunity to gather with our chosen family in celebration and communion with God.

We give thanks for this amazing life, with all that it brings...those things that are graceful, easy, and beautiful...and those circumstances that grow me in patience, resilience, character, and Love.

We give thanks for, and celebrate our diversity during this month of June, so grateful to have a community where are all truly welcomed and valued.

From this place of gratitude, and in faith that my prayer is answered even before it is spoken, I release it now to the Loving and Lawful Presence that I call God. It is done...And so it is! Amen!

Take a moment to allow your awareness to return to your body, to this space, to this beautiful gathering...welcome back.

Rev. Diana – Love Offering

I 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 budget and plan for our growth.

Enjoy this song by Karen Drucker about changing our story.

Music: *I Lost the Right to Sing the Blues*, by Karen Drucker

<https://youtu.be/bjVgeQOGtso>

Chris – Blessing for the Offering

Chris – Invitations

- ♥ **The Mystic Heart Book Club is meeting on Tuesdays from 3-5 pm.** We are enjoying great discussions as we read *Conversations With God, Book 1*.
- ♥ **Please consider joining us on Wednesday for our weekly work session on the new building.** Gather at 1:00pm in the new location to lend a hand. Wear your grubbies!
- ♥ **Fast Track to Wellness will gather this week on Thursday from 12 – 2 pm.** Join us this Thursday from noon – 2:00pm, topic TBA.
- ♥ **Parking Lot Sale Report – Call Rev. Diana up to do this one.**
- ♥ **Mystic Heart will have a booth at the Pride Festival on June 22nd from 11:00 am – 4:00 pm on the Market Street Promenade.** Set-up begins at 9:00 and we'll be done and on our way by 5:00pm. Come and lend...it should be a blast. Please contact Rev. Diana to sign up to help tend the booth.
- ♥ **Mark your calendar... Mystic OAKS will be going on adventure to Lavineyard Farms in Whitmore California on Saturday, July 13th ...meet to carpool at 9:00 am, or meet us at the Farm at 10:00.** Bring a picnic lunch, tour the farm, and gather a bundle of Lavendar to take home. Cost: \$9/person.
- ♥ **Please join April Jimenez-WinterSky, Saturday, July 20th from 11am to 1:30pm for part 2 of the Dancing the Wheel Workshop.** Suggested donation: \$20 Snacks will be provided.

There is more information available in the June Bulletin and online soon.

Information Cards if new people

Prayer Requests: I am available after service for prayer, or fill out a prayer card and she will get your request to our Prayer Team for daily prayer – We invite everyone to help us make a private space for prayer here in the Sanctuary by joining us next door for lunch

Rev. Diana & Chris – Closing Song

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

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ⁱ Deuteronomy 6:5