



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Online Edition

August 2020

Thoughts From Solitude

One of my favorite hermits was not really a hermit at all: Howard Thurman was a Black American, mystic, and Baptist minister who lived from 1899-1981. He was married with two children. He served as a pastor, chaplain, professor, and wrote many books, essays, and sermons. He has been called the spiritual director of the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King, Jr., was said to have carried Thurman's book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, in his pocket, wherever he went.

But Thurman was criticized by some as being irrelevant or a "backbencher" because he didn't attend any marches or demonstrations during those turbulent times. He saw himself less as an activist and more as a contemplative.

I wonder if a lot of us hermits and solitaries can relate to Thurman. We are also living through a time of great public pain, upheaval, and transformation – and I imagine that most of us, while we are moved and greatly concerned with all that is happening in our world – are probably not ministering to the sick, attending marches, or otherwise doing active ministry. Our call is different: to go into silence, to pray, to witness.

Thurman believed that the key to transformation of our public life was first to transcend the fear, deception, and anger in our inner lives. Or, as the hermit Seraphim of Sarov put it, "Acquire a peaceful spirit, and thousands around you will be saved." Hermits and solitaries can offer direction to others on this path toward inner transcendence and non-

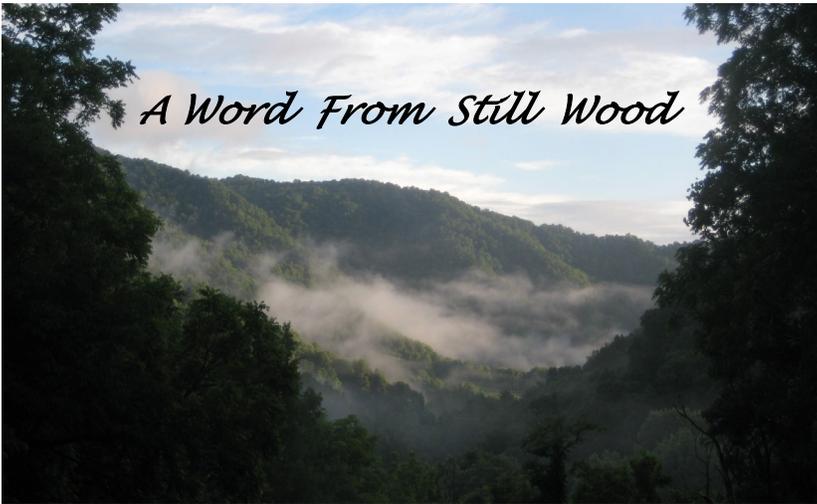
violence. We can testify to the power of "centering down," as Thurman called it. We can sit and listen. We can share strategies and perseverance in facing the inner demons that may appear. We can stand with love as prayerful witnesses to human pain. We reassure our brothers and sisters that day by day, hour by hour, difficult and lonely times can be endured, and even offer moments of deep joy.

Thomas Merton wrote of the power and resistance of a vocation to solitude, but he also warned of the dangers of valuing our peace and quiet too much. In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, he wrote: "Perhaps peace is not, after all, something you work for, or 'fight for.' It is indeed 'fighting for peace' that starts all the wars. ... If you yourself are at peace, then there is at least some peace in the world. ... But I am not speaking of quietism, because quietism is not peace, nor is it the way to peace."

Solitaries and hermits know something of the nature of peace, how simple and yet how challenging it can be.



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A Word From Still Wood

These days, our world elicits in us a swirl of emotions both from without and from within our very selves! We watch and listen as the society we once trusted to behave according to expected norms churns haphazardly and violently in ways strange and unexpected that frighten us and cause chronic anxiety. Memories of civil wars, genocide, the power of floods, tornados and hurricanes are all part of the world we have known for years.

But now, now we feel so helpless in the face of a threat we cannot see, or control, or fully defend ourselves against. And, for now, there are no experts, no geniuses, no sage guides to point us in the right direction or even show us the next step in this darkness threatening to overtake the planet.

Have you ever walked outdoors on a moonless night? The paths along our mountainside may be very familiar in daylight, but even on Trust Mountain, it can be dangerous and even sinister in the dark of night. We are reduced to dependence on a flashlight which we beam on the ground immediately before our feet. As we step into the circle of all the light we have, the light moves on, showing us the next bit of ground we must traverse. Let a nearby owl give a wild hoo-hoo, and we swing the light up into the surrounding trees, searching for the source of the sound that startled us. We stop moving forward. We might glimpse the gleaming eyes of that night hunter and take a deep breath, but the rabbit hiding under a nearby shrub still quivers.

As we re-focus on treading the path to our door, our heartbeats returning to normal, we may begin to wonder if the battery we are depending upon is fully charged; will it last long enough to get home? That rustling in the bushes...is it a possum? A browsing deer? A black bear? We attempt to calm our fears by waving our little light in every direction but standing still does not bring us any closer to our front door.

Our hands may be moist with sweat, our knees trembling, and our lungs hyperventilating, but there is only one useful thing we can do. Step forward, following the Light we have been given, trusting that the Way will be shown to us. Those of us who live in silence and solitude know that prayer is the Light we are meant to follow. What we can easily fail to realize is that we also become a Light for others who are also stumbling in the dark. The more surely and steadily we cling to the Holy One, the brighter our light shines, though we ourselves may be quite unaware. However, the fearful, the sick and dying, the angry and the abused, may see their own way a bit more clearly and can move forward with their lives, touched with a mysterious sense of security. Love surrounds them, holding them gently, and guiding them toward the open door through which the Light of Home shines forth. Yes, our world is in a very dark time, but we are asked to keep alive the flame of faith, and our eyes fixed on the Homeplace awaiting all of us.

With our grateful love, Karen & Paul

Raven's Bread is a quarterly newsletter (FEB-MAY-AUG-NOV) for hermits and those interested in solitary life published by Paul and Karen Fredette. It affirms and encourages people living in solitude. As a collaborative effort, it is written for and by hermits themselves, delivered by postal mail or email. Please send your written contributions, address changes, and subscription donations to: pkfredette@frontier.com or *Raven's Bread Ministries*, 18065 NC 209 Hwy., Hot Springs, NC 28743 or via PayPal at our website.* Our phone number is: 828 622 3750.

An annual donation is appreciated, each giving according to their means. Please send payment in US dollars (PayPal converts foreign currency to US dollars). Anything extra goes into a fund to insure that all who want *Raven's Bread* can receive it.

***Raven's Bread* derives it's name from the experience of the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 17: 1-6, where a raven sent by God nourished him during his months of solitude at the Wadi Cherith (The Cutting Place).**

***Our website is: <http://www.ravensbreadministries.com>; our email: pkfredette@frontier.com and the Blog for Lovers of Solitude: www.ravensbreadministries.com/blog.**



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