



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Online Edition

November 2019

Thoughts In Solitude

The call to solitude is the primary monastic vocation, without the historically conditioned accompaniments. It may come as an enormous relief to discover that this call which puts one's life in some way out of joint, which draws one to the fringes of the desert where unknown roads stretch ahead, is something which many people in the past have experienced and which many people experience today. The call is by name, it is personal and individual and not just a matter of finding a slot to fit into. The response to the call is also personal and individual; our personality, needs and background will shape our path. It is rather like falling in love; entering a relationship which gives meaning to our life. Who knows where it will lead?

In the Middle Ages it was a social commonplace that people could experience this interior call and withdraw themselves from society for a life of prayer. They were not regarded as particularly odd but as those who could intercede for the sins of others. They lived humbly, supporting themselves with work, with probably the occasional food being offered them by those who asked for their counsel and prayers. What function does the solitary fulfil in society today?

The solitary is first of all a useless person. This is in itself remarkable in a society where everyone is rated by their occupation or activity. The call of the solitary is not to be anything, to have any sort of public persona or mask. It is rather to be totally available to God, to live a hidden life of solitude. It is a call to share in the profound solitude of God, in the depths of the mystery of God's being. The world refuses this solitude, the God who is wholly other from the world's concerns, the one who calls us beyond those concerns into the divine mystery, according to the seventh century theologian Maximus the Confessor: "By taking flesh God makes himself understood only by appearing still more incomprehensible. He remains hidden... even in this disclosure. Even when manifest he is always the stranger."

The path of the solitary is, in the terminology of the eastern Churches, *apophatic* rather than *kataphatic*, an entering into the mystery rather than an explaining of it. This is why the call to solitude is itself mysterious, with little outward manifestation. The solitary is not called to be

anything other than a window into God. Any ministry that a solitary undertakes is incidental to the life, not an essential part of it, an overflow from the life of prayer. It is God alone on whom the solitary is centered. The discourses of the desert abbas, the preaching of the wandering Irish monks and of such figures as St. Francis spring from the love of God in which they were rooted. St. Francis' discourse on "perfect joy" shows that for him joy lay in being dispossessed and outcast, the sharing of the joy of the crucified.

The misunderstanding encountered by the solitary, the criticism offered by those who see the Christian life as being all about evangelism, or the forming of community, or some other particular activity of care and concern, has to be quietly accepted as part of the cross. The life of the solitary is essentially a hidden life, with little outward manifestation. The purpose of the solitary is to be a focus of God's love, and it is God who is the one who shapes and directs the life of the solitary who must live in total dependence upon God without anxiety. To do this he or she must learn to say no to a great many demands other people make upon time, energy and commitment, and above all to simplify one's life.

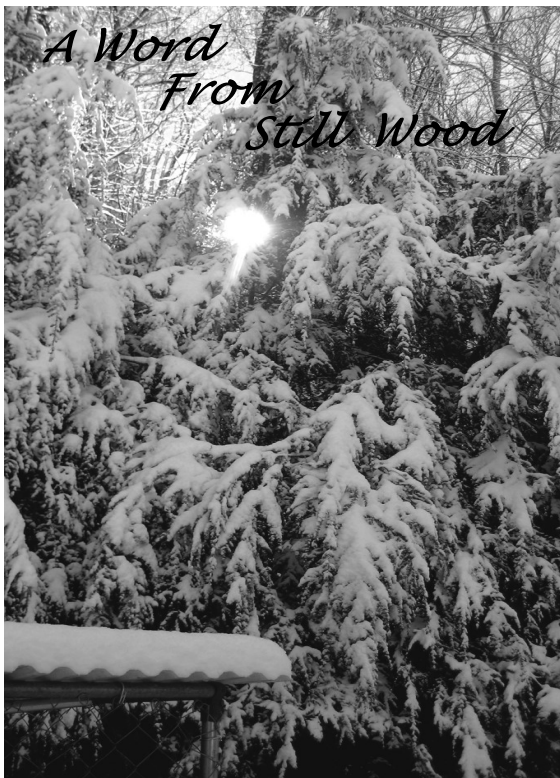
The modern solitary is one who is called to live an ordinary life alongside other people. There may still be those who are called to complete solitude as anchorites, but the medieval hermit, although in many ways a recluse, lived much the same sort of life as his fellow-countrymen. Common humanity joins us all. The monks of the desert, living on the margins of existence, were aware of the fragility of the common enterprise and of the brevity of human life.

So today's solitary is to be found among other people, in the deserts of daily life, distinguished by no special clothing or manner of life or other singularity. The difference, the separation, is an interior one, invisible to most other people.



Excerpted from Paths in Solitude

By Eve Baker



Fr. W. Paul Jones, monk, writer and reader of *Raven's Bread*, wrote the following: "In our society's culture of noise, individuals need to be ravished by silence. Nothing seems more able to remove life's clutter than silence. Yet everywhere we turn, we experience sensory overload that invades every sense until there is no space left in which to *be*. We need silence not only as an experience but also as an inseparable part of who we are. Such silence entails resisting the arrogance of communicating every thought that comes into one's head, as if the world needs our on-going commentary."

One of the most silent of God's creation is falling snow. Have you ever stood in a field as whispering flakes tumble out of the sky in a bewildering abundance that leaves us mute. Here in the Smokies it is a yearly experience that we look forward to... so long as there is no rumble of an avalanche!

The accompanying scene from one of last year's storms will not be repeated this year. Those heavily laden hemlock trees are no longer with us. We made an anguished decision to have a row of twenty magnificent trees cut down. They were a foot tall when we moved here in 1996 and lost in the weeds on the steep slope behind our house. They topped out at 45 feet last year and came dangerously close to caving in our roof when heavy snow weighed them down. We loved their beauty in all seasons and will carry their silent gift to us in our

hearts. But as quietly as the passing of time, they had reached their limits relative to our safety.

We hired a company to cut them down and reduce them to chips to mulch our flower beds. They will continue to give life but in a different manner. We have watched the seasonal changes and growth of trees on our acre for 25 years and have reached the point where tree care, driveway and ditch maintenance, leaf and snow-blowing, etc. are jobs for which we need more assistance. So, we are still looking for an able bodied, hermit-minded someone to contribute to such projects in exchange for the use of *Raven's Rest*, the two-room hermitage / apartment attached to our home.

As we approach the holiday season of Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas and the New Year, let us welcome it by inviting more silence into our daily lives. Then the wonder of the natural world - a wordless expression of the Holy One's endless Love - will soothe and bless us as we grow, mature and marvel at the silent song of our planet.

*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 its 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.



A very profound and heartfelt “Thank you!” to all who have continued to be so generous in their support of Raven’s Bread in recent months. We send our resident Raven to you carrying our prayers of gratitude!

Raven's Rest Hermitage

*Come to the Mountain
Meet the Lord
in Silence and Solitude*



A fully furnished two room apartment with a view of the Smokies; private entrance; bedroom, full bath, kitchenette and sitting room. Bring your own food. Pay what you want. Walk wooded trails over private property. Experienced spiritual guides available.

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Tell a friend

THE LAST HOUSE OF WINTER

*A LARGE PIECE
OF THICK ICE,
BOBBING, FLOATING;
AN ICE RAFT,
SOMETHING TO CLING
TO IN OUR PAIN,*

*OR LIKE A CLOUDED,
FROSTED WINDOW
—YET ANOTHER KIND OF
PANE,
NOW AWKWARDLY TAKING
THE CURVES
ON THE THAWING RIVER.*

*THIS BROKEN REMNANT
TORN, DISLODGED
FROM THE LAST HOUSE OF WINTER
HALTS,
ONE SIDE SCRAPING THE
RIVERBANK,
HOLDING ON, HOLDING BACK*

*BEFORE THE RIDDLED
ROCKS OF THE WATERFALL
SHATTER
THIS LAST ILLUSION
OF SEPARATION.*

SISTER JUDITH, HERMIT OF SARADA



Wood B. Hermit

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BOOK NOTES AND REVIEWS



AN ALTAR IN THE WORLD: A Geography of Faith

by Barbara Brown Taylor

Taylor reveals meaningful ways to discover the sacred in the small things we do and see, from simple practices, such as walking, working and prayer. Something as ordinary as hanging clothes on a clothesline becomes an act of meditation. If we pay attention to what we're doing and take time to notice the sights, smells, and sounds around us. As we incorporate these practices into our daily lives, we begin to discover altars everywhere and revere the world we live in.

240 pp. \$10.29 pbk. HarperOne, 2010

ISBN-10:0061370479 ISBN-13: 978-0061370472

LIVING GENTLY IN A VIOLENT WORLD: The Prophetic Witness of Weakness

by Stanley Hauerwas & Jean Vanier

A "little" book that delivers a simple but essential message, much like the parables of Jesus. Vanier's communities emphasize great humility and gentleness of a sort that is unique in the world—a humility that comes from weakness. His is not a condescending love; but it is a love that says, "You are as important as I am and I have weaknesses just as you do."

128 pp. \$12.41 pbk. IVP Books, 2018

ISBN-10: 0830834966 ISBN-13: 978-08304969

THE GIFT OF MEDITATION

by Lyudmil Tsvetkov

A collection of poems written to be "experienced" by the reader—a contemplative practice that deepens each time a line of verse is re-sensed; re-tasted; re-visited.

61 pp. \$6.95 pbk, Independently published, 2019

ISBN-10: 1691237957 ISBN-13: 978-1691237951