

Holy Ground

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A quarterly reflection on
the contemplative life



GIMME SHELTER

You may see them every day, or only once in a while. You know the familiar backpacks, cardboard signs, and occasional campstool parked on the highway medium, or on exit ramps near stoplights.

Sometimes you look away, avoiding eye contact. Sometimes you may pull out a few bills and wave them out the window. You might get a hearty *thank you* and *God bless you* in response. I once watched a pregnant mom and her young daughter weave into traffic for the twenty-dollar bill I waved. Living on streets, campsites, or in their cars, frequently jobless, sometimes trafficked and mentally ill, the statistics on unhoused people continue to mount.

At a point in time at the end of January 2023, 653,104 people – or about 20

of every 10,000 people in the United States – experienced homelessness. This is the highest number of people counted and reported as experiencing homelessness on a single night since reporting began in 2007.

Millions of people across the globe are leaving their homes. We call them asylum seekers, migrants, immigrants and refugees. Countries bolster their borders, enforce laws and policies, and still, they knock on our doors. The human need for a place of safety and hope is primal. We may become so desperate that we are willing to risk our lives and the lives of our children by crossing mountains, deserts, rivers and oceans. Once we arrive we may be met with racial slurs and violence.

Those of us who have homes may grow numb or overwhelmed with responding to these needs. We look to governments to be responsive, and may work to elect public servants, whom we believe will help.

Nearly one-third of the registered Palestine refugees, more than 1.5 million individuals, live in 58 recognized Palestine refugee camps

in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Gaza strip and the West Bank, including east Jerusalem.

- *International Rescue Committee*

The other day my Sudanese neighbor, Ashah, told me, “All our leaders do is shoot people – bang-bang! She was happy because her cousins were coming soon, and she invited me to a gathering of local Sudanese women to welcome her cousins.

Sudan is the world’s largest displacement crisis. Almost 9 million people have been forced to flee to other parts of Sudan or neighboring countries. Two thirds of all refugees worldwide come from just five countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia.

You shall make this response before the LORD your God: A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous.

-Deuteronomy 25:6

People have been moving back and forth over our planet for centuries. The earliest migration was from

Africa. Pre-modern migration of human populations begins with the movement of Homo Erectus out Africa across Eurasia about 1.75 million years ago.

In 597 BC a large number of Jewish people were forcibly deported in The Babylonian captivity. The deportations occurred in multiple waves. Jerusalem was under siege and in 587 the Temple was destroyed. They had been warned. Around 800 years BC Isaiah told the people that they would be held accountable for their actions. He spoke words of judgement, demanding better behavior and called them to return to their God, who had offered them a clear moral compass in the Torah, as well as promises of healing and hope.

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

-Leviticus 19: 33-34 NRSV



Isaiah had the foresight, as prophets do, to remind Israel that integrity rests in the heart of the human soul. If we lack integrity, we have nothing. We lose our credibility and the trust of others and are left to wallow in a lonely pit of lies, excuses, and fear. Isaiah was possessed by a deep sense of the holiness of people and all of God's creation. This is the root of his passion and his fury. He knows who we are: ignorant, sinful, and caught up in saving our own skin. He also understands from his own experience that God is holy, and we also become holy and are empowered to hold ourselves accountable and follow the path of truth, to forgive and offer love and compassion to everyone.

To live mindlessly without realizing our own worthiness and dignity is to sully and ignore the essential revelation of God. Nothing that we might do will keep God from loving us. God *is* love. All things created by God are good. Living beings have infinite worth and homo sapiens are capable of so much more than we think, because our Creator, Redeemer, and Guide are holy, we also are holy.

When the world seems overwhelming and you feel frail, vulnerable and confused, where do you find shelter and protection?

We live in a time in which fear, and threats of violence manipulate and control the behavior of other people. Fear sells products and services of all kinds and fuels our economy. Our trust in institutions and each other is eroded. How does one tell the difference between truth and a lie in an age of AI, misinformation, deceit and propaganda? The near constant intrusion of a digital world of ads, scams and a dark web of utter depravity eat away at our ability to protect and guard our sanctity.

Fear is a built-in primal response designed to keep us safe and alive. There are times when we may be in immediate danger and need to act. There are also times when our fear response gets stuck on "Red Alert," and you can't seem to turn off the alarm. We get swept away by memories of other times of danger, shame, or loss.

TAKE HEART. ISAIAH HAD BEAUTIFUL FEET.

*How beautiful on the mountains are
the feet of the messenger bringing
good news,*

*Breaking the news that all's well,
proclaiming good times, announcing
salvation, telling Zion, "Your God
reigns!"*



... once the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over its places of assembly a cloud by day and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night. Indeed, over all the glory there will be a canopy. It will serve as a pavilion, a shade by day from the heat and a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

-Isaiah 4: 2-5

There is hope! Judgement does not last forever . After the people come to terms with their failures and sin they find refuge.

These verses spoke to me in the early years of establishing the Sanctuary ministry. Even with our church revitalization plans and sincere efforts to respond to the spiritual and other needs of our neighbors, religion today has difficulty convincing people it is both sacred and safe for everyone. The church along with other institutions are in a time of reckoning with the

consequences of our abuse, racism, and struggle to respond meaningfully in a rapidly changing world. Some churches are finding ways to respond to those they have harmed. Yet, further healing cries out for confession, apology, and reconciliation with appropriate acts of contrition.

Before anything else, our places of assembly must be a refuge, a shelter, a safe place where people find a sense of awe and love for God and help in growing their faith.

People need to feel heard and seen and to take home strength, inner peace and hope for the challenges they are facing. This requires a refuge that is nimble and sturdy in order to respond to the felt needs and concerns, rather than imposing doctrine. A church bound by tradition, a form or style of worship, or “the way we do things here” may neglect tending to the deep-down spiritual needs of people. It takes time, trust, and opportunities for people to open up about these needs. They may have trouble even identifying them. Congregations tend to focus on programs and events that, though offering fellowship, may not encourage deep listening and deep sharing.

Buddhists take refuge in the Dharma,



the teachings and wisdom of their tradition. Buddhists also take refuge in the Sangha, the gathered community of followers.

Christians take refuge in the teachings in the Hebrew Bible and in the teachings of Christ as found in the Greek Bible. When church is a refuge, Christians find strength and safety in the gathered community.

Where do you find refuge, spiritual depth, and companions to listen long and deeply to the story of your life in Christ. Who prays with you?

A growing number of Americans surveyed (22 percent) say they are spiritual but not religious. A Pew Research Center study found these people feel they do not fit in with a religious setting, but they are spiritual. They are taking responsibility for their spiritual growth. They are going on pilgrimages to various sacred sites.

The alarm some people have about this is that these individuals focus too much on themselves and miss the accountability and the gifts of community. Yet research shows that the spiritual but not religious are finding and creating their own communities.

They gather online and in person, attend webinars, read and meet with people trained in listening, spiritual development, and compassion.

What we may forget in this materialistic age of technology is that the places of solace and healing we seek are not external to us. This may be part of why it is so hard for some churches to offer shelter. The new program may not offer shelter. It is not a distant harbor to dock our boats and take pictures of ourselves for Instagram. Refuge cannot be purchased. The place of refuge, solace and safety is already within us.

Holiness is not as much a place or a location, as it is a relationship between God and God's creation, where we are awake, aware and fully present. Take a look at Moses. Noticing a strange fire that kept burning in the same bush, he walks over to check it out. When God called him by name, Moses answers, "I am here." *Hineni* in Hebrew. In response to Moses God immediately sets a boundary. "You may come no closer. This ground where we meet is holy."

Holy refuge waits within us in each new moment, as we awake to the presence of Christ within us. Each



of us has the capacity to be here now and offer a safe haven of compassion and loving kindness for ourselves and others. All we need to do is to join Moses in saying *Hineni* and know you are in a sacred place.

THE GOODWILL STORE

She was dressed in the red smock all the staff wore at Goodwill. I was slowly making my way through a rack of women's summer tops, when I noticed her moving racks around and tending to a row of capri pants. After I had picked out a few items, I stopped on my way to the check-out counter to ask her, "How's your day going?"

"Well," she sighed, "that is a matter of perspective." She stepped away from her rack and walked over to me. Then placing her right hand on her heart and her left hand over her right hand, she told me, "You know, I just want to bring light into the world. I want to shine my light and help other people. I want to help people and spread love and light."

The depth of her desire and sincerity swept over me. "If you feel this so strongly, God wants this for you too." Then we exchanged hugs. I was a

little out of sorts myself, when the Spirit within her leaped into my heart. Suddenly all was well, and we both were standing in a pool of joy.

Tell me, is there a higher calling than that of my spirit-filled clerk?

We each have the capacity to create so much good and receive good, simply by treating each other with dignity and compassion. To break out of our isolation and fear and offer care and kindness to whomever God has placed before us is to give refuge. Our refuge is in the exchange of love with each other. Here we recognize ourselves joined in the body of Christ. And wherever that dance of love is exchanged is church.



*You hold the future within you, a
safe haven of compassion and loving
kindness. I am so grateful that you are
here on this earth,*

Loretta F Ross

SANCTUARY NEWS

**Gathering for Spiritual
Companions**
at the International Headquarters
of the Community of Christ
Independence, Missouri
August 17, 2024

I am pleased to be a guest speaker
for this gathering of nurture and
renewal.

Save the date!
Watch for further updates.

THE Praying Life

A BLOG ABOUT CONTEMPLATIVE LIVING

Stay current with Sanctuary news.
Find worship and spiritual formation
resources. Catch up on earlier editions of
Holy Ground as well as recent ones.

Read and follow The Praying Life Blog at
<http://www.theprayinglife.wordpress.com>

**Find us and follow the Sanctuary and
Loretta F Ross on Facebook, Instagram.**

And if social media is not your thing, just email
info@fromholyground.org or call 785-230-0365.

Thank You!

Holy Ground readers are amazing. Thank you
for your generous support of this Wayside
Fruit Stand. The Sanctuary and its programs
are open to serve a wide range of people. And
we have a great assortment of the fruits of the
Spirit ready for you.

Stories From Those We Serve

*I have to tell you how much I loved the recent Holy
Ground edition. In fact I am passing it on to a local
friend here who I know will love it. I always get so
drawn in by your writing and then your wonderful
messages. So great and so personal; always timely
but seemingly timeless.*

- J. M.

**Do you have a story or experience over the past
35-40 years related to the Sanctuary ministry?
If so we would love to hear from you and share it
with others.**



Do not waste too much thought looking into yourselves wondering what you ought to do; keep a “naked intent” toward God, keep one-pointed in your advance into the seeming chaos and darkness of the world. It makes for the capacity of loving stillness, it makes the temple of the bosom hold the spirit more adequately, it makes for gentle holiness, comfort and protection, stillness and softness, that you may stand strong and alert.

Letters of the Scattered Brotherhood, written in the years 1934-48

These days, everyone is looking for a safe place. It shouldn't be that hard to find. Every Christ follower is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Every believer is a safe place. Every Christian is a sanctuary.

Mike Glenn



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...the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Revelation 22:2-3

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