

Curtis Wood

Michael gave me an assignment to share my experiences with meditation and spiritual practice here at St. David's. Margot's reflection last Sunday on her life and times in the parish set a high bar and provides me a good background. I was here for many of those years, and I was moved by Margot's memories.

What I took away personally was the recognition of change, of our experience of becoming something new and different. And of course that story continues, perhaps never more dynamically. Margot mentioned the big new adventure of tearing down our old parish hall and building something completely different. I think Terry will discuss our building project and that process in the context of community next Sunday.

My purpose is to share with you an account of my experience of another adventure of change- that is, the development of meditation practice at St. David's.

I have been interested in spiritual practice for about 40 years. It began shortly after Carole and I came to Cullowhee and years before we came to St. David's. We explored a variety of approaches and practices, trying to weave them into our hectic daily lives of work and children. Looking back, I say with gratitude that everything matters; everything had its part to play in our lives. I told some of that story a few years ago after I came back from a trip to India. I think that Advent Reflection might still be on the St. David's website.

What I had never really tried or been interested in was meditation. Half-hearted attempts to sit did not appeal to me. I put myself down as part of that vast majority for whom meditation was not the thing.

But leave it to that cauldron of inclusiveness and radical thinking and living, which we know as St. David's, to open the door. A long time back 10 years or more, Chase Robinson sponsored training in Thomas Keating's Contemplative Prayer. I gave it a try but did not stick with it. But not long after that, one conversation led to another and Michael shared an essay by a teacher named Pema Chodron called "Sitting in the Fire". He and I and occasional others found it very compelling as a way of working with the really tough places in life, times that were close to more than we could handle.

This led to other books and other discussions. In that period our Sunday morning book group read things like Karen Armstrong's *History of God* and Richard Rohr's *Everything Belongs*. I love Richard Rohr- he's a Franciscan monk and a real 21st century mystic.

And one thing affects another. At the same time, a small men's group that I belong to on campus that had been meeting for about 20 years, focusing on men's issues like work and family -Newton and Terry are members - turned to spiritual practice. I never expected that. I think one of us mentioned Keating's book which our group read, then "Sitting in the Fire" and it went from there. We were all discussing meditation but not doing it. It was just one of the possible choices but not something you would necessarily do.

Then Michael suggested a Monday morning Lectio and meditation. You will remember lectio from our "neighborhood evenings" a little time back: reading short spiritual texts or poems, and brief reflection. Like that, with meditation of 20 minutes, at 7:30 Monday mornings. I don't enjoy the time. I'm the late one, but I go. And one of us mentioned this effort in our men's group, and all agreed to try meditation. So for maybe two years now we meditate at every meeting. It's settled now. It's what we do.

Very recently St. David's has begun a once a month, Saturday morning, two-hour meditation. And there are other groups, sitting here and there. Chad's yoga class at the Canterbury House on Monday mornings is an opportunity for extended meditation in motion, and Chad does a great job of explaining that basic element of yoga. Some people meditate at home. I don't have the discipline or motivation at this point. But I'm glad it's in my life.

This leads to a couple of observations.

Many people enjoy and benefit from reading the literature of spiritual practice. And more and more are participating in meditation groups and small informal gatherings that share experiences. My own experience suggests that reading and discussion practice can lead to actual practice. So watch out what you get involved in. It could lead to an adventure.

Richard Rohr commented recently on his website on the difference between Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy. Orthodoxy refers to doctrinal correctness-to the importance of getting your beliefs right, whereas orthopraxy refers to right practice. What we see in many Eastern traditions is not an emphasis upon verbal orthodoxy, but instead on practices and lifestyles that, if you do them (not think about them, but *do them*), end up changing your consciousness. Rohr concludes: *We don't think ourselves into a new way of living; we **live** ourselves into a new way of thinking.*

A second observation: I don't understand meditation well enough to say much about it- except it is a part of a way of living, it's an action. It involves spending quality time with your true self or a deeper self, looking at what goes on in your mind that makes you do

what you do and be who you are. It can help you carry self-observation and self-knowledge into your active life, which changes things.

Finally, no two spiritual practices are the same. The Anglican Communion for over 400 years has been sustained by and embodied in a liturgy, which we call common prayer.

This is a moment in our individual lives where we are a “we”. Common Prayer is an authentic bond of our spiritual community; just as the Koran or the Buddhist dharma are bonds. They are Wisdom teachings shared by a community. Wisdom teachings are grounding, but they are not the journey.

And what we are talking about is a journey. It is about change and risk-taking, letting go of what we have thought and believed and becoming something new.

It is very personal. To say again, no two practices are the same. My expectation was that as we practiced together, we would become more alike in our views. But interestingly this is not what I have found. For example, I am more interested in what I might call “knowing God” than I am in psychology, in the nature of mind. But not everyone is optimistic about prospects of knowing God and put their money on psychology, on knowing the mind and the self. After writing these words, I found this line from Richard Rohr: He writes: knowing ourselves and knowing God seem to move together.

So I have become more aware of our uniqueness. That’s been very interesting. It invites deep, radical listening, something that doesn’t come easily. This has been a challenge for me, but I have come to see that if I listened patiently and quietly rather than struggling to make my point, I heard much that deeply moves me and opens my heart.

I close as Margot did: may we always be open to hearing what the Spirit is saying to
God's people.