

EXPLORATIONS



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A Meditation on the Thread

**Martha Harris
Apalachicola, FL**

Nestled-in at the Claggett Center in the rolling hills of Maryland, our group of six gathered for seven days of training to be Listening Hearts Senior Program Associates. Early in our time together, this poem by William Strafford hit a chord for us:

The Way It Is

There's a thread you follow. It goes among things that change. But it doesn't change. People wonder about what you are pursuing. You have to explain about the thread. But it is hard for others to see. While you hold it you can't get lost. Tragedies happen; people get hurt or die; and you suffer and get old. Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding. You don't ever let go of the thread.

As the week unfolded, our threads began to come together in that place. We came from different regions, stretching north to New York, west to Colorado, then southeast to Tennessee and on to Florida, with two Virginians in the mix. Each of us had some experience of Listening Hearts, but none of us knew exactly what would be expected of us.

I imagine the fabric of my life as a colonial coverlet pattern, complex yet ordered by worshiping and working in the Episcopal Church for the last thirty years. The poem confronts me with a question: Have I lost my thread? As a recently retired Episcopal priest, I have spent the past year almost in hibernation, a transition time I acknowledge as healing but also isolating. My favorite line in the poem, is "While you hold it you can't get lost." Have I gotten lost?

We spent a week immersed in the range of programs and materials offered by Listening Hearts. An added dimension was that we were being trained to lead such events ourselves. It was a week full of laughter and tears and prayers. We told sacred stories, shared meals and walks and Eucharist. Our days were punctuated with times of silence and periods of reflection. We were increasingly astonished by the incredible energy, passion, and spiritual depth of our mentors, and we aspired to be like them.

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Near the end of our time together, we faced the question of how much of ourselves we could give to this ministry. I began to doubt the gifts I might have for this work and if I could reclaim the thread that had run through my life like a light. I worried that I was disappointing the mentors, who had such faith in us. The others shared their questions and concerns, and it seemed that the threads we had woven together to a common purpose were disintegrating. I went to bed that night troubled and torn. The next day we entered an extended time of silence, and we searched the Scriptures for guidance. During this time of silence, I felt like I was sinking into a deep, clear pool and allowing the buoyance of God's grace to envelop me and quiet my anxieties.

The Scriptures we shared shifted us from staying in our heads to claiming the hope lodged in our hearts. Our imaginations were fueled by words from the Letter of James: "People who worry their prayers are like wind-whipped waves. Don't [be ... adrift at sea]" (from *The Message*, Eugene Peterson, 1:5-8). The implication is to drop anchor, be rooted in God. Encouragement came from Ephesians: ". . . in him you are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (2:22). I remembered that collaboration of gifts and identities makes a whole greater than its parts; God and spirit weave a fabric, stronger than the threads running through it. It's not all about me and it's not all up to me. Luke's assurance that "people will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God" (13:30), provides a vision of a community of peers and a promise that our group of trainees could begin to see and claim for our work together. I surprised myself later that day by saying, "Let's go for it!" The community we had woven from shared experiences, hopes, and prayers was taking root in me.

Now I think of the six of us, scattered across the country but bound, somewhat lightly so far, by threads of love and grace and the power of God's presence with us as we carry this ministry into our own locations. I am grateful to Listening Hearts Ministries for offering me a new opportunity for service and challenging me to pick up my thread. I am holding on again. While I hold it I cannot get lost.

The Rev. Martha Harris, retired rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Apalachicola, is a mentor in the Education for Ministry four-year study course, a Listening Hearts program associate, and currently studying the Enneagram.

Three Poems*

**Wendy Gayle
Fredericksburg, VA**

Climbing the Wall

I
can build
quickly and
efficiently
a wall of worry.
It's the climbing over
that is the hard part for me.
With strength, I can get over it.
With faith, I can just walk around it.
If I ask God for help, there is no wall.

Alleluia

It
is the
mystery
of faith. Christ has
died, Christ has risen,
and Christ will come again.
Lent is finally over.
Today we are Easter people.
We rejoice that Jesus is alive
not only in our hearts but in our lives.

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The Scenic Route

The detours we travel on our journeys
As life twists and turns may be course corrections
Leading to the higher road
We are ultimately meant to
Follow as we pursue our calling.
We won't know for sure until we get there.

**These poems were first published on Wendy's blog, <https://www.windowstothespirt.com/> on June 11, 2018, April 1, 2018, and May 18, 2018.*

Wendy Gayle is a newly-trained Senior Program Associate for Listening Hearts Ministries, a mentor in the Education for Ministry four-year study course, and a discernment facilitator for the Diocese of Virginia. Writing poetry for her is a method of spiritual meditation and a way of showing intention. The blog is called Windows to the Spirit because through the words, windows have opened and insights gained into her life's spiritual journey.

God's Time

God's time is like the unfolding of a rose

**Lisa Houston
Greenwood Village, CO**

Six of us, along with Suzanne Farnham and Frances Sullinger, met at Claggett Retreat Center in Western Maryland to be trained as Senior Program Associates for Listening Hearts Ministries. The idea, of course, is to spread the seeds and share the beauty of discernment in community, which we each have experienced with Listening Hearts. Through a "Time Retreat" and personal discernment, I learned that there is a passage of time through which we each experience the same, yet different, moments—childhood, with favorite toys or books; school years, with the joys of learning and friendships; the angst of the teen years, trying to figure out who we are and where we belong. We continue that quest as adults, spreading our roots through children and/or careers. As we are sharing our gifts, cultivating our gardens, trying to keep up with the weeds that clutter our lives and fight for our attention, we lose our focus. At some point we hear the longing to return to our roots.

Discernment in community provided me a safe space for reopening myself to the divine presence. I traveled deep within to the deepest, darkest point, where the seed germinates until God calls it forth to seek the light. Bursting with love, lifted by love, and guided in love, I was able to reach toward the light. I came to see that, as we jump into our future, the unknown darkness, all that is required of us is to take the next step, which will light the next step. And although we may take a wrong step, God will use it to illuminate the next step. And so, our journey continues. What insight did I glean from this discovery?

I see my purpose unfolding like the petals of a rose. I see that I have not always listened, I have not always acted, but my path has taken the turns necessary for my rose to open and bloom. First from a seed planted in good soil, it has been nourished by the sun, water, and the nutrients of love and time. God's time. This process can't be rushed, just savored. When I stay out of my head and open to the Spirit, my life blooms with fragrance, beauty, and gift giving. Sometimes I fight God, demanding guidance, only to argue or, out of fear, to close myself off. But when I am open to God's message, I can become the vessel of God's love. I pour forth that love. I speak God's love. Without spiritual discernment as the focus of my quest, I may have to repeat the stages of growth.

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Listening Hearts Ministries
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people the practice of spiritual
discernment through prayerful listening
in supportive communities.

*If we release ourselves to the creative movement
of that flow (the Holy Spirit) without forcing it,
we can be carried by sacred currents to see new horizons.
—Keeping in Tune with God, p 4*

We shall not cease from exploring,
And the end of our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
—T. S. Eliot

Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit.
—Malachi 2:15

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold
the new has come.
—2 Corinthians 5:17

*Lisa Houston is a member of St. Gabriel the Archangel Episcopal Church, in Greenwood Village,
Colorado. She has been a community volunteer for more than 25 years; she loves golf, reading,
and playing with her grandchildren.*