



Sunflower Seeds

Celebrating Everyday Spirituality



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Mustard Seeds, Baking Yeast, Ravens and Lilies

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on JANUARY 21, 2019

One of Jesus' main methods of teaching was the use of parables. In his parables, Jesus uses the common elements of creation—seeds, birds, trees, flowers, water, soil. He also uses the ordinary activities of everyday life that his listeners would be familiar with: planting, making wine, baking bread, cleaning house, caring for animals, celebrating weddings.

In doing this, Jesus imparted three other major lessons for us. First, creation is holy. As such, it is filled with wisdom for us if only we would take the time to be attentive to its inner workings. Secondly, we are not separate from nature. The laws that govern the natural world, govern us. As the theologian, Dianne Bergant says, *"Earth does not belong to us. We belong to Earth."* Such a statement lies at the heart of our current ecological movement. And the third lesson, is this: everyday life is sacred. The humble tasks that occupy so much of our time and which we perform over and over again can be conduits of God's grace for us.

Jesus' teaching centered on the Kingdom of God or the Reign of God. He compared the Reign of God to things like mustard seeds and baking yeast. Both of these entities seem lowly at first. But both are filled with potential. Simple acts such as planting or kneading have the power to release their potential. But both seeds and yeast must be transformed to release their new life. And that transformation entails a dying.

The implication for us is simple: We too must be transformed so that new life may burst forth in us. But personal transformation always involves a form of dying—whether that means giving up bad habits, letting go of a prejudicial belief, growing in self-discipline, learning to share with others, or inconveniencing ourselves for the sake of someone else.

About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

Sister of Notre Dame,
teacher, student, author,
speaker, listener, friend,
poet, farm girl.



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About Sunflower Seeds

Each Monday I'll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality—the everyday kind of spirituality that



includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.

Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we're all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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Sometimes our external transformation is obvious. Here's an example. Below are two pictures of my grandniece, Rebecca. The one on the left was taken when she was 3. The one on the right is a current photo of her at 19. At age 3, her life consisted mostly of play and simple learning. At age 19, she is a college freshman studying nursing. She is also a certified EMT for the local fire department and she has soloed as a glider pilot. Imagine all the little "deaths" that went into making her the young woman she is today—the little deaths she herself embraced along the way as well as the countless little deaths her parents embraced in raising her.



Rebecca age 3 and Becca age 19 with Callie, the family dog.

God's Reign comes, then, not through showy and extraordinary deeds, but through humble, everyday actions: preparing a meal, helping a child with her homework, going to Church, taking a course, making time to pray, giving another driver a break in traffic, shopping for groceries, recycling, paying attention to the news, voting, reading a book, feeding the birds, cleaning a bathroom.

In addition to mustard seeds and baking yeast, the ravens and lilies have something to teach us too, Jesus says. Ravens do not plan for their survival nor do lilies design

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their own beauty. Rather, says Bergant, they both simply “live faithful to their natures, and God provides.” Though planning and designing may be natural to humans, anxiety should not be, says Jesus. The parable also raises the question of what we consider important. Ravens might seem unimportant in the grand scheme of things. After all, they are

scavengers. Lilies too may seem insignificant, for their beauty is so short lived.

Yet, in God’s Great Design, ravens rid their locale of carrion that could spread disease. And lilies add beauty and fragrance wherever they may be. What’s more, ravens and lilies “contribute to their respective ecosystems” whether human beings are present or not. We humans need to remember that all of earth’s components (including ourselves) are part of a dynamic cosmic design, each component contributing to that overall design.

When have you experienced your oneness with all of creation? In other words, where were you and what were you doing when you had such an experience?

What ordinary, everyday activities seem “holy” to you? Why do you think this is so?

Which of Jesus’ parables is your favorite—and why?

This lovely song, “Sanctuary” by Carrie Newcomer, is something of a parable in music and visuals. It reminds us that, when life becomes cold and dark, we need individuals in our lives who are a refuge and a sanctuary for us. And we need to provide sanctuary for others too. Who is your sanctuary?... Always remember, our greatest sanctuary is God, is Jesus.



I invite you to respond to this reflection and/or song. My other readers and I would love to hear your thoughts!

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Thomas DeFreitas January 21, 2019 at 4:15 am



Sister, good morning!

You are evidently and rightly proud of your great-niece Rebecca, and happy to see her contributions to, and participation in, her community and her world.

The last time Nature seemed unignorably vital and spiritual was last Tuesday night in Cambridge around 8 pm. I looked up into a cloudless black sky and saw hundreds of clear stars, immaculate and luminous. It might seem somewhat

“conventional” to be awed by the stars, but I assure you there was a freshness and a surprise to it, as if I hadn’t seen a night sky so fine in thirty years!

Holiness in the ordinary? Riding the MBTA, Boston’s public transport system. A bus or a train can seem a chapel sometimes where one venerates the Mystical Body of Christ. Also: laundry. I procrastinate horribly about laundry, but it affords time for thought and for conversation with others in the laundry room!

Drinking cold water can be an occasion for holy gratitude. So many reasons why. It is elemental, basic, restorative, and not to be taken for granted.

Sanctuaries in human form: oh, so many dear friends. Among longtime friends, Heather and Debba, each of whom knows more about me than God does (almost!)...and they love me anyway! Among newer friends, Karen is especially a compassionate listener. And Elena gives me hope through her supremely graceful poetry and art.

Thanks for affording me the opportunity to reflect on these many graces. Peace and light.

REPLY

Kathleen Magiera January 21, 2019 at 5:17 am



What a great reflection Sister Melannie!

I take an early morning yoga class and I see the oneness of creation after class in the sunrise. It is a beautiful combination of stillness in my body and still in God’s creation.

God bless.

Kathleen

REPLY

Clara January 21, 2019 at 6:24 am



I like the image of the little deaths we experience along our life journey. As the mother of two adult children, and now grandmother to three, I can remember

those little deaths, as well as the resurrections that followed. God knows the plan, and it is important to let Him be in charge!

REPLY

John Hopkins January 21, 2019 at 8:16 am



I live close to the Blue Hills Reservation in Canton/Milton, Massachusetts. It's a beautiful wooded sanctuary with several hills that reward the hearty hiker with some breathtaking views of Boston (Thomas D. from Cambridge has perhaps been there). Anyway, when I need time for solitude, I "head for the hills," and if I do so during the week, I can tramp the trails for an hour or so without encountering another living soul! And when I do encounter a fellow walker/hiker, there's always a friendly greeting.

One time, as I was walking one of the trails, a hawk swooped down from the heavens and glided right towards me! It could not have been more than ten feet off the ground! I could see it in all its feathery glory as it seemed to glide right for my head (yes, I was a tad worried!) before – in an instant – it lifted up and away. I thought I had just witnessed a miracle!

REPLY

Mary M Nausadis January 21, 2019 at 8:24 am



So many thoughts, it is hard to collect them to make something sensible come out, but I'll try. Often times, my breath is taken away by the clear blue sky...I close my eyes and thank God for the beauty of it. When my first-born son was a baby, I would take him outside and show him how the leaves were "dancing", how the wind was blowing in our faces.....it was a lovely experience.

The most powerful experience I have with being connected with nature is when it snows that kind of snow that builds up on the trees, and walk out our door and look up, up, up at the huge fir trees that fill our backyard and seem to be transformed into majestic mountains.....it is truly breathtaking!

My "sanctuary" is absolutely my daughter with whom I am living since my husband was diagnosed with cancer and subsequently died in the summer. I feel so grateful to have their lovely home where all my needs are met, and then some, knowing they are there whenever I am feeling lonely or glad.

I know that in some ways I am still her sanctuary, but isn't that the beauty of it all?

I am going to send the video to her to let her know how important she is...thank you for that, Sr. Melannie

REPLY

Marty January 21, 2019 at 9:53 am



ALWAYS you make me reflect: a moment when I grasped the forgiving UNCONDITIONAL LOVE of God: there was a bald eagle perched atop one of the prison light poles all majestic and powerful, many of us looking up in complete silence. One could just feel the PRESENCE and our oneness. Later I was priveleged to witness this great bird sore from its perch right past me and I was one with it and The ONE WHO CREATED us. I was free and loved. So many parables to get it into our hearts of God's PRESENCE even when we seem alone. My favorite is the one in todays reading. One does not put new wine into old wineskins. For me Jesus is reminding me that the Father is present and revealing Himself continually in all creation and life eperiences and I must be ready, open, and humble to change, thus able to recieve, hold and continue to believe in the LOVE(WINE)He pours into me daily.

REPLY

Jean January 21, 2019 at 10:36 am



Good Morning Sister Melannie,
I was able to work in Glacier National Park for the summers during my college years-WOW. That is God's creation and beauty-WOW.

REPLY

Sr. Sue January 21, 2019 at 11:20 am



I often call being out in nature "my chapel in the woods" because I feel God's presence so close. For years I have been a birder and in the more recent past I have gotten into butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies and even other insects. Each one is ornately different and brings joy. I have even sat in front of a spider making its web and thought of how blessed I am to be able to see God in all of creation.

REPLY

Shirley January 21, 2019 at 12:29 pm



Thank you Sister, what a beautiful reflection. The song is so touching. Thanks for your blog, I look so forward to it every Monday. Have a great week.

REPLY

Dorothy Janofsky January 21, 2019 at 1:48 pm



I look forward to your blog every Monday. Thank you

REPLY

Barbara January 21, 2019 at 2:53 pm



The most wonderful thing is I am in touch with creation every time I go outside; whether it is night or day, raining or snowing or sunny. Every living animal I see reminds me that we are here; all of us created to be with God forever. Sometimes I think he sends a creature to me just to say hello and I love you. This morning it was a robin who was in the tree outside of the place I go for water aerobics. I talk to him and honestly, he looks at me and comes closer.

REPLY

carol January 21, 2019 at 4:44 pm



Hi Sister Melannie,

Last night I went out into the bitter cold to observe the "Blood Red Wolf Moon." I didn't stay out too long, but I felt the wonder of this unusual happening to be a miracle shining on each and everyone of us!

REPLY

Joanne Bennardo January 21, 2019 at 7:21 pm



Dear Sister Melannie,
Earlier today I was in my kitchen preparing three beautiful heads of broccoli. As I divided the heads, I happened to look up and witnessed a agile deer leaping as if dancing through the high snows of yesterday's storm.

The landscape glistened, the deer danced, and when I looked back to the bowl of broccoli and the knife in my hand, I felt one with it "all." God is good.

But the "all" expanded as I remembered the farmer, truck drivers, and grocery employees who made God's bounty accessible to me. And to those who will not eat tonight, the "all" especially includes them. Praise God, hear our prayer.

REPLY

Kathy January 22, 2019 at 8:19 am



Beautiful reflection - thank you.

Oneness with creation happens most when I am at the beach, which is not often enough! Also on walks, and seeing the slow pink sunrise in the morning. In the summer of 2017 my husband and I joined hundreds of other people in viewing the solar eclipse. What an amazing experience - viewing this phenomenon with people from many places in the country and the world!

I make quilts, and in that creative process I feel part of Gods' creation. Taking bits of fabric and turning them into a useful, beautiful object; much like the Creator took earth and created human beings.

REPLY

Jean Canatsey January 22, 2019 at 2:30 pm



Every winter morning my husband and I sit at our breakfast bar and watch the birds flitting around and eating from the bird feeders on our front porch. Both then and whenever I sit with a dog on my lap, I feel one with nature. It was especially profound Sunday night when we watched that beautiful eclipse. Not only were we treated to a spectacular blood moon, but when I looked up I was also treated to a clear sky so full of unusually brilliant stars that I could easily identify the big and little dippers and other constellations that I rarely see. Thank you especially for the music today. Not only were the words profound but the pictures of the hands were especially moving. My husband is my Sanctuary.

REPLY

Lori Ann January 22, 2019 at 9:25 pm



Melanie, I have been in a very dark and lonely spot for 4 months now, since my husband passed away. We were without adequate money and many of his and my friends have also passed, including my 97 year old mother just 6 months ago. All my (3) remaining friends live out of state from me. I have been at work trying to develop a relationship with Jesus after not praying for a very long time. I am grateful for your posts, but just don't know what to say.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND January 23, 2019 at 4:29 pm



Dear Lori Ann,

My deepest sympathy to you on the death of your husband and mother. I will hold you in special prayer these days. I'm sure my readers will too. I wish you could find someone to speak with... a good friend... a spiritual director. Perhaps the local parish could direct you to someone. Or if you live near a convent or retreat center, perhaps they would be able to direct you to someone... Just know, that God is with you in this darkness... even though you may not feel God's presence... Prayerfully, Melannie

REPLY

Dolores Leffler January 23, 2019 at 9:57 am



God is good...always!!! Thank you for your blogs....

REPLY

Sr. Mary Frances Taymans, SND January 23, 2019 at 5:50 pm



Thank you especially for setting the human -natural world relationship right! Our nation's first people have much to teach us, if we would only listen.

REPLY

Lin Pobjecky January 27, 2019 at 4:54 pm



Trying to contact you, Sr Melannie, for a speaking engagement for our parish but your contact info is not working for me. Could you please email me?
Thank you

REPLY

Sister Pat January 27, 2019 at 9:48 pm



Thank you, Melannie, for this reflection and the song. It merged so well with the graced insights and experiences of the Christology Retreat last week affirming our oneness with all of creation and Christ becoming incarnate – one with us and all of creation.

Loved the hands in the video. Could almost feel the comforting touch as I watched and listened to the words. I hope & pray this somehow is transmitted to those in my grief support group. What a blessing to be a “sanctuary” for someone. So many – and you are one- who have been a “sanctuary” for me. Thank you!

REPLY

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