

Janice MacLean
A Taste of Retreat



Photo: Janice MacLean

Welcome to this mini retreat. You have everything you need to create a small oasis of rest, a Sabbath pause, a wee breather, in the midst of your life in motion.

Take whatever time you have. If it is minutes then choose one or two suggestions. You can always come back. If you have a little longer then begin at the very beginning and see where you are in an hour or two.

You might want to sample everything. Be mindful of this. There is material here for many different personalities. Prayer takes the shape of who we are. Some things will fit you like a glove; others may feel a little prickly. You choose. Perhaps you want a nurturing time so stay with what supports you. Perhaps you feel a yearning for a new experience. You decide.

I'm delighted you chose to try *The Prayer Bench*. Come visit again. *Janice*

Getting Ready

Abundance Around Us: Sit quietly with a soft gaze. (Half close your eyes and relax your looking.) Without moving your head let your soft gaze wander. Try to see without labeling or judging. Just enjoy looking. Allow yourself, body, mind and spirit to settle. Be aware of the abundance around you.

Abundance Within Us: God, or however you name the sacred in your life, is fully present and curled within our journeys, our thoughts, our sensations, our feelings and our breath. Become aware of your breath. Be mindful of the generosity of your breath.

When you are quiet in eye and in heart, move on.

What We Need is Here – Reflection

By Janice MacLean

*“... What we need
is here. And we pray, not
for new earth or heaven, but to be
quiet in heart, and in eye
clear. What we need is here.” Wendell Berry*

This poem helps me breathe. I breathe in *what I need*. I breath out ... *is here*.

This is one of the most contemplative poems I know. You can read the full poem here. [The Wild Geese](#). I've quoted the last few lines. The first lines are full of noticing, and tasting and hearing the gifts of an autumn day.

It is a poem of full-bodied awareness. The poet is rooted. Here. Now. In the midst of this day.

What we need is here.

- What invitation do these words hold for you? Take a moment and breath with them. *What I need | is here*.

I hear in these words a distant echo of desert wisdom. Remember the manna? [Read [Exodus 16:9-22](#) The Message Bible]

In their wilderness trek, the ancient People of God toggled back and forth between nostalgia and anxiety.

What are we doing here? Why did we leave Egypt? Why *did* we leave Egypt? What was intolerable then begins to look good midway through the desert days. It happens. The good old days are always defined in hindsight. Nostalgia is always shaped by what we can no longer have. What we need is back there.

Then there is anxiety.

What will we eat? What will we drink? When will we get there? Who will we be? The desire for security and survival is deep in us. When anxious we leave today and invest in the fears of tomorrow.

In a passage that creates a little *ouch* for me, the mystery writer, Louise Penny, captures future fearing in a comment on Gaumache's daughter:

"After spending most of her life scanning the horizon for slights and threats, real and imagined, she knew the real threat to her happiness came not from the dot in the distance, but from looking for it. Expecting it. And in some cases, creating it."

"Her father jokingly accused her of living in the wreckage of the future. Until one day she looked back deep in his eyes and saw he wasn't joking. He was warning her. It was a hard habit to break..." - *The Long Way Home*, Louise Penny.

This scanning the horizon robs us of our presence, here and now.

➤ What practices help you stay in the present?

What we need is here.

The manna came. One day at a time. There was no saving it for a future snack. There was no zipping it in a baggie for tomorrow. Grasping was not allowed.

Manna was *provisional*.

I like this word. It means, *"arranged or existing for the present, possibly to be changed later."* (Oxford Dictionary)

Desert wisdom tells us we can trust the day. This is the essence of the manna metaphor. Each day will provide gifts. There will be provision enough. What we need is here.

Yet it is provisional. It is passing. We take and receive the fullness of *this* day and, letting it go, we meet tomorrow, tomorrow. It is a stance of hospitality. We welcome this day in the shape this day comes.

When this is embedded in our heart it changes everything. This kind of hospitality has a way of challenging our "scarcity assumption." It creates a container for our fear and anxiety. It helps us get a handle on how much is enough.

When our heart is quiet and our eyes are clear, we are steadied in ourselves and strong in our engagement with the world.

What we need is here. And we are able to meet the blessings and challenges of this day.

Virtual Book Group on Facebook

Come discuss Louise Penny's book, *The Long Way Home* at the virtual book club.

Beginning February 1, 2015.

Check out my Facebook page for more information and other books coming up.

<https://www.facebook.com/prayerbench>

Life More Abundantly – Spiritual Practices

Here are some suggestions you might like to try. These practices are messengers calling us to deeper awareness or waking us up to a more profound sense of being present in the world.

Beautiful & Useful:

“Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.”

- Ponder these words by William Morris, the 19th century English architect, furniture designer and leader in the emergence of socialism. Take a look around your house. Appreciate all that is useful and all that is beautiful. Feel gratitude in your heart. What else do you experience? Do you feel any challenge or sense any invitation?

Cloister Walk

When I lived with the Iona Community one of my favourite spaces was the cloister, the covered walkway around the courtyard of the Abbey. I had a vision of ancient monks, heart-deep in prayer, walking around the square mindfully placing one step after another.

Since then I like to create my own little cloister walks, a space where I can walk in a circle or back and forth. The direction is set and I am freed from the thought of plotting a direction.

- Perhaps you can find a cloister space. Bring your attention to your breathing. With each breath release your agenda and simply be present. Be aware of the sounds, sights and textures of life in creation around you.

Holy Manna

You might want to choose one of your meals today to practice slow eating. Bring intention to your eating. Take a bite and set down your fork or spoon and bring your attention to that one bite. When your attention wanders (and it will!) gently and without judgment return to the taste, the texture, the aroma of your food. Ponder the generosity of land that offered the food. Appreciate the transformative journey from plate to energy in you. You may choose to express gratitude in a blessing of words or movement or art.

Or you may wish to prepare and share a simple feast with a friend. Enjoy how sharing at table nurtures good conversation. Keep in mind a ‘feast’ is not about the abundance of food but the abundance of feeling brought to the occasion.

In Shimmering Abundance

“I have always loved the gaps, the spaces between things, as much as the things. I love staring, pondering, mulling, puttering. I love the times when someone or something is late—there’s that rich possibility of noticing more, in the meantime...Poetry calls us to

pause. There is so much we overlook, while the abundance around us continues to shimmer, on its own.” – Naomi Shahab Nye

- Pause. Feel your feet. Notice. Notice more. Perhaps you will write your own poem. Come on over to my Face Book page if you feel like sharing it. <https://www.facebook.com/prayerbench>

Here is a poem by Naomi Shahab Nye that I appreciate. You might like it too: [Poem: Famous](#)

Bed-Time Breath Prayer

The breath prayer is an ancient practice. Bring yourself to rest with this prayer.

- As you inhale, pray these words: I breathe in *peace* (or love, or hope, or joy)
As you exhale, pray these words: I breathe out *anxiety* (or hurt, or worry, or fear)
Be present to your breath. Rest. Good night.

Closing

When you have given whatever time you have to this retreat, find a way to bring it to an end with intention.

You might stand and feel your feet on the ground. Really feel your feet and the energy of earth rising in the soles of your feet.

Perhaps there is a prayer or a poem you might want to write. Tuck it in your pocket. Stick it on your computer screen.

What one word or phrase do you want to take with you? Can you shape it into a breath prayer or affirmation to extend your retreat as you recall it at the next red light or grocery line up?