



Advent

“I will lure her to the desert and there I will speak to her heart” (*Hosea 2:16*). The desert has symbolized a physical and metaphorical place of encounter with God in the Christian biblical tradition ~ a symbol that continues to evoke a sense of awe and mystery today. The desert’s remoteness and lack of distractions were particularly conducive for silence and solitude ~ the ideal milieu in which to enter into the mystery of God. The desert experience was a call for prayer, emptiness, soul searching, surrender, conversion, expectancy, hope, and transformation.

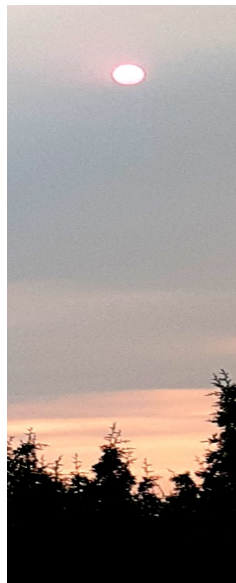
The desert experience is what Advent is all about. Advent can be a “desert” time in which to prepare our hearts and our lives for the promise that is ours. But we need a “desert” heart to know how to receive it, cherish it, live it. The “desert” heart is open, receptive, aware.

We are nearing the season of Advent, a spiritual preparation for Christmas. A “desert” heart may kindle a new approach to this beautiful, yet often overwhelming season. The accelerated pace, the busyness and all that we deem necessary for the perfect Christmas, can often leave us depleted physically and spiritually. The human spirit yearns for a deeper and more profound reality than the secular world can offer. The reality of Christ is the gift of the season, but we may need to slow down to a “desert” pace in order to embrace this gift.

We have spent over 18 years now in the high desert of Peacewhisper. It continues to fine tune my awareness to look deeper, to listen more closely. It constantly reawakens and strengthens my connection to the earth and the interdependence of all life. In its demand for simplicity, I have found that it discards excess and superficiality. The false self has no identity in the desert and withers for lack of nourishment. It has been an ideal place for letting go of all that impedes the connection to which the soul is drawn.

Consider setting aside part of one day a week this Advent as a “Desert Day,” to be alone with God out in nature or a space where you can enjoy silence and solitude. “Silence fills the solitude, while the solitude permits God to fill us.” (*Wayne Teasdale*)

May this Advent be an inner desert experience that prepares you to receive the fullness of God, and thus be an instrument of God’s love and peace to others.
~ Barb Kollenkark



Gratitude

We sincerely thank all those who visited this year. We saw many new faces and many returnees. Every one of you blessed us and Peacewhisper in your own unique way. We look back over these past sixteen years with such gratitude and awe. What God has accomplished through all of us who have contributed time, energy, love, prayers, and donations still astounds us. We could not have done it without you, and we extend our deepest gratitude and prayers.

We wish you all a very peaceful Advent and a Christmas filled with joy and love. Please know that you are in our prayers, especially throughout this holy season.

Mission Statement

The mission of Peacewhisper is to enhance spiritual growth and inner peace in an environment of simplicity and unique natural beauty through contemplative prayer and practice.

New Board Member

Craig Paschal, pastor of the United Methodist Church in Mancos, CO, is Peacewhisper's new board member. He and his wife, Jen, have visited Peacewhisper many times over the years.

The Way of the Desert

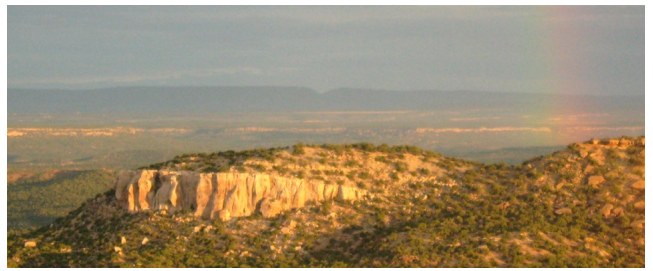
A small band of pilgrims from our church journeyed to Peacewhisper for a day of rest and reflection on October 14. By chance, it was also the day of the solar eclipse which added another layer of mystery to our time of peace. Upon arriving at the "mother ship," we gave thanks, ate bread, and drank hot coffee and tea. With the eclipse forthcoming and the desert calling us, we took off to the unknown, leaving only our footprints in the soft dirt. "In the desert we wait, we weep, we learn to live," writes Alan Jones, *Soul Making: The Desert Way of Spirituality*. "A dry and desolate place? A barren yet beautiful terrain?" In the desert wilderness life is fragile and "our very existence is threatened," writes Alan Jones. Yet the desert is a place where we often discover the Divine presence. As we empty our hearts and let the dry wind carry our fears and worries away, we fall into the heart of God.

Jones writes, "The desert of the spirit is a place of silence, waiting, and temptation. It is also a place of revelation, conversion, and transformation." The starkness of the desert moves us to a more mindful response to the lives we live.

I left the main house that morning and found an untrodden path to walk down. Overhead, the moon and the sun were drawing closer to one another in a primordial dance. My steps matched the silence of the juniper and pinyon trees as I walked deeper into the moment. A lone gray bird watched me move by as I entered the enchanted circle of the Rosary Garden.

I stopped at each plaque and breathed in the words ~ Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful, Glorious ~ written there. Then the moon covered the sun leaving a ring of fire visible around it. Would the darkness continue to grow? Would the birds hush their singing? Then the sun emerged again from behind the moon and the light grew and grew. And God said, "Let there be light" (*Genesis 1:3*). The desert way trusts the ultimate triumph of God's love, grace, and light. Let it be.

~ Craig Paschal
Mancos, CO



Retreat

I've had the privilege of visiting Peacewhisper for several years. Thankfully the surroundings seem to have changed little. The juniper, sage, the expansive sky and view, and the beckoning outdoor prayer sites ~ Labyrinth, Rosary Walk, Stations, Hermitage If you asked me what I especially appreciate about this sacred place, I might say the peace ~ the enveloping silence.

Lawn mowers, leaf blowers,
Cars revving, planes droning,
Dogs yowling, horns honking,
Phones ringing, texts pinging,
Music thumping, something humming,
Background noise.

I crave a desert of sound.

A billion years of change and it's come to this:
Stillness resounds,
A leaf rustles on the ground,
A chick-a-dee dees,
A cricket whistles,
A chipmunk barks.

The fullness overflows and gifts itself to those who hear, moment after moment, year after blessed year.

Wings wave as the raven flies,
Whispering whoosh, whoosh, whoosh.
What does this have to tell me?

~ Karen Sjoberg
Grand Junction, CO



*New yard
art gifts this
summer.*



Our Peacewhisper Story

Tiffany and I heard about Peacewhisper from one of our parishioners who had visited earlier this year. As the Pastor of a non-denominational charismatic Christian Church for the past 27 years, I have grown accustomed to a fast-paced and often externally driven Christian experience. Imagine a type of leadership that is celebrated in measurable outcomes, while often overlooking the value of a rich interior life with God, in Christ. That being what it is, Tiffany and I admit that our hearts have been in a spiritual desert. We were blessed with a Sabbatical this year and felt desperately in need of pursuing a deeper connection with Christ and one another. We are trusting more and more that the sustainable and fruit-bearing life we want to live is found in the presence and activity of the Trinity in our hearts and minds. Finding Peacewhisper and meeting Barb and Rick were God's way of answering our deep need and desire.

The morning of our 7-day retreat was spent taking in the space. The beauty and simplicity of this remote high desert immediately began to settle me. I met with Barb for spiritual direction and she helped validate the idea that being in a dormant place, a place with few consolations, can actually be an invitation to engage a more pure faith; a faith that trusts God's generous love more than my own spirituality. She spoke of this in the context of Centering Prayer. I have heard of Centering Prayer for years, yet Barb was the first person who offered to help me discover it for myself. I confess that my first go at Centering Prayer was internally hectic. My thoughts were rampant and I struggled to rest in the love of God. Barb's graceful direction helped me process my experience and find hope that consenting to God's presence and activity through Centering Prayer was possible, even for my overactive mind. The next day I walked out to the Hermitage and settled into several hours of silence and solitude. While there, I moved into a 20-minute time of Centering Prayer and immediately discovered a peace that was deeper than my thought. The time went so fast. In a word, I felt "immersed" in God. That evening as we enjoyed a meal with Rick and Barb, I shared that my time out at the Hermitage in Centering Prayer quieted me in ways I've never known.

Allow me to turn this over to Tiffany; she has her story to tell.

While driving into Peacewhisper, I immediately sensed the embrace of the juniper trees surrounding me like a comforting blanket. I came into our retreat with a desire for the healing I knew I needed, but honestly had no idea of the how to position myself to experience it. Becoming reacquainted with Centering Prayer, I found it took the pressure off "me" and opened me to receive God's mercy. The whole week felt like a Divine appointment. Yet, there were two meaningful sacred times where God met me powerfully. The first one occurred while walking the Labyrinth. I wasn't sure "how" to do it, but Barb assured me that I couldn't mess it up. I entered the space bringing all parts of me, not just the parts I thought were good. My experience in the Labyrinth was one of those times where space and time disappear. God removed a block in my heart that I had tried with my own strength to do for a long time. It particularly affected my relationship with my husband. I don't know if it was a bitter root or unforgiveness, all I know is it was removed as I allowed God to take it there in the Labyrinth. In God's goodness, the "ground" in my heart that had been lost was restored as this block was removed. I left the Labyrinth with tears of joy and experienced God rejoicing with me. The second powerful experience happened two days later at the Stations of the Cross. As I purposed to be with Jesus in his suffering as a human, there was a deepened intimacy I hadn't experienced in a long time. Being with Jesus in his suffering brought consolation to my suffering; past, present and future. I wrote in my journal that, "I can trust Jesus with my pain - I won't be offended." I believe the land that is Peacewhisper is very special. For me, it is a "Thin Place" where there is a grace to encounter the presence of God. I know I am not the only one who has experienced this. My life is marked by my week here.



For Tiffany and I as a couple, we enjoyed our daily walks and evenings spent watching sunsets. Our shared meals with Rick and Barb were wonderful highlights. Nearing the end of our week at Peacewhisper, Tiffany and I met with Barb in the Dome. She offered to facilitate Centering Prayer for us as a couple. This shared experience set a new trajectory for us. It is a very practical way for us to consent to the presence and activity of the Trinity in our lives together. We look forward to carrying this with us as we shift out of our Sabbatical and engage our community of faith in a more sustainable way.

~ Chris and Tiffany Austin, Woodland Park, CO

It's always a question of what we may find at Peacewhisper upon returning from our winter travels. Would there be damage from animals, the weather, or even people? We've been very lucky that nothing like that has ever happened.

This year was no different, but what we saw was. I knew this past winter was somewhat of a 'snow year' as we were warned to extend our return until access was doable. Remember, Peacewhisper is at the end of a red dirt road, not gravel, and everyone knows what melting snow mixed with dirt is called. So, by the beginning of April when we returned, it was to dozens of broken tree limbs. Some just snapped off, while others were literally ripped off the trunks. These poor drought-stricken junipers were so dry that when loaded with even an average snowfall, they couldn't bend, so they snapped like toothpicks.

That was one side of this double-edged sword because all that snow that damaged the trees made it one of the prettiest wildflower seasons we've seen here. In fact,



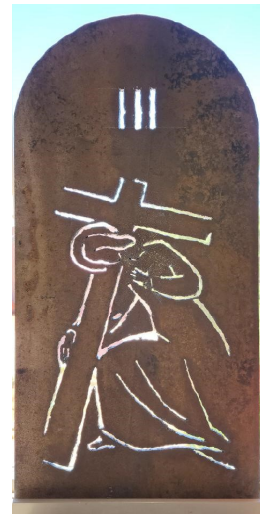
the Segoe Lily, the Utah state flower, was so prevalent that I actually made a video of them, hundreds and maybe even thousands. All the plants enjoyed the moisture, including the weedy ones. Everything was green and so beautiful. But back to the other edge of the sword, all that green wasn't

easy to keep up with. It clogged the trails and narrowed the road and what was green in May turned to brown in July. But whether green or brown, this desert is always beautiful. ~ Rick Kollenkark

Website

Check our website for a 2024 retreat schedule and sponsorship opportunities. You may now choose to receive your newsletter via email. Please call, email, or specify on the donation form and include your email.

The Stations of the Cross walk has seen three sets of plaques and the sun has defeated them all. After the second set went south, I thought I would like to make a set of the Stations myself, in the same fashion of all the other rusty iron signs I've made around Peacewhisper. Instead, I used the same stainless steel as the plaques on the benches and they lasted years, but sadly, they too are sun-faded to the point of also needing replacement. This spring we found a set of simple drawings that I copied onto the rusty metal and proceeded to cut away with my plasma cutter. I was working on Station 7 when the plasma cutter stopped cutting. Now it looks like it will be next year before I can finish the project. When completed, this old rusty metal will last forever.



~ Rick Kollenkark

Desert Peace

I fell in love with Peacewhisper after being there only once. Walking across the grounds and many places of interest, and worship in solitude, have often reminded me if there is any place on earth to remind me of what eternity is or may be like, it is the serenity and quietness of this little place in the Desert.

~ Bernard Reiff

Tarpon Springs, FL

Rosary Walk Brochure

We now have a brochure listing all those sponsored on a rosary bead and the names of the donors. Those who have walked the stone rosary beads seem to appreciate knowing who is sponsored on a particular bead in order to pray for them. Sponsorship of a bead is \$100.

Peacewhisper is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and your donation is tax deductible.

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