

Readings for Sunday, Nov. 18, 2012
Sunday before Thanksgiving

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is within/among you."

Luke 17:20-21

When we reach our inmost heart, we reach a realm where we are not only intimately at home with ourselves, but intimately united with others.

David Steindl-Rast

Spiritual awakening is frequently described as a journey to the top of a mountain. We leave our attachments and our worldliness behind and slowly make our way to the top. At the peak we have transcended all pain. The only problem with this metaphor is that we leave all the others behind — our drunken brother, our schizophrenic sister, our tormented animals and friends. Their suffering continues, unrelieved by our personal escape.

In the process of discovering our true nature, the journey goes down, not up. It's as if the mountain pointed toward the center of the earth instead of reaching into the sky. Instead of transcending the suffering of all creatures, we move toward the turbulence and doubt. We jump into it. We slide into it. We tiptoe into it. We move toward it however we can. We explore the reality and unpredictability of insecurity and pain, and we try not to push it away. If it takes years, if it takes lifetimes, we will let it be as it is. At our own pace, without speed or aggression, we move down and down and down. With us move millions of others, our companions in awakening from fear. At the bottom we discover water, the healing water of compassion. Right down there in the thick of things, we discover the love that will not die.

Pema Chödrön, quoted in Prayers for a Thousand Years, p. 63

God becomes God where all creatures express God: There he becomes "God." When I was still in the core, the soil, the stream and the source of the Godhead, no one asked me where I wanted to go or what I was doing. There was no one there who might have put such a question to me. But when I flowed out from there, all creatures called out: "God!" I was asked, "Brother Eckhart, when did you go out of the house?" For I had been inside. In this way, all creatures speak about "God." . . . When I return to "God" and then do not remain there, my breakthrough is more noble than my flowing out. I alone bring all creatures out of their spiritual being into my understanding so that they are one within myself. When I come into the core, the soil, the stream and the source of the Godhead, no one asks me where I'm coming from or where I've been. No one has missed me in the place where "God" ceases to become.

. . . There are some poor people who will return to their homes and say: "I shall sit down somewhere, eat my loaf of bread, and serve God!" I swear, however, that these people will have to remain in their errors, for they can never attain what these other attain, who serve God in poverty and exile.

Meister Eckhart, in Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation. Translated by Matthew Fox. p. 77.