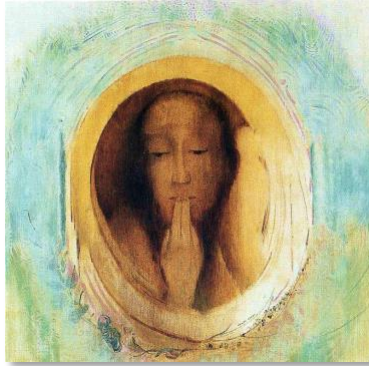


## Stillness – A Door Into the Temple

July 16, 2023

Rev. Elizabeth River



*Silence*  
Odilon Redons

### Readings

Learning to stop and be still is absolutely necessary  
before we can listen and respond fully and gratefully to life  
– moment by moment.

~ Brother David Steindl-Rast  
from [grateful.org](http://grateful.org)

“Today”

Mary Oliver

from *A Thousand Mornings*

Today I’m flying low and I’m  
not saying a word.  
I’m letting all the voodooos of ambition sleep.

The world goes on as it must,  
the bees in the garden rumbling a little,  
the fish leaping, the gnats getting eaten.  
And so forth.

But I’m taking the day off.  
Quiet as a feather.  
I hardly move though really I’m traveling  
a terrific distance.

Stillness. One of the doors  
into the temple.

In my first few years at CCC, Bill and Ann Eichhorn, our then co-ministers, offered a “Journey in the Spirit” using the book *A Pace of Grace, The Virtues of a Sustainable Life*, by Linda Kavelin Popov. The group met for three hours on Saturday mornings over six weeks or so, with study, conversations, writing, art-making, and of course food, joy, and lots of laughter. It was wonderful for me, as I worked in sales and felt burned out. Additionally, I was involved in quite a few outside activities, leading workshops, and maintaining a rich social life. Our Pace of Grace group showed me that how I was living at the time was not really sustainable, and also that that my over-busy, over-committed life was not deepening my connection with my Divine Source, nor to a more loving life. My fellowship in this community flourished, and slowly I began accepting guidance from my higher power—and my fellows!—and moving in the direction of my own authenticity as a person who wants to live a love-centered life, who helps expand the love in everyone whose life she touches.

It’s been almost two decades since that time, and the world has moved along at its own pace. It has evolved in a way that takes up a lot more of our energy, our time, and our inner resources. Ordinary everyday life in our culture has never been so demanding, and so full: full of a continual flow of stimuli, information, sounds, sights, movement, speed, drama, options, a multiplicity of absolutely everything there is! It’s pretty difficult now to do only one thing at a time! I’ve noticed that even driving is way more stressful than it ever was, with greater speed everywhere, more vehicles and kinds of transportation on the roads, more noise, fewer safety precautions, fewer people who even have a clue about defensive driving. There’s more what I call *offensive* driving: people expressing whatever they’re feeling with their cars!

People have come to believe that we all need to be connected to everyone, never UN-connected or DIS-connected. We are expected to be available at any time someone wants to reach us. A common thread is MORE: more of everything we can think of—technology, pets, ideas, books, shows, choices for entertainment, sources of news and information, amplification, noise imposed on us everywhere we go, things to buy and to be seduced into wanting, kinds of foods and places to eat, the idea that we need to “improve ourselves,” messages about goals, success, bucket lists, vacation destinations, recreational activities, self-improvement, fitness, diets, so-called “rewards” for purchasing things on credit. Enough. We have gradually been trained, probably mostly without our being aware of it, to want and seek and accept a way of life which pressures us into upgrading, replacing, improving absolutely everything, and teaching our children by our example to develop these same habits.

Most of us have surely taught ourselves ways to find comfort and relief from all of this. I have found a few tools, techniques and practices that take me out of the stream of overwhelm and too-muchness, and I hope you have too, because (and this has come home to me in a few challenging months) my whole being is screaming for respite, for quiet, for a cessation of pressure, for *help*.

I caught on to this by watching the person I was (am?) becoming!! I would catch myself thinking thoughts—even sometimes saying them *out loud!*—that I categorize as “cranky old lady” thoughts. Sometimes I hear what I’ve just said and am appalled at what came out of my own mouth! I used to decry old folks who blamed and complained and bitched and moaned and—guess what?!—I was on the brink of becoming one of them! Yikes!! Help!! So I had to look at what happened.

I had gradually, without really noticing, allowed myself to be taken in by the speeding up of the world around me and pulled along by it. At the same time, I see that I have been neglecting the simple basics of self-care, that is, being faithful to the *consistent daily practices that nurture and protect* this being whose body I inhabit, from diet and movement, to time in nature and study, to being in community, to honoring my creativity, to reading and writing, to a healthy spiritual practice. I also require spaciousness—space between activities, space for doing nothing. I require lots of time for solitude and silence, and a daily gratitude practice for everyone and everything in life is as essential as daily bread.

I realized I had to make some big changes quickly. Just as I needed to find a way to reduce my engagement with so many activities and commitments, I also needed to carefully curate what I allow to come into my awareness and my knowing. For example, a long time ago I stopped taking in audio and visual news, and now I only read it. But now I see that it's time to let go of the quantity of the reporters and commentators through whom I learn what's going on, and increase the number of those people who inspire and lift me up. I had to go from four to one daily newsletters by commentators/interpreters I can tolerate, so I made a decision to drop Robert Reich, Michael Moore, and Robert Hubbell, and just keep Heather Cox Richardson. And in addition to the two non-political newsletters I already receive ("The Writer's Almanac" and Richard Rohr), I have added the "Good Newsletter," Diana Butler Bass's "The Cottage," [grateful.org](http://grateful.org), and Philip Gulley's "Plain Speech" newsletter. I shifted the balance from the burden of really heavy stuff (which I do need to know about to be a citizen) to tipping the scales in the direction of that which lifts my spirit, kindles hope, renews my faith, and inspires me!

Angeles Arrien taught that we are creatures of nature just like all the animals and the plants, and she said, "nature's pace is *medium to slow*." And just like the animals and the plants who know these things inherently, we need to *choose* to go at nature's pace, to STOP moving at the pace that has been set by our popular culture. To learn to make our own *slow time, quiet time, time for rest and renewal*. We can call this a pace of grace.

In *A Pace of Grace*, Linda Popov teaches us to create sacred time and space for our spiritual practice, which she describes as the RPMS of Spiritual Fitness: Reading, Prayer, Meditation, Service. Re-reading this book now, I'm pleased to note that some of this wisdom has become a part of my life and work, along with all I've learned from being part of the beloved community of CCC, and also along with my 12-step communities, and that path of connecting to God and to a loving life.

My friends, more than ever we need to allow ourselves the space for blessed silence. It is in silence that we are able to hear the still, small voice. Gandhi said he began ordinary days with an hour of meditation, but when it looked to be an especially busy day, he began with two hours of meditation. When we can accept the gift of that sacred pause, that reprieve from busy-ness and over-stimulation, a time of quiet, we are opening ourselves to the holy act of listening! "Be still and know that I am God ..." (Psalm 46:10).

Today

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not saying a word.  
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Stillness. One of the doors  
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Mary Oliver gives us such perfect expressions of the most important things in life, doesn't she? It's such a thrill to uncover one of her poems just when you need her message. In this poem she offers three gifts to us:

1. "a day off" — "I'm flying low and I'm not saying a word."
2. the jewel of this day of quiet: "really traveling a terrific distance."
3. that stillness is a "door into the temple."

What is that temple for you, and what doors do you open to enter it?  
Amen.