



Blessed Are You Who Bear the Light

Blessed are you
who bear the light
in unbearable times,
who testify
to its endurance
amid the unendurable,
who bear witness
to its persistence
when everything seems
in shadow
and grief.

Blessed are you
in whom
the light lives,
in whom
the brightness blazes—
your heart
a chapel,
an altar where
in the deepest night
can be seen
the fire that
shines forth in you
in unaccountable faith,
in stubborn hope,
in love that illumines
every broken thing
it finds.

—Jan Richardson



HOLY EVEN IN PAIN ... HOLY EVEN IN DARKNESS ... HOLY IN BROKENNESS ... HOLY IN VULNERABILITY

We hold a mystifying tension. Our bodies are wondrous, resilient, more intricate than we can fathom, strong beyond imagining. Our bodies are fragile, vulnerable, astonishingly permeable to pain.

There is no explanation equal to the presence of pain in our lives, nothing that will excuse it, make sense of it, or reduce it to something whose purpose we can understand. Even if there were, it is likely the explanation would provide little comfort or satisfaction.

When I was in high school and in the hospital again because one of my lungs persisted in collapsing—the cure for which was having tetracycline poured through a tube into my chest cavity so that the acid would form scar tissue on my lung—no theological construct could have eased or explained away that searing pain. What did help was having people by my bed—my mother on one side, a nurse on the other—who stayed with me through the procedure, letting me grip their hands (with no small force) until the pain began to recede.

And this, of course, is one of the primary gifts that can come in pain: that though pain tends to propel us inward, it can also, if we let it, draw us out toward connection. This connection does not resolve the pain, it does not justify it, but when our vulnerability makes itself known to us with piercing particularity, it comes as a grace and a balm to reach out our hands and find that we are met, and that sanctuary can happen between us even there. Especially there.

In the presence of pain, there is a door. The door does not depend on whether we are cured, or on what length of time the pain lives with us. The door comes in the form of choices about where we will allow God to lead us in our brokenness, and how we will let the brokenness open us to one another and to new terrain in our lives. In time, we become the door, discerning where and how and to whom we will open in both our vulnerability and our resilience, those twin gifts that, as we go along, become increasingly indistinguishable.

Compassion is one word for this opening that can happen in our brokenness. Compassion is not the point or purpose of pain, but, if we are receptive, it can become one of pain's enduring gifts. Compassion is the ability to perceive the presence of the sacred that shimmers through each of us even—and sometimes especially—at the point of our greatest fragility. It means looking at one another in our brokenness and being able to say, in wonder, **holy still**.

Have you had an experience of brokenness or pain that drew you toward connection and became a place of meeting? What did you find there? What did you carry with you from there?
Jan Richardson

*Bearing the light means looking at one another in our brokenness
and being able to say, in wonder, holy still.*

Compassion

Don't hide away your grief
in such dark and lonely places.
Don't waste away your tears
but in weeping share your life.

For I would like to cry with you,
to share your deepest sorrow,
to be within your weariness
and wake with you tomorrow.

And I would like to laugh with you,
and teach you that delight
can walk beside still waters
and compassion is their child.

We'll walk beneath the shadow
and the balm of weeping willows
where cool refreshing water
laps gently at our side.

I'd wait with you 'til morning
had touched on every leaf tip
and the glow of dawning sunlight,
is shining on the sky.

In *Rest Awhile* by The Fisherfolk



We hope that the Deepening Circle becomes a place of welcome, belonging and community for you. Our hope is that most of us will **attend each session and do the monthly practices** as a way to support the healing and wholeness of one another and of our world.

We welcome all ... and we reverence each person's form of belief, expression of faith and manner of speaking about God. We are all on a journey to greater wholeness and more expansive love.

CALENDAR: Spring Deepening Circle sessions on Zoom

Tuesdays, April 20 & May 18 1:30—3:00 PM

Tuesday June 22 10 AM—12 PM and 1—3 PM

(This is a full day that I will facilitate with a guest presenter.)

So that all who wish can attend, the sessions are free. Once Spring registration is open, we invite those who can afford it to make a contribution to Jesus House. Suggested donation for the Spring sessions—\$60. (jesushousecenter.org).

Check out our website, deepeningcircle.com, for archives of our past sessions and information about our most recent sessions.

With love and gratitude,

Kaye and Liz

(Kaye Shinham, SSJ & Liz Sweeney, SSJ)

We are members of the Sisters of St. Joseph, a religious community founded in France in 1650 and thriving around the world.



We suggest that you keep this reflection sheet near your prayer space and do these practices daily as a way of staying connected with the Deepening Circle and healing a bit of our world.

1. See if you can practice between five and twenty minutes of silent centering prayer each day. (centeringprayer.com) Over time this prayer practice will enrich you and deepen the bonds of our community.
2. Each day try to find one opportunity to look at yourself or at another in moments of brokenness and say, "HOLY STILL!"