

**Listening to the Wisdom of Winter** Rev Brigid Beckman 1/28/24

Will you pray with me and for me...

**Meditation** from ***Circle of Life*** by Joyce Rupp and Macrina Wiederkehr

Excerpt from ***Listening to the Wisdom of Winter***

...I am listening to the roar and to the quiet of winter.

I am listening to a beauty  
that sometimes remains unseen.

I am listening

I am listening to the season of contemplation,  
to the urgency of our world's need for reflection.

I am listening to all that waits within the earth,  
to bulbs and seeds,  
to deep roots dreaming.

I am listening to the sacred, winter rest... and sparks of hope within the  
darkness.

I am listening

I am listening to storms raging out my window,  
to storms raging in my heart....

I am listening to the kind permission of the season  
to rest more often,  
to reflect more deeply,  
to pray without words.

I am listening to the sacrament of non-doing.

I am listening

I am listening to my dreams and inner visions,  
to the unknown wrapped in the mystery of my life  
to tears trapped in underground streams of my being,  
to seeds watered daily by those tears I am listening

I am listening to the quiet life in Winter's womb.  
I am listening to winter, nurturing spring.

I am listening

### **Message**

The inspiration for this theme came about a couple of weeks ago when I read [Patricia Pearce's blog post](#) titled "A Song for Winter." I talked to Raj about learning her song, and in a little while he'll play that for us.

Yet as I did my deep dive into the Wisdom of Winter, I realized with a bit of astonishment that I probably have enough inspiration for 2 or 3 talks at least. The astonishment is that for YEARS, my primary response to winter has been begrudging acknowledgement of the poetic beauty of a snow covered world – and deep-seated salty-languaged-grumbling about cold, ice, parking, shoveling...

Walking in the wisdom of winter began to shift when I was teaching in the winter of 2020-2021. Teaching at school in a hybrid format meant wearing a mask every day, for hours at a time. Only if I was alone in my office could I take it off– or if I was outside. Taking a brisk walk with a teacher friend even for 10 or 15 minutes and feeling the cold air on my face felt miraculous, cleansing, a complete gift.

So, here is my walk this morning into the wisdom of winter that is the womb of spring, the wisdom of darkness that is the womb of light.

The ancients knew the rhythms of the natural world in ways that most of us in modern day, western culture have lost.

***I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the HOLY ONE... who calls you by name.*** ~Isaiah 45:3

In the Celtic world of druids and nature based wisdom, every 6 weeks or so there was another day with rituals to mark the turning of the year, rituals that wove together a deep sense of the connection and kinship between humans and the more than human world.

In the Northern hemisphere, winter solstice marks a liminal space– the hours between the longest night and the turning again toward the lengthening days of sunlight. Six weeks later is Imbolc, Feb 1, the feast of Brigid, goddess celebrated as maiden, mother, and crone. The legends of the Christian saint Brigid grew alongside the legends of the ancient Brigid, as of course, did many of our winter holiday celebrations.

### From **Circle of Light**

In winter, the heartbeat of the land slows ... This is the period of dormancy when the extravagance of summer becomes a distant memory...nature accepts the great change that the pilgrimage of Earth brings. Now is not the time for stretching and growing. Now is the time for withdrawal and restoration of energy. The lessening of light and the increase of darkness are necessary ingredients for the Earth's nourishment. They enable the fallow process to happen. Nature has been busy producing. It is time to slow down and rest. Without this rest, soil wears out and loses its nutrients. All of creation needs some time to pause and have its spent energy renewed. So do humans. Winter offers this gift of essential renewal.

Winter has its share of beauty, but it also has its share of harshness. Even though it is quiet and dormant, it sometimes manifests a pronounced and damaging intensity which is of special concern to the vulnerable and the homeless. ...

Because of the uncomfortable conditions of winter, it is natural to underestimate the positive value of this season. The same is true for our interior winters. Few consider their inner winter time something to enjoy, yet this season is vital for spiritual growth. The human spirit needs dormancy and rest, silence and solitude...

We also encounter storms and prolonged hard times during our interior winters. This season challenges us out of our comfort zones. The extended darkness of our inner winter can be an opportunity to learn more about ourselves and our relationship with God.

That inner winter is something that British author Katherine May explores in ***Wintering: the Power of Rest and Retreat in Difficult Times***. I first heard of this book in [an interview with On Being](#) host, Krista Tippett, recorded in winter of 2020, and which aired in Dec 2021.

*“Some winters happen in the sun.”* May begins her book with the story of “a blazing day in early September” that shifted her whole world. She says in the interview: “I wanted to make it really clear that, although a lot of [the book] Wintering is about my love of winter and my affection for the cold and even the dark, that **wintering** is a metaphor for those phases in our life when we feel frozen out or unable to make the next step, and that can come at any time, in any season, in any weather... it has nothing to do with the physical cold... Everybody winters at one time or another; some winter over and over again.”

Wintering is a season in the cold, a fallow time (as Joyce Rupp, and nature

herself, also remind us!). Katherine May pushes us to remember that it is also ***inevitable***.

“We like to imagine that it's possible for life to be one eternal summer and that we have uniquely failed to achieve that [eternal summer for ourselves when we land in a wintering time] ...We're not raised to recognize wintering or to acknowledge its inevitability. Instead we tend to see it as an embarrassing anomaly that should be hidden or ignored... [Yet] Winter brings about some of the most profound and insightful moments of our human experience. And wisdom resides in those who have wintered.”

With kindness and generosity to yourself, as we listen to Roger sing “Winter” by Patricia Pearce, consider a time of your own inner winter. Then get metaphysical and metaphorical!

- Think about your childhood experience of the dark– were you afraid of the dark or love to look at the night sky?
- Did you enjoy winter and live somewhere where you could play in the snow?
- How do the changing weather patterns due to climate change affect your/our relationship to winter and what Earth is crying out for us to hear?
- What places in your heart have been cold and dark within?
- What dormant life resides in your inner winter places, or experiences?

(Inspired by, and adapted from, *Wild Winter*, by Mary de Jong)

We bless the dark as the womb of the light. We bless our slowing down and deep rest. We bless the cycles of nature, and our own rhythms. We bless winter as the womb of spring. And we listen to the whispering wisdom of winter, the deep wisdom of the Creator’s great gift of Nature, our kin and our calling.

And so it is. Amen.