

“Like a wilderness guide, Jill Crainshaw leads us through poetry and politics, science and spirituality, to open our eyes to the wonder of God’s active presence all around us. Drawing from a deep well of sacramental theology, Crainshaw shows us the profound relationship between our sacred rituals and our daily lives, that we may live more mindfully, passionately, and faithfully. Her book is a great gift to preachers, liturgists, and all people who seek to love God—and God’s world—with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.”

—Kimberly Bracken Long, Editor, *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching and the Arts*

“Reading *When I in Awesome Wonder* is a sheer delight! Rich in stories, metaphors, and imagery, this book takes the holy stuff of worship (bread, wine, water, hope, awe, relationships) and grounds it in the everyday stuff of life (food sources and food scarcity, water sources and water contamination, hopelessness around the great issues of our day, etc.). The conversation between these two greatly enhances how we view what we do in worship and reorients us to what we might do differently in worship, but it also allows us to see how the ‘stuff’ of our everyday lives is truly holy—given to us for the work of God in our communities and in the world. As Crainshaw notes, worship then ‘orients us toward God, the world and others in life-savoring and life-saving ways.’”

—Kathy Black
Gerald Kennedy Chair of Homiletics and Liturgics
Claremont School of Theology

“Jill Crainshaw has offered us all a rich gift. Like a wise teacher, she has invited us to reexamine the ordinary experiences of our lives and find the extraordinary love of God within them. Like a compassionate prophet, she has drawn attention to the injustices of our world near and far and invited us to respond in small and large ways. Like an insightful poet, she offers texts that invite our repeated reading and our concerted contemplation. Like a loving pastor, she has interpreted scriptures and rites for us in provocative and practical ways that draw us nearer to our earth, our neighbors, our worship, and our God. Reading *When I in Awesome Wonder* may evoke such a deep sense of ‘wow,’ you may not even make it to ‘thank you.’”

—Todd E. Johnson

Theological Director of the Brehm Center for Worship, Theology,
and the Arts

Fuller Theological Seminary

“Jill Crainshaw offers an evocative reflection on the sacramentality of everyday life and its implications for Christian worship. Each chapter retells a particular story, revealing the wonder and awe of human experience as a lens for reimagining worship. The book is provocative, instructive, and enormously inspiring, mirroring qualities that make Jill Crainshaw an exemplary liturgist, preacher, and teacher. A must-have for pastors and liturgists.”

—Veronice Miles

Visiting Professor of Preaching

Wesley Theological Seminary

When I in Awesome Wonder
Liturgy Distilled from Daily Life

Jill Y. Crainsbaw



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In memory of
Sarah Louise Rodgers Crainshaw
(1934–2017).

She trusted in a Creator who was able to keep her from falling.

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Earth Gifts

Bread.

Sourdough.

Pumpernickel.

Rye.

Old standbys—wheat and white.

Bread.

The stuff of life.

We break it, eat it, think almost nothing of it.

Golden-crusted loaves seasoned by the smell of the earth

Passed from me to you to the stranger.

We cannot live without it—

The bread or the sharing.

Grace.

Wine.

Poetry bottled and decanted.

Kiss of sweet grace on thirsty lips.

Wine.

Remembrance seasoned by the taste of the earth.

Spilled out between us,

For us,

You and me and the stranger.

We cannot live without it—

The sip of mystery or the sharing.

Grace.

Water.

Trickling.

Surging.

Moaning.

Water.

We bathe in it, fear it, plunge its murky depths.

Washing over weary feet,

Soaking chafed hands.

We cannot live without it—

The brooding Spirit,

Sea-lapped promises on sun-singed shores.

Grace.

Bread. Wine. Water.

The earth.

Broken.

Poured out.

Stirred up

In us.

Remembering that does not forget

Hungry, wilderness people

In neighborhoods, towns, cities.

Bread. Wine. Water.

Our hands

Baking, pouring, washing.

Gifts of God for the people of God.

Grace.

—Jill Crainshaw

Prelude

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

Life is liturgy. Not just Sunday mornings or weekday prayer services. All of life. Even the commonplace happenings, places, and things of everyday living are liturgy, perhaps especially the commonplace things. Life is liturgy.

Artists, storytellers, and poets remember through words and images what they see, hear, taste, and feel in the world around them. In a similar way, I remember in these pages times in my life and ministry when poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning's words have come alive for me and I have seen the earth "crammed with heaven" and "every bush afire with God."¹ I remember in these pages times when I have experienced life as liturgy.

The biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann, writes about the formation of Scripture as an act of imaginative remembering:

The tradition that became Scripture is a relentless *act of imagination*. That is, the literature is not merely descriptive

¹Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Aurora Leigh," in *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse*, ed. D. H. S. Nicholson and A. H. E. Lee (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1917), also available at www.bartleby.com/236/ (accessed October 16, 2016).

of a commonsense world; it dares by artistic sensibility and risk-taking rhetoric, to posit, characterize, and vouch for a world beyond “common sense.”²

This is the kind of remembering I undertake in this book. I explore how liturgy dares to “vouch for” in the “common sense” of everyday living the inexplicable, “beyond ‘common sense’” wonders of God’s presence.

The book’s subtitle arises out of these acts of imaginative remembering: “liturgy distilled from everyday life.” To “distill” is to “extract the essence” from something. Another definition says that to distill is “to let fall, exude, or precipitate in drops or in a wet mist.”³ I prefer the second. Sometimes our recollections of life-happenings precipitate from our memories like mist. The mist becomes a prism that refracts new and unexpected colors, textures, and meanings from what is common or familiar.

“Liturgy” is distilled from everyday life when we peer through the mist and see the sacramental and spiritual dimensions of daily actions, objects, conversations, and events. Sometimes we are aware in the moment that events happen of the liturgical or spiritual qualities of those events. Often, though, our awareness is not sparked until we look back on events. This is not unlike what happens when in weekly worship we look back on the events of Jesus’ and the early church’s life. We peer through the mists of years of biblical storytelling and wisdom and here and there, now and then, encounter God anew for our times as we hear ancient words and share a simple meal around a sacred “in remembrance” table.

When we remember events that we have observed or that have happened to us, we often shape and retell them as stories. How often,

²Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 9.

³Merriam-Webster.com (2017), s.v. “distill”; accessed June 6, 2017.

for example, have we shared with friends around a meal table stories about our growing up years or about what happened during the past week? Perhaps that is what Jesus' followers did in the weeks and months following his death and resurrection. They put the events they recalled from Jesus' life in story forms, story forms that have come to us as sacred writ, as Gospel narratives.

An intriguing thing about recalling events is that when we remember and tell stories about things we have experienced, we remember and retell more than just the facts. We "re-feel" and "re-embody" what happened, and because of that those happenings take on new life, life that surfaces as imaginative storying.⁴ We create and re-create meaning by weaving together a story that makes sense to us for the time when we are remembering it.

That is how in this book I have distilled liturgy from everyday life. The narratives I share here are from events I have observed or experienced. They are acts of imaginative remembering because my recollection of them has stirred for me new understandings of the liturgical dimensions present in the events. I story these events anew in these chapters, reflecting in my telling of them the unexpected meanings they have come to hold for me as I have recalled them again and yet again over time.

Does this mean that the stories I tell here are not true? No, but imaginative remembering, like living a life, is an imperfect exercise. I celebrate with gratitude the people and places I remembered and storied again as I wrote this book. But I realize that my recollections are personal and contextual and to some extent ambiguous. What I remember here is shaped by how I use words and in some instances by my inability to find adequate words to capture the power or beauty of an event or place. I seek grace in advance where my storying stutters

⁴E. Keightley and M. Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering as Creative Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 14–42.

or stumbles. That, too, is part of the distillation process. Memories mature over time. Some details fade into the background while others take on unexpected prominence. The liturgy that is life shifts and changes and sometimes becomes clearer to us as we continue to remember, retell, and remember again.

The haunting last lines of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* capture the multidimensional power of imaginative remembering: "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And then one fine morning—So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."⁵ With these closing lines, Fitzgerald reminds us of how past, present, and future are intertwined in human life.

Past, present, and future are also intertwined in our remembering in our liturgies. Contemporary author Annie Liontas says about this ending of *The Great Gatsby*: "As spare and stripped down as the narrative purports to be, there is an elliptical nature to Fitzgerald's third novel. It refuses to say what it's saying, or it says it over and over, and still you can't quite hold on to it. Much like prayer."⁶ Life has this elliptical nature. Liturgy too. Both refuse to say what they are saying while at the same time saying it over and over. This means that to search out through imaginative remembering—through storying—what life is saying is to engage in a prayerful act. It is to engage in a prayerful act whereby we distill liturgy from daily life.

I have been blessed by a calling that has carried me out upon many vocational seas. The people I have encountered as pastor, chaplain,

⁵F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 180.

⁶Annie Liontas, "The Month of Fitzgerald: So We Beat On: The Last Line of *The Great Gatsby*," *Scribner Magazine*, <http://www.scribnermagazine.com/2015/04/so-we-beat-on-on-the-great-gatsbys-last-lines/> (accessed June 6, 2017).

and professor—the people with whom I have shared a lifeboat—have enlivened my perceptions of life and my understandings of faith. Some of these people appear in these pages. At least, my recollections about them do. Again, I repent in advance for evidences of my faulty remembering even as I offer gratitude for the holy ground on which I have been blessed to stand with so many to taste and see God's mysteries.

To be attentive to liturgies wherever we are is to be attentive to God's mysteries. It is to be attentive to how God is present wherever we are. My hope is that readers will join me in listening and looking for the liturgical dimensions of their own life stories. The remembering and writing process has made me more aware *in the moment*, as life happenings unfold, of where liturgy—God's work with God's people—lives in my life story. I hope something similar can happen for those who read this book.

Chapter 2

O Taste and See

O taste and see that the Lord is good.

—Psalm 34:8

Gordon is a chef, a culinary artist.¹ His alimentary genius amazes me. I know of no one else who can scrounge around in a kitchen when it has been depleted of its weekly grocery stock and, using odd combinations of leftovers, stale bread, languishing vegetables, and other perishables, concoct a delectable feast.

I asked Gordon several years ago what inspires his desire to cook. His answer sounded to me very much like the language of calling.

“I like knowing that people can come to a restaurant where I am cooking, sit down, be served, and enjoy a meal someone has prepared for them,” Gordon said. “I am satisfied with my work when people are satisfied by the food I cook.”

Most diners in the bistro where Gordon works never meet Gordon. The holy space where he presides over the restaurant’s daily cooking rites is behind the scenes, in the kitchen. But diners experience nourishment and delight because of Gordon’s artistry and hard work.

¹A version of this chapter appeared in Jill Crainshaw, “‘O Taste and See’: Daily Prayer as Wise, Savoring and Saving Action,” *Call to Worship* 47, no. 3 (2014).

Gordon's love for food and cooking was born in his parents' kitchen. To eat at the Callahan's house is to enter into a realm of culinary magic. Both Gordon and his parents season their cooking with radical hospitality and gastronomic imagination. Meals prepared by the Callahans are always worth the wait because the food tastes so good and the conversation and fellowship leading up to and during the meal are so nourishing. And there is always enough for that unexpected guest who drops by at dinner time. I know. I have been that unexpected guest.

Some of the best bites of food I have ever tasted have come from pots stirred by Gordon's or one or the other of his parents' hands. Part of the wonder and mystery of those superlative bites is that they are for the most part singular. Even if the same recipe and ingredients are used again, the taste is never the same twice. Each culinary moment combines unique elements of food, conversation, time, and place. Rare and unrepeatable, each culinary moment reveals its own wisdom about life. Each culinary moment—each bite—is to be savored.

My conversations with Gordon have made me consider a question that I think is central to life and liturgy: What is the difference between tasting and savoring something?²

I enjoy cooking, and I relish opportunities to experience culinary excellence. I look forward to sampling unusual foods. Experiencing epicurean delights. Learning how different chefs—both professionally trained and homegrown—create foods that nourish and amaze.

I enjoy tasting foods, and certain flavors particularly appeal to my sense of taste. But to savor a food or a dining experience? To savor,

²Two works inspired my thoughts for this essay: Kirk Byron James, *Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), and Robert Farrar Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Entertainment* (New York: Doubleday, 1969). Both authors, in their unique ways, encourage savoring life.

for me, is different from tasting. The word “savor” is derived from the Latin *sapere*, which is related to another Latin word, *sapientia*, or wisdom.³ To savor is “to have the experience of, to taste or smell with pleasure, to delight in.” Savoring something requires a certain amount of patience and perhaps even wisdom.

Take dark chocolate as an example: I love the rich, robust taste of dark chocolate. It is both a delicacy and a comfort food. A perfect partner for after-dinner coffee. But I cannot eat dark chocolate in large quantities. It overwhelms my senses and my stomach. Dark chocolate demands that I savor it, that I linger with its flavor and fragrance.

Savoring eludes most people in a world as fast-paced, frenzied, and frantic as ours. We taste countless things every day, it seems, but rarely do we have (or take) the time to savor those things. To linger with them. To delight in or relish them. To consider with curiosity and care their breadth and depth. This is true for our relationships with food and too often for our relationships with each other and with the world around us.

Yet, researchers and practitioners in a number of fields note that taking time to savor at least some parts of our life is important to personal well-being.⁴ Savoring is also important to societal well-being, to the overall health of human communities. People who savor creation cultivate wisdom for caring about creation. People who savor the food that creation provides cultivate wisdom about sustainable food sources and a concern for equitable food accessibility. People who

³ *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “savor,” accessed 4 August 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/savor>.

⁴ See F. Bryant and J. Veroff, *Savoring: A New Model of Positive Experience* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007); Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), Nook Book; Scott Russell Sanders, *Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), Nook Book; Barbara Frederickson, “How Does Religion Benefit Health and Well-Being? Are Positive Emotions Active Ingredients?” *Religion and Psychology* 13, no. 3 (2002): 209–13.

savor life seek strategies for improving the health and life of creation and of all humanity.

The Callahans and other culinary artists invite us to savor meals. What is striking about their invitation is its everydayness. Gordon's daily life is the life of a chef. As each day begins, he takes in his hands the stuff of the earth—in his case, local and seasonal vegetables, grains, fruit of the vine—and with skill honed by time and experience peels, chops, boils, marinates, and roasts, cooking up in his kitchen dishes both familiar and brand new. Gordon works each day to nourish bodies and satisfy senses. Gordon's everyday work invites diners in his restaurant to savor meals in all of their many dimensions—aroma, taste, table talk. Even to experience being served in a restaurant is to experience a dimension of savoring.

Enjoying meals with the Callahans and hearing Gordon talk about his calling as a chef have made me think about links between savoring and worship. What if all of us are called to take time each day to savor—to pay attention to the gifts of God's good creation and then to do what we can using the skills we have and the resources in our kitchens to satisfy yearning senses and nourish hungry bodies? What if we are called to savor life and then to serve others so that they can savor life too?

How do we learn the arts of savoring and serving? Perhaps the liturgical discipline of daily prayer can teach us something about both. And perhaps one way we pray daily is by working to savor God's daily gifts, grace, and presence. What if daily prayer practices teach us how to taste and see—how to savor and serve—God's goodness, both at the Eucharistic feast table and at kitchen or restaurant or boardroom tables?

Daily Prayer as Savoring Practice

When she was a child, Ellen could not go to sleep without saying the prayer her mother had taught her:

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Ellen was born in the 1960s. As a five-year-old, she had no idea that the prayer she said with her mother just after turning the lights out at bedtime was written in the eighteenth century. She didn't know that there were alternative verses or versions of the prayer. And she didn't notice the rather daunting theology embedded in the words of the prayer.

All Ellen knew was that climbing into bed, pulling the bedcovers up tight around her neck, holding her Mrs. Beasley doll, and having her mother turn off the light and say this prayer with her made her feel safe for the night. Once Ellen started first grade, the simple rhyme expanded as she began to name people and pets and other things she wanted God to keep safe through the night.

As an adult, Ellen couldn't remember when or where she learned the prayer but maturing into adulthood had not erased the words from her memory. Even at midlife, sometimes when she got into bed at the end of a long day, the words and rhythms of that poem would spring unbidden into her mind. And on most nights, the adult Ellen still offered the names of loved ones and life concerns into the darkness after turning off the lights. Ellen still sought God's presence and care as she fell to sleep. Ellen's childhood nighttime ritual shaped in her body, mind, and soul an enduring prayer practice that lingers with her even now that she is in her fifties.

Rituals shape us and stay with us as we embody them across the years of our lives. Consider baseball players. Some are obsessive about embodying certain actions before they take their turns at bat. Or what about the actions we take to center ourselves before giving a speech or singing a solo or even before going to the dentist? Rituals mark times

and places. They provide us with containers for holding emotions and memories. Rituals, especially those we practice regularly, can provide us with meaning-making life rhythms that shape how we see God, ourselves, and the world around us. Daily prayer is such a ritual, one that fosters our capacity to savor life and serve others.

In Christian tradition, the term “daily prayer” refers to the practice of speaking and listening to the word of God each day. Daily prayer is the way people seek God’s presence as they traverse their Monday through Saturday life terrains.

Christians have in different times and places gravitated toward varied kinds of daily prayer practices. Some practices—both their content and patterns—are carefully scripted. Versions of these practices can be found in denominational prayer books such as the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*, the Roman Catholic *Daily Roman Missal*, the Eastern Orthodox *Synekdemos*, the Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship*, and others. Some traditions follow less formalized prayer patterns, but they nevertheless emphasize the importance of praying daily. Christians across a diverse spectrum of beliefs share in common a conviction that praying daily, routinely, and even multiple times throughout each day is vital to deepening faith and cultivating a sense of personal if not communal well-being.

The Liturgy of the Hours is a historic daily prayer pattern that continues to capture the imaginations of individual Christian believers and faith communities. The earliest form of the Liturgy of the Hours, described by several church fathers in the second and third centuries, included morning and evening prayers as well as prayers at other set times during the day. This prayer pattern emerged out of Jewish practices of reciting prayers throughout each day, often at the third, sixth, and ninth hours, and at midnight. By the end of the sixth century CE, the Liturgy of the Hours, also called the Daily Office or the Divine Office, regularly included seven moments of prayer—

sundown (vespers), night (compline), dawn (lauds), early morning (prime), mid-morning (terce), noon (sext), and afternoon (none).

Benedict, a monk in Italy, is credited with articulating in the fifth century a link between the Liturgy of the Hours and daily work: *Orare est laborare, laborare est orare* (To pray is to work, to work is to pray). Other monastic communities also linked manual work to the rhythms of daily prayer.⁵ Nuanced forms of the Liturgy of the Hours emerged over time in Catholicism, especially as different monastic communities developed prayer practices distinctive to their contexts.

Over the course of Christian history, daily prayer forms quite different from the Liturgy of the Hours also emerged. Perhaps most enduring in Protestantism are the Daily Office's major hours, or morning and evening prayers. Morning and evening prayers, again reflecting Jewish roots, are based on Scripture, particularly the psalms, and include prayers, songs, and intercessions crafted for the beginning and the ending of each day.

Prayer meetings, often held on a weekday, became popular forms of communal prayer in American religious practice during the Great Awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many congregations today continue to hold midweek prayer services that include Scripture reading and Bible study, singing, and prayer. Also, daily devotional guides published by many different denominations and other groups provide Scripture readings and meditations for each calendar day.

Recent years have seen renewed interest among some Protestant groups in the Daily Office. This renewal includes efforts to reclaim aspects of the Liturgy of the Hours. Many denominations now include

⁵Lonni Collins Pratt and Daniel Horman, *Benedict's Way: An Ancient Monk's Insights for a Balanced Life* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2000); Fred Bahnson (*Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013]) describes the time he spent with Trappist monks at Mepkin Abbey in South Carolina experiencing the rhythms of work and prayer in their community.

daily prayer resources in their hymnals or supplemental worship aids. Also, a number of recently formed intentional communities, sometimes called “new monastics,” include versions of the Daily Office in their corporate practices.

Other daily prayer resources are available online, many of them crafted with contemporary concerns and issues in mind. Examples include Celtic daily prayer from the Northumbria community; A New Zealand Prayer Book, created by New Zealander Anglicans; *The Divine Hours*, a trilogy of prayer guides for the liturgical year compiled by Phyllis Tickle, a well-known voice within the emerging church movement; and *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*, a print and web-based collection of morning, midday, evening, and occasional prayers arranged to be used in a yearly cycle.

Common Prayer was developed by Shane Claibourne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, and Enuma Okoro, leaders within the new monastic movement. The primary audience for *Common Prayer* is evangelical Christians, but the content of each day’s prayers is drawn from a range of historical and contemporary cultural and denominational sources. The writers of *Common Prayer* state that “liturgy is soul food” and “offers us another way of seeing the world.”⁶ A primary purpose of *Common Prayer*’s prayer cycle is to interrupt life’s usual schedules with God’s holy rhythms and to weave together what transcends time with what is most common to human time.⁷

The call of daily prayer was and is to invite believers individually and in community to experience the entirety of their lives as guided by rhythms of praise to the Creator. Daily prayer also cultivates an awareness of how God is present with God’s people in both momentous and mundane life realities. For example, daily prayer can remind

⁶Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, and Enuma Okoro, *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 7–8.

⁷Ibid.

us: God is with God's people in the bread on the Eucharistic table *and* in the bread on the supper table. God is with God's people in the grains of the field that *become* the bread at Eucharistic and supper tables. And God is also with God's people in the hands of hourly wage workers who bake the bread that we purchase at our local grocery stores and eat together at Eucharistic and supper tables.

Daily prayer's attentive pauses connect our human comings and goings to the rising and setting of the sun and to the changing of the seasons. Daily prayer's invitation to pause in the midst of our everyday days deepens our recognition of God's persistent diurnal work to create, incarnate, and resurrect. Praying daily—morning and evening and at moments in between—connects all of our senses to the deeper realities present in each moment of life and in every fiber of creation.

In "The Universe as Cosmic Liturgy," theologian Thomas Berry offers these insights about the transformative powers of creation's rhythms as humans live and work within those rhythms:

Each morning we awaken as the sun rises and light spreads over Earth. We rise and go about our day's work. When evening comes and darkness spreads over Earth we cease our work and return to the quiet of home. We may linger awhile enjoying the evening with family or friends. Then we drift off into sleep. . . . As in this day-night sequence, so in seasonal sequence, we experience changes in our ways of being. In autumn our children may spend their days in school and we alter our daily regime accordingly. In springtime we may go out more freely into the warmth of sunshine where some of us plant gardens. In summertime we may visit the seashore to find relief from the limitations that winter imposed upon us. In each of these seasons we celebrate festivals that give

human expression to our sense of meaning in the universe and its sequence of transformations.⁸

Berry's words echo the wisdom of Psalm 104:

You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.
People go out to their work
and to their labour until the evening. (Ps 104:19-23)

Both Berry's and the psalmist's insights alert us to the universe's cosmic liturgy and humanity's part in that liturgy.

What is the promise of this cosmic liturgy? Whether we work through long nights as nocturnal hospital or factory laborers or toil in the fields from sunrise to sunset or clock unpredictable hours for corporations or spend our wakeful hours caring for house and home—in whatever work or play occupies our days—God is somehow with us and God's rhythms somehow sustain us.

The problem, Berry argues, is that people today have become disconnected from the universe's cosmic liturgy and its daily promises of God's creative presence. Thus, we have replaced habits of gratitude and thanksgiving with mindless routines that destroy, violate, and exploit the earth and its people.

⁸Thomas Berry, *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 96.

How does daily prayer reconnect us to the universe's cosmic liturgy? How does it shape life-giving dispositions and habits? Daily prayer heightens our awareness of how God is present in all creation and in every aspect of human living. It invites and teaches us to taste, see, and savor God's grace whether we are embodying a Sunday liturgy in a church sanctuary or sitting down at a chaotically littered desk in an office early on Monday morning or mowing the lawn on a Friday afternoon or cleaning the kitchen after a far too late and much too rushed evening meal with weary family members.

As we saw above, "savor" is related to the Latin word for wisdom. Perhaps as daily prayer teaches us to savor life, it also instills in us wisdom.

The primary biblical sources for the kind of wisdom cultivated by daily prayer are wisdom writings within the Old Testament. The best known of these are Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and what are called wisdom Psalms. Wisdom writings are also found in Deuterocanonical sources, the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach.⁹

A goal common to the ancient writers who penned these texts was to shape the characters of persons in their communities so that they would have "eyes to see and ears to hear" (Prov 20:12) God's presence in their everyday lives. They also wanted to cultivate in people the insight necessary for making ethical choices that would lead to communal and personal well-being.¹⁰

⁹"Deuterocanonical" refers to writings that are deemed by some traditions to be part of the Old Testament. Deuterocanonical sources are considered canonical by Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians. Most Protestants do not consider them to be canonical. Deuterocanonical sources are included under a separate heading in a number of versions of the Bible. See *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v., "deuterocanonical," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deuterocanonical> (accessed December 8, 2013).

¹⁰William Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 49.

According to the writer who composed the Wisdom of Solomon in the second or first century BCE, wisdom “pervades and permeates all things” (Wis 7:24). This writer places a prayer for wisdom on King Solomon’s lips:

to know the structure of the world and the activity of
the elements;
the beginning and end and middle of times,
the alternations of the solstices and the changes of
the seasons,
the cycles of the year and the constellations of the stars,
the natures of animals and the tempers of wild animals,
the powers of spirits and the thoughts of human beings,
the varieties of plants and the virtues of roots. (Wis 7:17-20)¹¹

Exemplified in this text is a theme shared by many biblical wisdom texts.

God’s wisdom, ancient wisdom writers insist, has infused creation from the beginning of time. God founded the earth “by wisdom,” established the heavens “by understanding,” and broke open the deep “by God’s knowledge” (Prov 3:19-20). Ancient sages saw wisdom everywhere—both in the particular skills required to do everyday work (Exod 31:1-6; 35:1-4, 21-19) and in the extravagant and mysterious “work” of the cosmos (Prov 8:22-31), both in the diligence of ants

¹¹The Wisdom of Solomon (Wis), also called the Book of Wisdom or Wisdom, is thought to have been written in Greek but in the style of Hebrew verse. While the author attributes the book to Solomon, most scholars today argue that it was likely written after the death of Solomon, probably in the second or first century BCE. See David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), and Leo Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

and badgers (Prov 30:24-28) and in the mythic activities of Behemoth and Leviathan (Job 40).¹²

Even as biblical writers depicted wisdom as a certain kind of knowledge and attitude of heart, they also personified wisdom as a woman. In Hebrew, the word for wisdom is *hokmah*. In Greek, *sophia*. Wisdom/Hokmah/Sophia appear in many biblical wisdom writings as the personification of God's presence. In Proverbs, for example, *Hokmah*, speaks out at the city's entrance gates (Prov 1), traverses urban streets (Prov 8), works beside God to create the world (Prov 8), and sets a feast table in the house she has built (Prov 9). "Pay attention to human life," Hokmah in Proverbs challenges those who pass her in the streets or who travel by her house.

Daily prayer practices strike a similar chord: *Pay attention* to how God is with us in the sights, smells, sounds, and especially stories that we inhabit and live out each day. Pause and give grateful attention to these every day, often earthy things, because they "connect us to vibrant theological truths that dwell *within lived human experiences*."¹³

By inviting us to pause and pay attention to the sacramentality of all life, daily prayer calls us to the wisdom work of savoring life. It evokes within us an appetite for life and invites from us a commitment to sustaining life and to making the delights of life available to all people. Perhaps daily prayer can teach us how to be at home in the universe, sunset to sunrise to sunset, in a wisely reflective way that renews and redeems the earth and its peoples.

¹²For a discussion of wisdom and work in Exodus, see Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture—An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 139–54.

¹³Jill Crainshaw, "Wording Wisdom: The Wise, Strange, and Holy Work of Worship," *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy* 3–13, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 8, 2013).

Daily Prayer as Saving Action

Liturgical theologian Lawrence Hull Stookey writes that “to be deeply Christian is to know and live out the conviction that the whole human family dwells at the intersection of time and eternity.”¹⁴ Where do time and eternity touch? Time and eternity touch in those moments and places where God has made God’s home with humanity.

That is one of the most profound gifts of the Gospel story. God’s Word—God’s Wisdom—was with God at the beginning of time (Gen 1, Prov 8:1, John 1:1). Then, in the midst of time, God’s Word—God’s Wisdom—became flesh and lived among God’s people (John 1:14).¹⁵ God—Wisdom and Word—dwelt upon the earth in the person of Jesus. Jesus’ body was nourished by the gifts of seed, soil, and rain. Jesus’ feet stirred up dust on city streets. Jesus ate and drank. Jesus felt rain fall on his face and squinted his eyes on sunny days. Jesus lived here, on the earth, and so do we.

The practices of daily prayer can stir within us wonder and awe at the fact that we, like Jesus, dwell here on God’s benevolent earth. We, like Jesus, are part of God’s life-sustaining creation. We eat and drink. We feel rain and sun on our faces. Our bodies are nourished

¹⁴Lawrence Hull Stookey, *Calendar: Christ’s Time in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 2.

¹⁵A number of scholars link *logos* in John with “wisdom” in Hebrew and Greek sources. Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker (*Saving Paradise*, 49) write that “in the Septuagint, the Hebrew feminine noun *Hokmah* (Wisdom) in Proverbs became *Sophia* (Wisdom), which was linked to Word, as the principle of creation.” This link between *logos* and Wisdom emerges in the first chapter of the Gospel of John. See also Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), cxxv; Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroads, 2002); Sheri D. Kling, “Wisdom became flesh: An analysis of the prologue to the Gospel of John,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 40, no. 3: 179–87, *ATLA Serials, Religion Collection*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 8, 2013); Sharon Ringe, *Wisdom’s Friends: Community and Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), web (accessed December 8, 2013).

by the fruits of the earth. Indeed, God's good creation daily saves us by providing for our physical needs and offering to us sensual and spiritual delights.

When we give prayerful attention to the rhythms of the earth—sunset into night, night breaking into dawn, morning giving way to noon and afternoon, and afternoon drawing us toward yet again another sunset—we are reminded: God continues to dwell *with* us here on this earth, our home. God is incarnate *in* us, in our lives. God is at home with us in the neighborhoods and cities where we laugh and play, worship and work, lament and celebrate. God is saving—redeeming—us every day.

Perhaps that means that the work of daily prayer is, in a sense, saving work, as it shapes in us the desire to follow Jesus' concrete examples of generous love for all people and attentive care for creation. Theologian Rebecca Ann Parker expresses it this way in *A House for Hope: The Promise of Progressive Religion for the Twenty-first Century*:

To say paradise is accessible here and now is not to say the world is perfect or that we should focus on the good and deny the evil and pain around and within us. The serpent lives in the garden, and paradise is a place of struggle, a place where suffering happens and where destructive systems that harm life have to be resisted. But as the early Christian church understood, here is where the hand of comfort can be extended, the deep breath can be taken, and we can live at home in the world, knowing this is enough.¹⁶

This knowledge, this wisdom, is fostered as we pray together through each day's hours and minutes. And when we foster this wisdom

¹⁶John A. Buehrens and Rebecca Ann Parker, *A House for Hope: The Promise of Progressive Religion for the Twenty-first Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 15, Nook Book.

through prayer, its gifts are birthed in us. We become people who extend hands of care, who with generosity and hospitality serve others so that they, in turn, can savor and serve.

The novelist E. B. White is credited with reflecting in an interview that “if the world were merely seductive, that would be easy. If it were merely challenging, that would be no problem. But I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (or savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day.”¹⁷

By taking up daily prayer perhaps we can learn how rhythms of saving and savoring dance together in our lives and communities. Indeed, when we pray daily, we learn anew how to savor God’s here-and-now gifts of generous grace. We are also challenged to recommit ourselves with each sunset and sunrise to reclaiming, renewing, and even saving God’s good earth and to being mindful of and prophetically thankful for the beauty and value of all God’s people.

¹⁷Martha White, ed., *In the Words of E. B. White: Quotations from America’s Most Companionable Writers* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

Interlude

Saying Goodbye to the Night

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. . . . God has made everything suitable for its time. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live.

—from Ecclesiastes

I had an old dog once. He was not always old. He became old as he and I journeyed life together over a decade or so. His name was Deacon.

My friends said Deacon was an apt companion for a liturgical theologian because he was devoted to rituals. Deacon was committed to “the way we do things every day,” from getting up at the precise getting-up hour to walking each morning without fail, to eating at the same time every day, to sitting together in our favorite chair at the appropriate time every evening.

As Deacon grew older, he needed more assistance with his last trip outdoors before going to bed. This required a change in our nightly ritual from sending Deacon out the backdoor alone into our fenced yard to suiting him up with harness and leash and walking with him up and down the sidewalk out front. Much to my surprise Deacon embraced with his usual fervor this change of his nighttime ritual act. I was less enthusiastic.

“You’re a liturgist,” Sheila said when I complained about the new nighttime outings. “Can’t you turn this into a meaningful ritual? Maybe you can think of it as saying goodbye to the night. Don’t you liturgical theologians love that sort of thing?”

Sheila had a point, and I began to consider how Deacon was teaching me to pay attention to the night. As I became more intentional about saying goodbye to the night, a new orientation to God's presence seeped into my bones and recalibrated how I embraced the final hours of each day. Over time as Deacon and I wandered up and down our neighborhood sidewalks I began to reflect on the happenings of the day as I looked up into the expanse of a sometimes clear, sometimes muted, night sky, and in spite of myself I began to experience wonder in my heart and in the soles of my feet—in the marrow of my bones.

A nighttime goodbye chant began to emerge as autumn gave way to winter and our walks continued. I was surprised that as the chant emerged from the womb of the evening, its arc stretched from sunrise to sunset and across the human and canine life span to praise and petition an unexpected divine companion—a Holy Other—who met us each night to walk alongside us. A ritual devised to meet the needs of an aging dog had become a sacred prayer discipline. Deacon and I were embodying compline.

Liturgical theologian James K.A. Smith cites the following by the character Keats in *Bright Star*, a film about poet John Keats:

A poem needs understanding through the senses. . . . The point of diving in a lake is not immediately to swim to the shore but to be *in* the lake, to luxuriate in the sensation of water. You do not work the lake out. It is an experience beyond thought. Poetry soothes and emboldens the soul to accept mystery.¹

¹ James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 47.

The same might be said of daily rituals like saying goodbye to the night that emerge because of some practical need in our life. These rituals, like diving into a lake, are experiences beyond thought. These rituals, like poetry, have the potential to embolden us to embrace, even to incarnate in our very bones, mystery.

Nuclear physicist, theologian, and astronomy professor Paul Wallace writes that when we look up into the skies on a clear night, we can see about three thousand stars. Then he startles his readers by noting “that if we were to remove our home planet from under our feet we would see 3000 more” stars beneath us.² My nighttime ritual with Deacon confirmed for me Wallace’s insight. The cosmos holds more life than we can fathom. But here and there, now and then, we can feel in our bones with wonder what eludes our eyes and imaginations.

Something sacramental happened through that undesired nighttime ritual that shaped my way of being in the world. This is the potential of rituals that both in intentional and unintentional ways become sacred liturgies of a sort; acquired habits can and do shape our dispositions toward and actions in the world. Saying goodbye to the night became for me a way to be *in* the night and, if but for a moment, to dwell in the cosmic mystery I felt all around me and beneath my feet.

When the sun lifts its head in the eastern sky,
 And the birds begin to sing,
 We give thanks, O God, for the dawning light,
 And the symphony of hope it brings.

² Paul Wallace, *Stars Beneath Us: Finding God in the Evolving Cosmos* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2016), vii.

Fill my feet with the joy of the morning.
Tune each tendon to the sounds of your grace.
Let each step I take through the streets of the city
Be a note in this hymn of praise.

When we say our farewells to another day,
And the stars begin to shine,
We give thanks, O God, for the moon at night,
And its promises of rest sublime.

Fill my dreams with the hopes of tomorrow.
Lay me down to sleep and give my soul your peace.
Restore my hands; bless my feet; calm my restless thoughts.
May the worries of the day begin to cease.

When age takes its toll on my body
And my hands become feeble and frail,
I will lift them up to give thanks to you
And I'll pray for the strength to sail

Over the river Jordan
Under your stars and your light.
Please guide my boat to the other shore
As I say goodbye to the night.