



## Invitation

This self-guided Advent retreat isn't about adding another thing to your holiday schedule. It's about creating space to experience the sacred and make meaning from this remarkable and challenging time. Participants will receive weekly emails on Monday morning featuring a selection of music, artwork, reflection, and poetry. An optional online gathering on Wednesdays from 7-8 pm EST gives participants opportunities to offer responses and engage with others. RSVP to [info@gracechurchredhill.org](mailto:info@gracechurchredhill.org) to join.

## Into the Gloaming

The season of Advent affords us the opportunity to remember, express, and anticipate the coming of Christ. We remember the coming of Christ to Bethlehem, we express the spirit of Christ in our lives as believers, and we anticipate a future coming of Christ and the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. *Welcoming Our Longest Nights* was inspired, in part, by my (Emily's) reading of *Learning to Walk in the Dark* by Barbara Brown Taylor. Taylor writes that "If there is any truth to the teaching that spiritual reality is divided into halves, it is the truth that those pairs exist in balance, not opposition. What can light possibly mean without dark? Who knows spirit without flesh? Is anyone altogether good or altogether evil? Where is the church that exists outside the world?" I have always found it difficult to embrace dualities instead of binaries, both/and rather than either/or. This has been in especially stark relief this year as I've found myself trying to create space to honor the dualities of my experience in a global pandemic -- both sorrow and joy, loss and unexpected gain, constraint and freedom, disillusionment and hope.

The four themes of this year's self-guided Advent retreat are meant to reflect the shadow sides of the more "traditional" Advent themes -- doubt as the shadow of hope, discord as the shadow of peace, sorrow as the shadow of joy, and contempt as the shadow of love. Our invitation is to explore these themes as portals to a deeper conversation with the breadth and depth of human experience and to cultivate a posture of welcome towards these themes as we discover them in ourselves, others, and the world around us.

### **"A Blessing for Traveling in the Dark" by Jan Richardson**

Go slow if you can.  
Slower.  
More slowly still.  
Friendly dark or fearsome,  
this is no place  
to break your neck  
by rushing,  
by running,  
by crashing into what you cannot see.

Then again, it is true:  
different darks have different tasks,

and if you have arrived here unawares,  
if you have come  
in peril  
or in pain,  
this might be no place you should dawdle.

I do not know what these shadows  
ask of you,  
what they might hold  
that means you good  
or ill.  
It is not for me to reckon  
whether you should linger  
or you should leave.

But this is what  
I can ask for you:

That in the darkness there be a blessing.  
That in the shadows there be a welcome.  
That in the night you be encompassed  
by the Love that knows  
your name.

## **Preparations**

If possible, set aside a time in the day that is free from distractions. Take a few moments to prepare your space. You may want to gather a few items, such as a candle, journal, or other symbolic elements, that encourage contemplation and reflection. Feel free to adjust these materials to suit your needs and your landscape.



*Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*, 1991 by Cornelia Parker

## Week 1: Welcoming Doubt – the Shadow Side of Hope

### Opening Meditation

[A Blessing for Traveling in the Dark by Nan Macmillan](#)

### Reading

*But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.* Mark 13:32

### Reflection

If Advent is a season of anticipation, then it seems understandable that hope would be its natural traveling companion. Hope is often synonymous with belief and associated with qualities like confidence, trust, assurance, and certainty. As its inverse, doubt is sometimes interchangeable with suspicion, skepticism, and hesitancy. As someone who is often thinking in terms of bodies and bodily movement, I find myself drawn to the embodied sensations I recognize as "doubt." What emerges for me is *doubt as a felt-sense of suspension*.

Nature provides us with many avenues to perceive the kinetic energy of suspension: the cresting ocean wave, the fluffy dandelion seed pod drifting on the wind, the saturated cloud accumulating and releasing raindrops. Our bodily selves provide us with even more intimate evidence. The regular rhythm of our breathing includes a moment of suspension in the transition between our inhales and exhales. The transfer of weight from one foot to another in walking or running is imbued with buoyancy as we press into the earth on one side and launch ourselves up and

forward on the other. Inherent in these actions of suspension is the ability to yield – if only for the briefest of moments – to the force of gravity and the support of the earth.

But what does suspension have to do with doubt or with Advent, for that matter? Perhaps, on a fundamental level, we are always already in the process of suspension. We hover between sunrise and sunset, between beginnings and endings of this season, this year, this global pandemic, the now and the not yet. Ultimately, we are all poised between birth and death. My teacher and mentor, Nancy Stark Smith, calls this moment in dance improvisation “the gap.” She writes

“Where you are when you don’t know where you are is one of the most precious spots offered by improvisation. It is a place from which more directions are possible than anywhere else. I call this place the Gap... Moments that once were easily and automatically filled have become uneasily and consciously unfilled. By leaving them unfilled, I’m not only breaking a “momentum of being,” a pattern of behavior, but I’m bringing attention and charge to a moment that would have passed without remark... Being in a gap is like being in a fall before you touch bottom. You’re suspended – in time as well as space – and you don’t really know how long it’ll take to get “back.”

Practicing doubt as a felt-sense of suspension offers me new opportunities to engage with the uncertainties and complexities of this season with curiosity, creativity, and availability. Do I want to keep making the same movements? Are there new patterns of thinking, feeling or acting that are arising to me? Ultimately, doubt becomes the mutually enabling condition for what Frank Ostaseski calls “mature hope,” a hope that is not dependent on a particular outcome, a capacity to be fully alive to life regardless of current circumstances.

### **“Sweet Darkness” by David Whyte**

When your eyes are tired  
the world is tired also.  
When your vision has gone,  
no part of the world can find you.

Time to go into the dark  
where the night has eyes  
to recognize its own.  
There you can be sure  
you are not beyond love.

The dark will be your home tonight.  
The night will give you a horizon  
further than you can see.

You must learn one thing.  
The world was made to be free in.

Give up all other worlds  
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet  
confinement of your aloneness to learn  
anything or anyone  
that does not bring you alive  
is too small for you.

## Questions & Prompts for Reflection

- Where are the moments of suspension in your life? How alike or different are they to your experience of doubt?
- *Cold Dark Matter* (image at beginning) is made up of the recomposed fragments of garden shed suspended in mid-explosion. What thoughts, images, or associations does it evoke in you? What connections can you make between this work and the concept of doubt?
- Consider exploring the embodied qualities of suspension this week. Bring your attention to the moment of transition between inhale and exhale or your footsteps. What other embodied experiences of suspension do you notice?

## Online Gathering

Join us Wednesdays 7-8 pm EST for an informal gathering to offer responses and interact with others participating in the retreat. Connect [here](#).



[Nightscape](#) 2001, by Jean Shin

## Week 2 Welcoming Discord – the Shadow Side of Peace

### Opening Meditation

Put Everything in Order by Craig Green and Cleo Keller

### Reading

*For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace', when there is no peace. They acted shamefully, they committed abomination; yet they were not ashamed, they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the Lord. Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it and find rest for your souls. Jeremiah 6:13-16*

### Reflection

Since February, Trump has made the claim that COVID-19 will disappear 38 times according to a recent CNN report. On March 6, 2020, for example, President Trump declared, "I don't think people are panicking. I said last night – we did an interview on Fox last night, a town hall. I think it was very good. And I said, 'Calm. You have to be calm.' It'll go away."

I'm reminded of the warning in Jeremiah, "They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace', when there is no peace." The virus continues to ravage our country and the world, leaving health workers exhausted and families grieving in its perilous path. All the while, political divisions in America have widened and calcified. Conspiracy theories, fear, and entrenched hatred fray the remnant of our social fabric. Even the seemingly innocuous mask has been tossed around like a political football. And, to top it all off, the country is embroiled in a less than peaceful transfer of presidential power. In late 2020, there is no peace.

For first century Palestinians, the Pax Romana gave them no peace. As the colonized, the Palestinians experienced social upheaval first-hand: the violent loss of land, livelihood, and community. This was Jesus's context, and in this tension between the claim of "peace" and the violence of lived reality, he taught God's way of life – a critical dissent to the false peace imposed, an imaginative alternative to the imperial oppression at hand.

Yeats managed to describe Jesus' time, his time, and ours when he wrote:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

In Advent, we welcome a revelation of rupture — the distance between how things "seem to be" and how they are. Instead of a false peace, we acknowledge that things fall apart. This year the very much alive coronavirus and the very real disregard of black bodies have thrown us into confusion, vexation, and grief. And with our nation's political divisions and our own particular struggles, it's no surprise that we're the ones who fall apart.

Advent's long nights of incubation give us permission to locate peace in us, in our dividing cells, in our discordant selves. We need this time to acknowledge the fragments, the pieces, the splinters that crowd our hearts and minds.

We look to the coming of Christ not as a magical cure of the chaos, not as an escape hatch, not as an opiate that numbs the alienation. Christ comes in cell division—the conception, gestation, and birth of a baby. Christ's advent happens in the midst of the earth's astonishing biology—birth, bodies, cells, a dizzying array of life forms. We look to Christ's coming as a fresh experience of a nuanced peace, internal and eternal.

The peace that passes all human understanding is not a condition that comes from outside our biology; it is a force deep within our beating hearts. It is biological and spiritual, it is generative, imaginative, visionary. It brings about our own rebirth. In this fragmented place. At this time of discord.

Let us treat our individual and collective wounds with care and, with Jeremiah, "Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls."

### **"The Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats**

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know

That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

### **Prayer adapted from John Philip Newell**

*In this incubation time, in the quiet of these hours, in the fragments and pieces of our lives, during these long nights, we wait for Christ's birth and for our rebirth, that we may give you thanks for the night, for the anarchy, for the discord, that we may be open to night's senses, that we may remember the ground from which all things come, that we might know you, as the presence in the mystery, as the stirring in our soul, as the strength of Earth's body, as the flight of birds, as the breath that keeps us alive. In this Advent, we wait, that we might know you as the authentic peace that lives and breathes within us all. That we might live and breathe that peace. That we might live and breathe you. Amen.*

### **Music**

[We Grow Accustomed to the Dark by Nan Macmillan](#)

### **Questions & Prompts for Reflection**

- Where are the fragments, pieces, and slivers crowding your heart and mind? Are they intruders? How might you welcome them?
- In Jean Shin's *Nightscape*, the fabric fragments, from garment manufacturers, are sewn together and layered to make the nightscape. How are our thoughts and feelings in these long nights like layers of fabric? Do even the jumbled fabric pieces create some coherence?
- How might you use your breath as one way to draw your discordant self together for brief moments of peace? When you walk, how might you sense the unity of the different parts of your body? And the unity of the body with the sky, the trees, the pavement and the ground beneath it?

### **Online Gathering**

Join us Wednesdays 7-8 pm EST for an informal gathering to offer responses and interact with others participating in the retreat. Connect [here](#).





*noBody*, 2002 by Sasha Waltz

## Week 3 Welcoming Sorrow – the Shadow Side of Joy

### Opening Meditation

*Within Our Darkest Night* by Craig Green and Cleo Keller

### Reading

*Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.* Psalm 126:6

### Reflection

The year after my father died, I tried desperately to avoid making a dance about it. I'm not sure why I did this, but, perhaps my sorrow was too raw, my grief too vulnerable, my loss too recent for anything as coherent as choreography. Unfortunately, I avoided my sorrow entirely, not just in my dance-making. I didn't set out to obstruct my grieving process intentionally. But when sadness swelled inside me, it was as if a great dark wall of water began to gather above me, a towering tsunami of anguish and despair. At any moment, this murky wave threatened to come crashing down on me, engulfing me in an agony of loss.

One of the challenges of sorrow is in the limitations of language and the difficulty we sometimes confront in translating embodied sensations and perceptions into verbal utterance. In the English language, the word "sorrow" conveys a sense of something that exceeds mere sadness. It is a deep distress, often associated with loss. Sorrow also conveys a sense of durability – a prolonged desolation tinged with regret or resignation. Sometimes words or phrases from other languages offer more satisfying descriptions. *Lebensmüde* is a German word that translated literally means

“life-tired” and describes a state of being world-weary, fed up, restless, or dissatisfied with life. *Winterweaving* is an Old English word that means “winter sorrow.” It suggests a quality of sadness that is as enduring and bitterly cold as winter. These words provide a finer level of emotional granularity, helping us to be more present with our feelings, and, potentially, opening us up to new ways of moving through them.

But sometimes experience exceeds verbal expression. Then I must dance. I often begin my choreographic process with a single strand, a thread of an idea that I weave together with other fibers of thought, image, and action as I work collaboratively with the dancers. I began the process of constructing *Here and Not Here* with an intention to follow a thread of hope. At some point, I brought in a collection of childhood photographs, and we developed a series of vignettes that elaborated and expanded on my recollection of these scenes. Eventually, what emerged was a reimagination of memory against the backdrop of a tumbledown structure.

In the days before the performance, I came across an [essay](#) in which author Brandon Shaw analyzes a “phantom duet” from German choreographer Sasha Waltz’s *noBody*. In this duet, choreographed shortly after the death of Waltz’s mother, a “living” dancer carries a “dead” dancer on his back. Shaw describes, “The living dancer struggles beneath the weight of grief, striving to conduct himself as he had previously, to calibrate to his scarcely responsive appendage. He rises, seems to acquire a gait for a moment, and collapses again to the ground, performing a choreographic critique of any notion of a linear process through the stages of grief.”

Importantly, an ensemble of companions surrounds and observes the duet, dispelling the notion that grief should be invisible and solitary. At a crucial moment, the group intercedes in a “communal physical intervention.” Although the effort to bear the weight of the dead is a struggle for one, the burden is light when distributed among the group. They lift, roll, and carry him, engaging in brief duets of their own as if enacting their own memories with the departed.

Shaw likens this depiction of communal grief to a process called “companionship.” Developed by Alan Wolfelt, companionship assumes fellowship with – rather than authority over – the bereaved. It requires presence and attention, a capacity to both give space and draw close. Significantly, companionship involves the sharing of stories. In *noBody*, Shaw observes,

“As the grieving dancer relinquishes his exclusive bond with the dead, he realizes that this phantom has had meaningful relationships with a host of others. The memory of the phantom is not stored exclusively in the grieving dancer’s body, but he might perceive glimpses and hiccups of his loved one in the movements of the [ensemble]. **Death, then, is not only becoming inanimate – becoming “it,” but also a dispersal – becoming “they.” This ensemble is the body of a noBody.**”

Although my dancers never met my father, they became my companions in grief. They enabled me to catch glimpses of childhood memories and, without realizing it, they relieved me of the burden of carrying these memories alone. I still feel the sting of my sorrow, but it isn’t quite as heavy as it used to be. And that brings me an inexplicable gladness.

### “It’s possible” by Rainer Maria Rilke

It’s possible I am pushing through solid rock  
in flintlike layers, as the ore lies, alone;  
I am such a long way in I see no way through,  
and no space: everything is close to my face,  
and everything close to my face is stone.  
I don’t have much knowledge yet in grief  
so this massive darkness makes me small.  
You be the master: make yourself fierce, break in:  
then your great transforming will happen to me,  
and my great grief cry will happen to you.

## Questions & Prompts for Reflection

- Are there sorrows you carry this Advent? What words would you use to describe your experiences? Are there words you might invent?
- Companions can take many forms: friends and loved ones, a cherished pet, a special place, even an imagined friendship with an author or artist. Who are your companions in sorrow?
- Have you found joy in the midst of sorrow? What does that look like in your life?

## Prayer adapted from Rev. M Barclay, enfleshed

*God of love, God of peace,  
Come and comfort all who are grieving.  
Weep with those in sorrow.  
Gather round the circles of remembrance.  
Hear the choirs of gratitude,  
and make Holy all that pours from broken hearts.*

*May your eternal embrace  
your forever love,  
your Divine Presence that is before death,  
companions through death,  
and rises after death,  
be the resting place –  
the place of return –  
where we can always find each other.*

## Online Gathering

Join us Wednesdays 7-8 pm EST for an informal gathering to offer responses and interact with others participating in the retreat. Connect [here](#).



*The Metropolitan Museum of Art* by Joseph Pearson

## Week 4 Welcoming Contempt – the Shadow Side of Love

### Opening Meditation

[\*Hard Times\* \(Gillian Welch\) sung by Shannon Worrell and Courtney Coker](#)

### Reading

*The Grinch hated Christmas! The whole Christmas season! Now, please don't ask why. No one quite knows the reason. It could be his head wasn't screwed on just right. It could be, perhaps, his shoes were too tight. But I think the most likely reason of all may have been that his heart was two sizes too small... (Later, the Grinch hears the Whoville folks singing Christmas songs even after he had stolen their food, decorations, and gifts.) ...And what happened, then? Well, in Whoville they say — that the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day. And then — the true meaning of Christmas came through, and the Grinch found the strength of ten Grinches, plus two!*

—Dr. Seuss, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ...”

—Matthew 5:43-44

Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

—Martin Luther King Jr., *Loving Your Enemies*

### Reflection

On a recent morning walk, the December sun shone behind me at such an angle that it made my shadow distinct on the ground in front of me. I followed my shadow up the trail as it moved over the contours of the rugged and steep terrain. When the trail took a sharp turn my shadow stealthily moved alongside me, and, as soon as the trail turned again in a westerly direction, there it was flat and stocky on the ground, on a tree trunk, out in front. It was part of the landscape, part of my movement, part of my life as I walked under the sun. I couldn't shake my shadow.

The shadow, in Jungian thought, resides in the psyche, mostly repressed in the sub-conscious, and made up of those feelings and thoughts that scare, shame, or confuse us. It is something we can't shake.

For those in the Northern Hemisphere, as we descend deeper into December, the nights have grown longer until the year's longest night — the Winter Solstice. Thus, Advent is a fitting time to deal with the longest nights of our shadow.

Contempt is a shadow feeling. Contempt, hate, loathing, rage, shame, scorn, envy, fear, these are not feelings most of us want to reveal; we want to keep them hidden in the shadow. But there's no switch to turn them off. We can't wish them away; that's not how the psyche works. They come swiftly uninvited, unwanted, unpolished and often they dominate the other emotions we may be feeling.

Christian Picciolini, a former white nationalist, observes that “people hate other people because they hate something very specifically about themselves, or are very angry about a situation within their own environment, and that is then projected onto other people” ([August 6, 2019, \*The Atlantic\*](#)). That insight describes aspects of the shadow we can't shake. When we perceive threats to our in-group from an out-group, flashes of hatred course through the body. When the motorcyclists gathered in Sturgis, South Dakota this summer, I seethed. Last Saturday when the Proud Boys marched in Washington, harassed counter protestors, and vandalized four churches in support of undoing the election, my blood boiled.

This year has presented many opportunities to feel the shadow of contempt. There have been lots of triggers, like disrupted plans, fear of contagion, police brutality, climate catastrophe, incompetent government leaders, an attempt to mount a coup. There have been moments when I wished death on certain people. In my imagination, I lash out and resort to violence. I feel contempt, scorn, rage flare up in my upper chest. My whole body tightens. My heart compresses. It seems to shrink.

It takes inner work to be aware of our shadow—that contempt and hatred are somehow a part of us. Rumi, in his poem “The Guest House,” encourages the reader to welcome “The dark thought, the shame, the malice./meet them at the door laughing and invite them in./Be grateful for whatever comes./because each has been sent/as a guide from beyond.”

To welcome the dark thought, the shame, the malice does not mean to embrace them or to submit to their destructive force. To welcome our shadow means to greet, acknowledge, and explore these very real thoughts and emotions. By doing so, there's a chance that the beyond might guide us more fully into humility, empathy, and compassion. Our shadow need not dominate or define us.

Martin Luther King Jr. was not thinking about the long nights of Advent when he preached these famous words: “Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.” As we live into these longer nights, however, we once again ascertain their wisdom, their guidance from beyond and deep within, that “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

*In Advent, we wait for light to shine. We wait with the shadow we can't shake for this love to be born. Born to us. Born in us. Enlarging our hearts.*

### **Questions & Prompts for Reflection**

- When do you become aware of your shadow? How do you hold those strong feelings and dark thoughts? What part of your body feels them?
- In Joseph Pearson's photograph, shadows mark the people and capture them in place. Notice shadows today. How does looking at images of shadows or finding your own shadow outside on a sunny day help you to welcome your shadow and those thoughts and feelings you would rather hide?
- How might you use your breath as one way to both welcome your shadow and be filled with love? When you inhale, breathe in daylight; when you exhale, breathe out the night. Inhale, love; exhale, hate. Inhale, your large heart; exhale, your shrunken heart. Inhale, the Spirit of life; exhale, all that detracts from life.

## Music

[\*Winter Solstice Round\*](#) by Craig Green and Cleo Keller

### “The Guest House” by Rumi

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice.  
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.  
Be grateful for whatever comes.  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

### Prayer for Advent adapted from Henri Nouwen

*Holy and incarnate one,  
To be found in both the light  
and the darkness,  
Emanuel in our bodies, relationships, and shadows,  
send your Holy Spirit upon  
our preparations for Christmas.*

*We who have so much to do  
seek quiet spaces to  
bear your voice each day.*

*We who are anxious  
over many things  
look forward to  
your coming among us.*

*We who welcome the long night of contempt  
desire for your love to  
be born in us.*

*We who are blessed in so many ways  
long for the complete joy of your reign.*

*We whose hearts are heavy and small  
seek the joy of your expansive presence.*

*We are your people,  
walking in darkness, yet seeking the light.*

*To you we say, "Come, Lord Jesus."*

*Amen*

### **Winter Solstice & Blue Christmas Prayer Service**

On December 22 at 8:00 pm, GC|RH will offer a virtual **Winter Solstice and Blue Christmas Prayer Service**. There will be no separate online gathering this week.

## An Ending and a Beginning

Dear fellow travelers,

Thank you so much for joining us on our Advent journey. We hope that the seeds planted during this time will quietly unfold as we continue through the Christmas season. On the eve of the solstice I read these [words](#): “The great irony of winter is that the moment that darkness is greatest is also the moment the light is about to return. Each year the winter solstice comes with the promise that the next day will be brighter.” Although the light grows imperceptibly at first, the return of the sun is inevitable. We will almost certainly continue to face doubt, discord, sorrow, and contempt in the coming months, but hope, peace, joy, and love are also our birthright. May we have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to embrace it all.

Be well,  
Emily Wright and Neal Halvorson-Taylor

### “The Winter of Listening” by David Whyte

No one but me by the fire,  
my hands burning  
red in the palms while  
the night wind carries  
everything away outside.

All this petty worry  
while the great cloak  
of the sky grows dark  
and intense  
round every living thing.

All this trying  
to know  
who we are  
and all this  
wanting to know  
exactly  
what we must do.

What is precious  
inside us does not  
care to be known  
by the mind  
in ways that diminish  
its presence.

What we strive for  
in perfection  
is not what turns us  
to the lit angel  
we desire.

What disturbs  
and then nourishes  
has everything  
we need.

What we hate  
in ourselves  
is what we cannot know  
in ourselves but  
what is true  
to the pattern  
does not need  
to be explained.

Inside everyone  
is a great shout of joy  
waiting to be born...