Welcome- “Walking Toward Morning”, Victoria Safford

Scripture Reading (from “Sacred Spaces” by Margaret Silf)

The created world was in its infancy. Nothing was growing. Evolution had not yet begun. There was no rain falling from above, but there was a spring of water coming up from the depths, from the bedrock. This was the water that flowed out over the earth to set in motion the whole pageant of creation. The elements, those basic building blocks of creation, were all present in the first crescendo of fire that we call the Big Bang. They were present in the earth. God took this earth, these same basic elements, and wove them into the fabric of life. These same elements from interstellar space became the elements of the human body. The same energy that had set the process of creation in motion became the breath of life, and the desire for growth that animates every living thing.

From these two sources, the elements of the earth and the living stream of water, life evolved, and the breath of desire flowed through it all and made it live!

It was the garden of original wholeness, and in that wholeness all living things were in bedrock union with the source of their being, whom they called God. They walked with him in the garden of creation. They experienced his constant blessing. They knew how deeply there were interconnected with each other, being formed of the same elements as the earth itself, and animated by the energies of creation. They talked freely with God. Their dialogue was unbroken. There were no power cuts, because they lived and moved and had their being within the source of all power. Their center of gravity was undivided. Their conscious and unconscious selves were one in that deep center.

Until a new presence entwined itself into their hearts. An unseen voice. The voice of suggestion. The voice suggested this: ‘You could be an island, with your own autonomy. There would be less for you to rule, but of that less, you would be the absolute ruler. In your own little world, you could be God. Your kingdom would be yours to control. You would be in charge of your own center of gravity. If you pluck this suggestion down and take it into yourself, your whole view of the world, and your whole understanding of your place in it will change, and you will see that you, not God, are at the center of your world.’

And they plucked the tempting fruit of this suggestion. And they took it in. Or rather, they were taken in by it. And the inner voice was right. Their entire view of creation changed. Their whole understanding of the world changed gear. They felt as if
they were being raised to the level of God. But actually, they were being raised from
the bedrock reality, to the shifting surface view of life. From then on, all they could see
were the islands of each other. They forgot that once they had lived in the bedrock and
known each other, and all creation, in its wholeness.

They rarely saw God after that, because their vision was focused on themselves. They rarely heard him, because their ears were tuned only to the narrow frequency of
their own music. They thought he had banished them from the bedrock union. But in
fact they had banished themselves. A barrier came down between all living things and
the source from which they sprang. It was like a fiery, flashing sword, dividing them
from themselves, dividing them from the very ground of their being.

In the new kingdom of their ego-selves, they discovered they had to fight for their
survival. This wasn't surprising because, after all, every living being had become its
own island kingdom, and every little kingdom had to struggle to keep itself alive and to
guard its boundaries against the demands of all the others. From then on, two acorns
falling from the same oak tree were in competition for the same patch of earth. Two
brothers born of the same parents were in competition for the same piece of land.
Conflict began. Violence, suffering and death followed on its heels. God’s Dream,
which had once been the Deep Dream of every living creature, had become fragmented
into a million little hopes and fears. God’s Desire, expressed in the original wholeness,
had been broken into a million little personalized wants and wishes.

Yet God kept on weaving his Dream. He made tunics of skins for his fallen
creation, to protect them from the worst effects of their choices. Above all, he spread a
shelter over them, called death, not to punish them, but to ensure that their brokenness
should not go on forever. And he kept weaving…

A Few Moments of Silent Reflection

Some Thoughts on Thresholds and New Beginnings
Frame the retreat experience with the “spiritual provisions”

1. Threshold quotes
2. Use spiritual provisions and Intro. To the Rites of Passage
3. Guidelines for group sharing

Some Starter Questions for Sharing and Discussion

I like Margaret Silf’s images of “bedrock unity” and “islands of disconnect” in the creation
story piece:

1. What images do those phrases conjure up in your mind?
2. Can you relate? In what ways do you feel connected to the deeper flow of energy that we consider a higher power or energy in the universe? Personally, culturally, spiritually?

3. From what do you feel disconnected? Why? Personally and culturally....

4. *Islands of our ego selves*... (Adam & Eve) we became protective of our space... invested in our agendas, competitive.....conflict with God's dream ..... Your responses?

5. Ongoing evolution.....God continuing to weave the dream..... evidence of??

6. Where do you feel the need for a new beginning? personally.....culturally...

**Handouts:** “Spiritual Provisions”

1. Ron Pevny article on Rites of Passage
Welcome: “For a New Beginning”, John O'Donohue

Scripture Reading (from “Sacred Spaces” by Margaret Silf)

God looked down on the Earth and wept to see the unravelling of his eternal Dream. Each creature seemed to be pulling, relentlessly, on its own little strand, and no one could see that the integrity of the whole of creation was being torn apart. Their eyes had dimmed so much, and their focus had shortened so dramatically, that they were blinded to what they were doing to each other. It felt like the end of the road. An awakening from a dream that had turned into a nightmare.

God’s tears fell upon creation. They gathered into a running stream, and grew into a raging river. It was a river that could not be crossed. It became a flood that covered the Earth. No repair work would mend this broken Dream. To all God’s pleadings for a return to wholeness and sanity, the answer came re-echoing back from every corner of creation: ‘No!’

And it was then that God refused to take ‘No!’ for an answer. Surely, he pondered, life is stronger than death, and creation is stronger than destruction. And, contrary to all human common sense and reason, God resolved to build a bridge across the waters of destruction. It would be a bridge to new possibilities and new beginnings, but it would demand of humankind a special kind of trust and courage. It would be a bridge that called upon men and women to work as co-creators in their own future. This challenge would call them beyond their present limits, but it was the only way to move beyond the impasse.

God moved unseen among the sons and daughters of Earth, and came across Noah. Noah was a man who had lived a long, long life and had struggled to keep the fire of God’s Dream burning in his own heart and in the hearts of his children. God decided to take a chance on Noah’s trust and courage, and his ability dream big, unreasonable dreams. He asked him to build a boat.

‘Noah,’ God said, ‘soon my grief will wash the world away, but you shall build an ark to carry you and your children and grandchildren safely across the flood waters. Will you trust me for a new beginning out of all this destruction? Together we can begin again, in new ways, to dream my Dream again for a new generation. If you will trust me, then build an ark as I shall instruct you, and when the ark is ready, take on board your own family, and take a male and female of every species of living creature. You and they shall be the seedcorns of a new beginning.’
And Noah trusted the Dream and built his ark. And when it was ready he and his family went on board, taking with them a male and female of every kind of creature. Thus the seed of the future was cast upon the waters that had flushed the past away.

Noah was the last to board the ark, and as he did so, God closed the door behind him. Once the future had been entrusted to this fragile bridge, there was no way back.

For forty days, the ark, with its cargo of hope and promise, tossed on the seas of despair. The waters that appeared to be destroying all life, all hope, were the same waters that floated the little ark of promise and set it free to search out the new beginnings. Eventually, a fresh wind blew over the face of the Earth, and ever so gradually the waters began to ebb.

Noah tentatively opened a porthole and peered outside. Still there was nothing in sight except water. He sent out a dove, but after a while the dove returned, because she could find nowhere to perch, out in the watery world. Noah waited for seven more days, and sent the dove out again. In the evening the dove returned, but this time she was carrying a sprig from an olive tree in her beak. Noah realized then that dry land was emerging out of the devastation. He waited a further seven days and sent the dove out for a third time. And she never returned. The ark came to rest on the higher slopes of a mountain. Noah opened the hatches, and set free the seed of a new beginning.

God rejoiced to see his Dream reborn. He desired to mark this moment eternally, as sign to all creation that hope is more real and permanent than despair. He shone his perfect, invisible light – the light of joy – through all the tears that would ever flow out of human grief and suffering. That invisible light was broken down, through our tears, into all the colours of the rainbow. And God stretched the rainbow across the heavens, so that we might never forget the promise that holds all creation in being. This is the promise that life and joy are the permanent reality, like the blue of the sky, and that all the roadblocks we encounter are like the clouds – black and threatening perhaps, but never the final word. Because the final word is always ‘Yes!’

A Few Moments of Silent Reflection

Some Thoughts on Thresholds and New Beginnings

1. Jan can use the transitions questions to invite participants to consider what those thresholds are in their own lives.

2. Jan can refer to the John O'Donohue article about thresholds (very nice general piece) and invite folks to ponder what they leave behind.
Sharing and Discussion-

1. Invite group to bring some symbol or object of their new threshold

Handouts:

1. Transitions questions (or perhaps they could just be read aloud)
2. John O'Donohue article on Thresholds
3. “Wholeness” journaling page available for anyone that might like it.
Welcome- “The Layers”, Stanley Kunitz

Scripture Reading (from “Sacred Spaces” by Margaret Silf)

The sun had set, and Jacob stopped to find a place to sleep. The ground was not very inviting, so he lay down where he could find a place, and took a stone for his pillow. He had a dream. He dreamed there was a ladder that began on the ground right where he was lying, and stretched all the way up to heaven. Angels were going up and down the ladder all the time. Then God was standing next to him, talking to him in his dream. ‘I am the God of your whole story and your people’s story,’ God told him. “I am giving you this ground you are lying on. It’s yours now. It is the space where your story shall be told and the story of all the human family. This is the earth of your own experience. It is the infinity of all human experience, from north to south, from east to west, through all time, for as long as human life shall last on Earth. You can be sure that in every part of this experience, I am with you. Wherever you travel I will keep you in my care, and at the end of all your travelling, I will bring you safely back to your truest self and your eternal home. I will never be apart from you, ever. You have my promise.’

Jacob woke up with a start and exclaimed, ‘Truly, God is here, and I never realized! This little patch of stony ground is a place of wonder, where I have felt the presence of God! This little corner of Earth is nothing less than the dwelling place of God and the gateway to heaven!’

The next morning, overwhelmed by the deep truth his dream had opened up in him, Jacob took the piece of stone he had been using as a pillow and placed it upright as a marker for all other travelers. He poured oil over it, as if to anoint it. He declared it to be a sacred space.

A Few Moments of Silent Reflection

Some Thoughts on Thresholds and New Beginnings

1. Share objects to describe our thresholds.
2. Refer to Rites of Passage piece by Ron Pevny and share some of experience of retreat.
3. Threshold experience (liminal) or neutral zone.
4. Refer to dreams and journals.
Sharing and Discussion

Handouts:

1. Ron Pevny article on Rites of Passage
Welcome- “The Guest House”, Rumi

Reading (from “Sacred Spaces” by Margaret Silf)

It was an ordinary day on the hillside, and Moses was looking after his father-in-law’s very ordinary flocks. We might imagine him walking the hillside, noticing the dried-up grassy hillocks, examining the sparse growth of plants and bushes, and then scanning the distant skies, blue-white with the heat of the day, with just a few clusters of fleecy cloud relieving the monotony.

Then, just a few hundred yards away, a glimmer of fire. A crackle, as of burning twigs. Sometimes the shepherds would light small fires on the hillside, and brew themselves a pot of tea with the aromatic herbs that grew on Mount Horeb. But there was no sign of any other human presence here. Moses went closer to investigate.

The bush was on fire. There was no doubt and that. But it was not burning. It was not getting any less. On the contrary, it was becoming more and more vibrantly present, or so it seemed to Moses’ wide-eyed gaze. And as he drew closer, he began to realize this was a special moment in his life. The whole ambience of the hillside seemed to be changing. Everything around him felt more real and looked more clear that it had done before. A moment of heightened awareness? Whatever was happening, he sensed that some barrier between the seen and the unseen had been breached, and he knew the energy that was setting the bush alight was creative, not destructive. It was bringing forth a significant change in his life, but as yet he had so idea of what that could be.

Moses was overawed. Within his terms of reference, such a feeling, such an experience, could only come from God. ‘Come closer,’ the bush seemed to invite him. He approached, in silent, expectant wonder, until the bush spoke again: ‘Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.’

Then the source of the life-giving flame made itself known to Moses: ‘I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses covered his face, overwhelmed.

The sacred moment had been sealed, as God and Moses acknowledged its power and its meaning. Only then could God reveal its purpose. ‘I have seen the misery in which my people are living,’ he said. ‘I have heard their cries of desperation in the face of so much oppression and heartache. I desire to free them from everything that enslaves them, and bring them to a place where their hearts can be eternally at home. Their cry for help has reached me. I am sending you to be their deliverer. And
in everything you do I shall be with you. This burning bush is a sign of that promise. It burns with the energy of my constant presence, and it is your spiritual fuel for the task that lies ahead of you. And when my people have been freed, they will come to this mountain, knowing it to be holy ground, because here God and humankind have met, a new vision has been opened up, and a new stage in my people’s journey has begun.’

A Few Moments of Silent Reflection

Some Thoughts on Thresholds and New Beginnings

1. Heightened awareness in the desert……Burning Bush moments
2. Share William Bridges Transitions thoughts

Sharing and Discussion
Welcome- “Step into the Arms of God”, Joan Chittister

Scripture Reading (from “Sacred Spaces” by Margaret Silf)

It was a normal morning in every way, when quite suddenly the atmosphere changed. I felt as though I had been immersed in a warm pool of light. Time stood still, for I do not know how long. Nothing at all could have harmed me in that moment. Quite the opposite. I felt as though I was coming to life, really deeply and vibrantly. As though someone had ignited a beautiful candle deep inside me. For a moment I just let myself be enfolded in this amazing experience. I became aware of a bright presence beside me, and a clear but gentle voice, speaking to my heart. It felt as though my own being was in resonance with the being of all creation and the voice was the music of that resonance.

‘I come to you in peace, Mary, and I bring you joy.’ The angel said. ‘The maker of all that is longs to be in perfect relationship with you and with all creation.’

I was deeply disturbed by this greeting, but the disturbance was like the stirring of the depths of my being that no one had ever touched before. I didn’t know how to respond. I was overawed.

‘Don’t be afraid, Mary,’ the angel continued. ‘God, our creator, grieves for his lost and lonely people. When Earth was new and humankind first chose its own, lesser, way, he clothed you in your human bodies and gave you the Earth to tend. He never ceases from his care for you, nor sets aside the weaving of his Dream. Now he chooses you, and asks you this: “Will you weave a tunic for me? I need a tunic of humanness in which I can become one with my creation. Will you make that human body for my eternal presence? Will you accept the coming of the fullness of my love for all creation, and weave that love into a human form? Will you give birth to my love, so that all creation might be restored to wholeness?”

I stood speechless before the mystery that the angel unfolded to me. He read my thoughts. ‘Mary,’ he said, ‘when a human child is conceived, a new “island” comes into being in the ocean of life. But the child that you will conceive is a child of the bedrock oneness of creation, and he will draw all people home to wholeness. He will be conceived through the very energy of life itself. He will not be your child alone, but the child of all, and for all. When the Christ-child comes to birth in all creation, beginning with you, then the Father can lift the protecting veil of death from the face of his people and set them free for forever-ness.’
I knew that to deny this all-enfolding presence in which I was being held would be to deny my very self. To turn from the presence would be to turn away from my own deepest longings. I gazed into the light that held me, and I gave my consent to all that the angel had said.

A Few Moments of Silent Reflection

Some Thoughts on Thresholds and New Beginnings

The new beginning—the “call”

1. Saying Yes, Yes, and Yes!.....affirmations for new beginning-Mary Catherine Bateson, Composing a Further Life

Sharing and Discussion

To Ponder:

1. How might I ceremonialize my new beginning, my transition?: a poem, a song, a drama…simple is good…(anyone that would like to do that next week)
Welcome: “Yom Kippur Prayer”

Scripture Reading (from “Sacred Spaces” by Margaret Silf)

It had been the longest Sabbath ever. Mary, from the village of Magdala, had been aching to go to the place where her dearest friend had been buried the previous Friday. He had been executed as a dangerous troublemaker. She was still numb from the shock of it all. She knew him better than that. They all did – all his friends. There was nothing she would not do for him, even now. But now was too late. His body had been sealed up in a rock tomb since Friday, and now at last she was free to go and shed her tears at his graveside.

Friday had taken Mary across a terrible boundary in her thinking and feeling. She had been so sure her friend was going to save the world, and that nothing could destroy him. Standing here at the gateway to this burial garden, brought home to her the undeniable fact that her hopes and dreams had been dashed. She felt as though all she had ever lived for was buried here with him, behind that rock.

The rock! She gasped at what she saw. The rock had moved. And the guards, set there to watch over it, were fast asleep. She peered inside, and all she saw was emptiness. That yawning empty space shook her mind apart, and took her right back to the feelings she had once had, when her own life had been like a gaping hole, aching with emptiness – until he had come into her life and filled it to the brim.

Hardly aware of what she was doing, Mary ran back into the warm light of the morning sun. In the distance she could see someone tending the plants and raking the path. She went up to him and poured her anxious questions all over him. ‘My friend who was buried there – over there,’ she cried, ‘He’s gone! Has someone taken the body away? Please, please tell me where he is if you know!’

The gardener turned round slowly, and laid his rake aside. The light of his eyes seemed to burn into her heart. ‘If you’ve seen someone take him away, please tell me,’ she repeated. Then the gardener spoke to her. He spoke her name, and the word was charged, and supercharged, with love:

‘Mary!’

‘Master?’ she whispered, as she ran towards him and flung her arms around him, recognizing the friend she had lost and found again.

‘Don’t try to hold on to me, Mary,’ he said. ‘I have crossed the boundary and you cannot fully follow me – not yet. Instead, go back now to our friends, and tell them what you have seen here. Tell them there is nothing to fear. To cross the boundary of death
is just a gateway into a new, eternal form of life. You are not yet quite ready for that birthing. There is still much for you to do here on your side of the boundary. Tell our friends that I am going ahead of them to Galilee, and I will be with you in all you still have to do. I will breathe my living energy through all your days. Let me go now, Mary. We cannot return to how things were. We have crossed the threshold now, to how things shall become.’

Mary crossed her own boundary that morning. She let go of the desire to return to how things had been, and embraced the call to move forward across the threshold into the unknown of how things would become. She returned to the group of friends and became the first apostle of the Christian gospel.

A Few Moments of Silent Reflection

Some Thoughts on Thresholds and New Beginnings

1. Reincorporation.....

Sharing and Discussion

Revisit our objects and reflect on any learnings: (Ceremonialize a change in your life)
Sending forth.....

Take homes
Packet of prayers/poems/quotes