



Nazareth Letter December 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters

A Good Measure, Pressed down, shaken together and overflowing

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back. ' (Luke 34-36)

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Nazareth

I am writing to you this December to wish you all in Nazareth Advent prayers and a very Happy Christmas and New Year.

The Nazareth Community and Companions of Nazareth continue to be a source of much blessing to me and I hope all of you too.

In November I attended a retreat led by Rowan Williams which took the above title. The retreat looked at the example and teaching of those who combine a profound contemplative practice with active involvement in the service of the vulnerable. It seemed as if the whole retreat was addressed to me... to us.

A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap

It is a beautiful description of what we are trying to live and discovering to be true. When we learn to contemplate our hearts overflow. The grace of God is something poured into us. It is a love, a compassion and a joy beyond our imaginings. We are like acorn cups beneath a waterfall. We are not large enough for what God wants to give- but in contemplation our souls are enlarged. The pressing down may at first seem like we are losing our freedom, but quite the contrary-rather grace is being concentrated in us- and the pressing down is both like a wine press extracting the juice but also expanding us and overflowing. It is both within and beyond. And we are not alone in this process we are shaken together- together we become this wine. Together we receive overflows from the other. We become Communion.

The Life We Seek

1. We seek to be where we are now: in the world. Against all the temptations to be somewhere else. I recently sat next to someone watching *King Lear* who was trying to answer text messages throughout. It struck me that was a difficult duality. We sometimes think that God is absent but the absent God, as St Augustine pointed out, is actually the absence of us. Our calling is to become present – to come **down** to where we are and where we need to be.
2. We are seeking to see things as they are. Not as we would like to see things but with an inner truthfulness- a transparency which is freeing because it lets go of deception and the masks we wear. It is a seeing beyond self, a seeing from all around. It is a shared seeing receptive to others. Every view is unique but we learn to see the world through others eyes- This seeing is an opening up to the presence of God- in self, in other, in creation- in Jesus Christ with us- multi-facetted and astonishing. The overflowing grace of God permeates the ordinary.
3. And it is an experience of overflowing. It leads us into compassion- sharing that which has been poured into us. This path is not about picking up religious experiences or the accumulation of achievements- it is about creating the space for God's overflowing. And the space we discover belongs to all- it is generous, shared- it is communion. The whole of humanity, the whole of creation can become our altar.

What is needed

1. Freedom from expecting or measuring by result or profit. It is not about what we get, its about what together through God's grace we become. Its not about numerical growth, or competition- its abundance, beauty, healing, flourishing- an immeasurable gift of being.
2. Patient faith- expect God daily. God shows up its we who do not notice. A faith shaped by rhythm and regularity- receptive to the extraordinary within the ordinary.
3. Commit yourself to silence. The ground of all our seeking is a deeper listening, a deeper presence, a deeper attentiveness. Rowan told the story of chased by a lion and falling down a cliff finds himself holding on to a cleft in the rock and there seeing the most beautiful plant that is growing. In silence you will resolve the world but your soul will be humbled, made tender, and enlarged and opened up.
4. An offering of self- a generous disposability. A freedom from I want. What you thought you came for was only the shell husk what we are discovering is beyond our previous imaginings but only possible when we let go of the need to possess or cling. It not a calling out of the world but a calling to love God within the world and in the offering of self to discover true self. Dispossession is at the heart of religious life. As we let go of our need to accumulate status or power we begin to discover Christ in the other.

- Where there is not beauty put beauty and you will find beauty.
- Where there us no goodness, share goodness and you will find goodness.
- Discover the dailyness of grace.
- Your moods and thoughts will always wander. Do not see this as a failure but a calling to return... to turn again to Christ

In Nazareth we are not seeking to create a new church but to rediscover the spirit that makes us Christ's body. To live in a way where we can see the flower that grows in the cracks in the pavement, to see the swallows return, to see the person who was weighed down by life by burdens look up filled with light. To see the suffering of the world and to see Jesus Christ our saviour in that suffering too. We are building with presence and openness to God, to one another, to humanity made in Christ's image and the. astonishing wonder of our world

Lectio

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I wonder what this passage from Luke means to you

I wonder what you seek this advent

I wonder what you need

I wonder what line or thought in this letter you will ponder.