

Chapter 5. Don't Push the River

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is fitting for us to give thanks. It is right and fitting, our joy and our salvation, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to you, almighty, everlasting God, through Christ our Lord.

Lectio

Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God, and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us. (1 John 3:21-24)

Questions on Chapter 5

1. What is the chapter *about*? What are some of the key points?
2. Was there a part of the chapter that particularly affected you?
3. What is Rohr's "*holy fool*"? . . . How would the holy fool respond to the HSR?
4. "*If we can learn to trust God, the next movement of our souls is to trust ourselves. . . . You can trust yourself because God trusts you, using your journey, your experience. Nothing will be wasted; all has been forgiven; nothing will be used against you. In fact, God will even use your sins to transform you! . . . If that's not good news, what else could be?*" (128-129) . . . What sense does it make to "trust ourselves" when we are sinful? Does the world feel like a safe place to you?
5. "*Without this awareness of the river, without a sense that we are supported, we succumb to fear.*" (145) How in your own life have you begun to trust the presence of God? What role does prayer play?
6. How do you experience prayer? Is it asking for healing, for the things you need? Is it sitting in silence, trying to turn off your thoughts? Is it something you do or something that happens to you, that is given to you? When do you consider it to have gone well? . . . How does Rohr describe prayer in this chapter?
7. What does "contemplative prayer" mean to you?

Meditation: Embarrassing promises

Exercise: Lift up your hearts

This ascent is called blind, or a knowing through unknowing; so that when all the operations of imagination, reason, intellect, or understanding are done away with, the mind has immediate experience through the union of most ardent love, which the understanding is not able to grasp; and what is more, all speculative knowledge is wholly ignorant of it. (Hugh of Balma)

Take care that nothing remains of your mind's activity but the simple extension of your will, reaching out to God, not dressed up in any particular thought concerning God as he is in himself, or as revealed in any of his works; simply that he is as he is. Let him be just so, I pray you; do not make anything else of him. Do not seek to penetrate any deeper into him by subtle reasoning; let faith be your foundation.

This simple extension, freely established and grounded in true faith, must be nothing else, as regards your thinking and your feeling, except a simple thought and blind feeling of your own existence; as if you were to speak to God inwardly, with this for your meaning: "What I am, Lord, I offer to you, without looking to any

quality of your being, but only that you are what you are, and nothing else." This humble darkness is to be the reflection of yourself and your entire mind. Think no further on yourself than I bid you do on your God, so as to be one with him in spirit, and this without dividing or dissipating your awareness. (*Pursuit of Wisdom*)

No words or any words can be appropriate to express this humble impulse of love by which one lifts up one's heart to God, this "simple extension of your will, reaching out to God." This is the sole activity of the mind that is proper to this exercise [contemplation]. The author calls it the "nakid entent," and it signifies the substance of the contemplative effort. The traditional word in the spiritual vocabulary of the west is *extension*, inherited from the Vulgate translation of the Pauline phrase in Philippians: . . . "forgetting the things behind me, and reaching out to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal which is the heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. (*Pursuit of Wisdom* footnote)

Rohr quotes

Faith

1. There is a kind of knowing, a kind of powerful conviction, that comes from spiritual emptiness. It comes from letting go and living out of the beginner's mind. We call this knowing "faith." It is a very *spacious* way to live, because it alone can include all contradictions. Faith is the only way of knowing that is patient also with not knowing. (123-124)
2. If we can learn to trust God, the next movement of our souls is to trust ourselves. . . . Jesus tells us in the gospels, "don't be afraid." He's saying it is radically okay. You can trust yourself because God trusts you, using your journey, your experience. Nothing will be wasted; all has been forgiven; nothing will be used against you. In fact, God will even use your sins to transform you! . . . If that's not good news, what else could be? . . . If you accept this good news, the universe suddenly seems to be a very safe place. (128-129)
3. I believe that faith might be precisely that ability to trust the river, to trust the flow and the lover. It's a process that we don't have to change, coerce, or improve. We need to allow it to flow. That takes immense confidence in God, especially when we're hurting. (142) The river is God's providential love—so do not be afraid. . . . Simply ask your fears, "What are you saying to me about what is real?" "What are you trying to teach me?" (143)

Forgiveness

4. Two-thirds of Jesus' teachings are about forgiveness. A good third of Jesus' parables are about forgiveness, directly or indirectly. Forgiveness . . . is a mystical recognition that human evil is something we are all trapped by, suffering from, and participating in. It calls forth weeping, humility, and healing much more than feverish attempts to root out evil. The transformation happens through tears much more than through threats and punishment. (133-134)
5. After prayer, the church needs to teach people what I call "the weeping mode." Weeping is different from beating up on ourselves. Weeping is a gentle release of water that washes, baptizes, and renews. Weeping leads to owning our complicity in the problem. Weeping is the opposite of blaming and also the opposite of denying. It leads to healing when inspired by the Spirit. The saints talked about weeping frequently. . . . St Ephram the Syrian said that the freedom to cry was a clear sign that you had actually experienced God. . . . When the mourning that Jesus called "blessed" is lost, we move instead into the fixing, blaming, and controlling mode. (148)

Prayer

6. Prayer is being loved at a deep, sweet level. I hope you have felt such intimacy alone with God. I promise you it is available to you. (135)
7. Our awareness of the supportive presence of God is outside of and beyond our power to express in word or conceive of in thought. The gift of contemplative prayer is not a way of thinking . . . it finally moves beyond words into silence. It moves into the mystery that is too deep for words (149)
8. While the prayer of words in an attempt to *express to ourselves* our dependence on the great mystery, the prayer of silence is not so much to express, but to *experience* that silence. We acknowledge and rejoice that we are beloved, created out of nothing. I sit as contented as a child on its mother's lap. . . . Silence leads us to that kind of reveling in the mother's arms. (149)