



February 2026 Nazareth Weekend

Dear Nazareth Community and Companions

I write to you as the Nazareth Community and Companions of Nazareth join together for the first time this February at High Leigh. To all those able to be present with us and to all those equally part of our community. This letter is to you all. In March 2018 the first 48 People at St Martin-in-the Fields took their promises and became the first members of the Nazareth Community. A year before a faithful group of 8 of you kept silence with me each day at St Martin's through Lent 2017. After that Lent I remember those who joined me saying to me: "I don't want this silence to end" It had rooted us. I remember Brother Roger of Taizé saying that you don't create a community you pray a community into being.

Silence

Our community began not with a committee or strategic plan but with contemplative prayer. We started with silence, still, open, and listening- silence is more spacious than the sky. Our aim was not to grow God but to give God room to grow us. It is what we are still doing nine years later. Think of a seed, still and buried in the soil. The smallest of seeds, organic, waiting for God's growth. Who would ever believe it could grow into a tree in which others would find shelter in its branches:

With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.
(Mark 4.30-32)

Stillness and silence- listening deeply is the soil and tap root of our life together as community. In the darkness and silence of this soil, the seed splits open, shoots up and grows into the light. This is the miracle- the gift of God's life in us. Jesus Christ- is that seed within us, waiting to find the space and soil to grow. At first this seed remains, dormant, as though dead, unseen and we just have to wait both trusting and attentive before we see the signs of life breaking through the surface of our lives. If it were a single seed it would be much frailer but together we grow each sheltering and giving life to the others- our roots under the surface intertwining. In stillness and silence, unseen, unheard- the life of God begins. Be still. Let the seed grow

Our silence is not an empty silence it is a constant turn and returning to Christ. We notice that even when we sit in silence our minds are seldom silent. But silence allows us to listen to ourselves and the world. Silence makes space both within and without. Contemplative prayer is an act of love but like love it can sometimes feel like being in a boat facing all weathers. There are waves coming at us from all directions, filling our minds, triggering our fears, reminding us how easily we could drown. Jesus Christ comes to us- walking on water, walking across the waves of our fears calling each one of us not to look at the waves but to turn to him. He reaches towards us. He pulls us up out of the waters of chaos. He invites you to take his hand. To ride the waves with him. "Peace be still" Peace be still- do not look away, or look to the waves, turn to Christ. As contemplative prayer becomes part of the rhythm of our lives we learn to constantly turn to Christ and Christ becomes the "still point of the turning world"¹

Let us keep silence together using these words to still us
"Peace be still"

Scripture

Daily we turn to Christ. We find him in his Word- the word made flesh.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1. 14)

In the last eight years perhaps like me you have learnt to listen to scripture in a new way: to hear scripture as the text which speaks to your own life and can be revealed in the lives of those around you. A living script for life. Perhaps you have begun to **recognise** the New Testament's immediacy, **allowed** it to address you and speak to you and **illuminate** the actual experiences of your life. No longer just an ancient or academic text, or a literal text which judges you but an encounter which is life giving. The words of scripture take time to filter into us, dissolving our blocks and blindness. Scripture read prayerfully opens up, like a poem or a piece of music can open so that it is no longer about defining but much more about becoming. Like a drama there are multivariant ways of seeing and understanding. A living text goes on revealing and disclosing its meaning. As we each week have taken part in Lectio Divina I have realised again and again how Christ is the Word made flesh- our flesh. It comes alive in us. Each person responding adds a new dimension, a new empathy and understanding so that the text is illuminated by life itself- our diverse lives. It is in this way that the reading of the Gospels heals us through our encounter with Christ, just as the encounter with Christ healed so many in his lifetime. Remember you only need to touch the hem of his robe. **Nurture** all that the Word calls you to become and all that is set free. Scripture is like rain on our thirsty soil. Scripture is living water.

RAIN

1. Recognise
2. Allow
3. Illuminate
4. Nurture

Read the words from John 1.14

Recognise, allow, Illuminate and nurture those words in the silence

¹ TS Eliot: Four Quartets

I wonder what is that grace and truth you are discovering.
I wonder what is the grace you ask for this weekend

Sacrament

While they were eating Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body. Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26.26-28)

We are learning too what it means when we say "We are the body of Christ"
The true meaning of sacrament is to realise that we too and the whole of creation can become sacrament- a small visible sign of God's astonishing invisible presence- each of us a channel of peace and grace. When we gather around the altar we are not simply receiving a token in memory of a past event. We are ourselves receiving Christ and becoming the bearers of Christ to others. More than that we are witnessing that each one of us can ourselves become the dwelling place- the tabernacle of his love. Nazareth is the place of growing recognition of a world charged with the wonder of God. So often our modern world has become addicted to the algorithms of pain, scandal, brutality, pride and gossip. We are learning to see again the presence of Christ even in our own fallen humanity- a grace that releases and sets free. We are learning to recognise a world alive with God's grace and that can be redeemed by goodness. Perhaps many think this is nothing. But it is the life of soul. And the soul is eternal. So the life of the soul is everything.

I invite you to turn to the person next to you. Look at them with the love of Christ. Recognise Christ in them. And bow to them. And then offer them the peace of Christ.

Service

So often the Christian life is presented as a dichotomy between contemplation and action between Mary and Martha. Don't just sit there do something or don't just do something sit there. In Nazareth that Silence and Service are not in opposition but total harmony. The silence of Christian contemplation tenderises the heart. It opens it up. It creates space to see, to recognise, to allow, to illuminate and to nurture the presence of Christ in ourselves and others and to reveal that presence through the action of our lives.

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' (John 13.34-35)

Our service is not an attempt to control, or achieve, or solve the life of another but an act of true recognition and love. Real service is always reciprocal- a giving and a receiving, a receiving and a giving.

If you go to our International Group it would be difficult to say who is feeding who- for we are all feeding one another. And this same trinitarian miracle I believe is taking place here as we gather as a Nazareth community both in the building and also online. Who is ministering to who? The real answer is that we are all ministering to one another- we are all instruments

of grace- the person praying in their hearts for peace as much as the person needing that prayer, the person reflecting on the gospel , the person receiving the Gospel, the person administering the chalice, the person receiving the cup of life. We are all part of the same body equal before God. Every member of the community by your presence is part of the life of the whole. When one suffers we share that suffering, when one has a gift to share we share that gift. Each one giving and receiving the treasure of Christ within.

I wonder who has shown you Christ

I wonder who you have been able to show Christ

Sharing

When we come together in a group as large as this the temptation is to feel overwhelmed. How can I ever know all these people who are part of my community? How can I ever become friends with everybody in this room or online or even know all their names? The simple answer is we cannot. But as our Community Chaplain Janet gave this insight- when you join a choir you don't come together because you want to know everybody you come together because you want to sing and each voice will help the other voices and together if you are attentive to one another and to the music will create the most beautiful harmony that you could never arrive at alone. The same is true of our sharing. In keeping our simple rule of life together we are each supporting one another. It is a sharing with open hands. Rowan gave our community a word. The word is **“release”** In community we are releasing each other and ourselves to become all that God intended. Each one of us is equal in God. We in the western world sometimes find this difficult because from an early age we have learnt to compete: to show that we have skills that are better than others. But in Nazareth we are learning something different we are learning harmony. We are learning communion. A communion that breaks down barriers and borders – a communion of different ages, genders, colour, race sexuality, faith- an us that recognises that we are all, all made in God's image and sharing with a neighbour is more pleasurable than keeping for oneself. In our Nazareth collect we pray. “We are held together by the unseen chain of God's love”

I wonder how Nazareth releases ourselves and releases others

A wonder what is your prayer for the release of the world at this time

Sabbath

I am aware of how hard in the modern world it is to make space and how quickly any space we create can become cluttered and filled often with mess. When I was a Melanesian Brother in the Solomons I had one shelf- a change of clothes, a bar of soap, tooth paste and a tooth brush, a mat to sleep on in an empty room. Its hard to describe how free I felt. We have often learnt that we need a hundred choices for everything and surrounded ourselves with so many distractions that we can no longer concentrate on any one thing or are able to find the space between: we have so filled our lives that we sometimes fail to notice the person next to us. Go to a concert or theatre and watch at the interval to see how many people rather than being present to the person who has come with them are turning on and checking their mobile phones. Notice how we have all become constant consumers. So what is Sabbath. Sabbath is making space to be present. Making space for thankfulness and gratitude. It is for a while

turning away from the thousands of oughts wants and compulsions and being present to the ONE. It is turning towards the thing that gives you life and being there bodily. It could be walking through the park. It could be planting shrubs in the garden. It could be sitting on the couch and reading a book you love or listening to a piece of music. It could be meeting a friend whose company you enjoy, it could be running a marathon or lying in bed watching the sun rising through the window or holding in your arms a new born baby. You will know Sabbath if you look for human goodness or the wonder of creation and if you allow yourself time to see it and touch it and be with it fully with your whole body. This is not about greed or compulsion this is a celebration and a thanksgiving of all that is good and life-giving.

Turn to the person next to you and share one Sabbath gift that gives you life and joy
Give thanks for it

Staying With

I heard the story of a Buddhist monk who went home from the monastery and grew ever more frustrated that no one in his family seemed to appreciate his new found peace and holiness. He tried to talk about the joy of meditation but they seemed much more interested in the football on television. He tried to keep a sense of inner peace but his mother was complaining about a pain in his shoulder and how his younger brother was such a worry to her. They kept on talking about food and what they were going to cook to welcome him home and he wanted to tell them about the joy of fasting. His holiness wasn't working at all. In fact he began to feel more and more detached and critical of the family he loved. No prophet is recognised in his own home as was said of Jesus. Can any good come out of Nazareth? This monk began to realise that rather than trying to convert his family into monks he had to stay with them, where they were. Instead of talking about meditation he talked to his father about the football. Instead of trying to get his mother to understand the practice of fasting he delighted in the food she was making and helped her prepare it and then messaged her shoulder which was sore while he listened to her worries about his brother. Rather than talking about the importance of mindfulness to them. He lived mindfulness using all he had learnt from his meditation to be more present to each one of them. Instead of feeling aloof he began to recognise their struggles, and listen to their hopes and fears. He realised they would always be his family just as they were and he would always be their son or brother just as he was. When he left his mother said to him: "Thank you so much for coming it felt like we had all come home again" Our practice in the Nazareth Community is to stay with Nazareth when we feel irritated and fed up, when we feel far from holy, when times are hard and we are feeling ill to find a way of living with grace and attentiveness, recognising our failures too with humility and grace. Above all to keep on turning up.

A major part of this staying with is learning to stay with our own sadness and failures and struggles without constant blame, hostility or guilt- to recognise in this staying with our own humanity and needs but also that Christ is present not only on the mountains of our lives but in the darkest valleys and on the cross. It is much harder to keep on turning up day after day when you feel no one even realises how much you love. Staying with means often recognising that we have to sometimes stay with our suffering too, there is no instant antidote. Joy is not the removal of all pain or struggle rather it is holding that pain within the a greater love. Staying with means richer or poorer, in sickness and in health and even when

death parts you. It means staying with Christ in all things. This Nazareth way , this compassion and kindness, is what it means to remember the kingdom of heaven is coming but now is.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Certainly many good things can come out of Nazareth- including Jesus Christ himself
As St Paul said to the Philippians: "I thank God whenever I think of you"
Blessings and prayers

Richard

I invite you to recognise a struggle you or someone you love is facing and to hold it in the love of God. As though offering it to God to hold with you.
I invite you to turn to the person next to you and pray for them
