

Like living stones, let
yourselves be built into
a spiritual house...

— 1 Peter 2:5

This book is intended as a gift for you: to read and reflect, pray and wonder, write and draw. It is largely an open space to reach for what matters most to us, and wrestle with what holds us back. Take your time with it — alone, with friends or family, with kin from this place — with the hope that together, and with God, we may all become more whole, connected, and alive in the process.

Building with Living Stones

One of the exciting experiences that I had ten years ago when I was called to be the Rector of All Souls Parish in Berkeley came in the realization of just how alive the congregation was. Sometimes when you enter a community as a new priest, one of your challenges is to bring energy in a system of complacency. That was not the case when I arrived at All Souls — it was immediately clear and that this spiritual house was alive. Thousands of people for over one hundred years had given of themselves and now I and many others were part of a living, breathing tradition. It was amazing.

During the last decade as a guide and pastor with this parish my call has expanded along with my capacity to give. As I have trusted the Spirit in this place and with you all, I have found new ways to give so that this Realm of God can be witnessed by others. Because of the support that I have received from All Souls, and the work we have done together to open our hearts to the spiritual discipline of giving, I feel more able to give my money, my time, and my gifts. Because this parish is so generous in responding with the gifts of God to the wider world, I have been more willing and able to do the same.

In particular over this past year, I have seen over and over the spiritual sacrifices that this place and this people offer the world. It's not just that the Realm of God is being built with our generosity in our places of work, our volunteer hours, in our homes, and around the world. It's also how I have seen hundreds of people offer themselves as living stones in and through this parish. From the hospitality we have offered in the Parish House, to the deep work of the formation of all ages, to the worship that shapes our lives, it is clear to me that this parish is alive with God. And it is good.

So I invite you to join me in responding to this aliveness. Consider what we, each of us, have been given as we came to the corner of Cedar and Spruce. Consider how you have been and are being called to participate in the Realm of God being built all around us. And consider how All Souls Parish is participating as part of that life-giving Realm. You and I have been gifted with much. Please join me in giving so that many others will be able to share in the shelter of our spiritual home.

Phil+

Creator and lover of our souls: Teach us to release our burdens and accept your love. May your love be the deepest reality of our lives, and may we offer real love to others. Amen.

What was here when I arrived?

What was the gift that welcomed me into All Souls?

Accidents of Birth, an excerpt

— William Meredith

The approach of a man's life out of the past is history, and the approach of time out of the future is mystery. Their meeting is the present, and it is consciousness, the only time life is alive. The endless wonder of this meeting is what causes the mind, in its inward liberty of a frozen morning, to turn back and question and remember. The world is full of places. Why is it that I am here?

— Wendell Berry, *The Long-Legged House*

Spared by a car or airplane crash or cured of malignancy, people look around with new eyes at a newly praiseworthy world, blinking eyes like these.

For I've been brought back again from the fine silt, the mud where our atoms lie down for long naps. And I've also been pardoned miraculously for years by the lava of chance which runs down the world's gullies, silting us back. Here I am, brought back, set up, not yet happened away.

But it's not this random
life only, throwing its sensual
astonishments upside down on
the bloody membranes behind my eyeballs,
not just me being here again, old
needer, looking for someone to need,
but you, up from the clay yourself,
as luck would have it, and inching
over the same little segment of earth-
ball, in the same little eon, to
meet in a room, alive in our skins,
and the whole galaxy gaping there
and the centuries whining like gnats—
you, to teach me to see it, to see
it with you, and to offer somebody
uncomprehending, impudent thanks.

How am I — how are we all — building on the gifts we have received?

Thirst

— Mary Oliver

Another morning and I wake with thirst
for the goodness I do not have. I walk
out to the pond and all the way God has
given us such beautiful lessons. Oh Lord,
I was never a quick scholar but sulked
and hunched over my books past the
Hour and the bell; grant me, in your
mercy, a little more time. Love for the
earth and love for you are having such a
long conversation in my heart. Who
knows what will finally happen or
where I will be sent, yet already I have
given a great many things away, expecting
to be told to pack nothing, except the
prayers which, with this thirst, I am
slowly learning.

What are some of the most wonderful gifts I have been given?
What gifts have I been most delighted to offer to another soul?

Jesus said, “I came that they may have life,
and have it abundantly.”

— *John 10:10b*

How do I want to give of myself towards building up the Realm of God? What's our big-picture hope and vision?

Grant us, O God, not to be anxious about earthly things but to love things heavenly and, even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

How can generosity be a spiritual discipline? How do I want to practice it — daily, monthly, long-term — in my life?

The City Limits

— A. R. Ammons

When you consider the radiance, that it does not withhold itself but pours its abundance without selection into every nook and cranny not overhung or hidden; when you consider

that birds' bones make no awful noise against the light but lie low in the light as in a high testimony; when you consider the radiance, that it will look into the guiltiest

swervings of the weaving heart and bear itself upon them, not flinching into disguise or darkening; when you consider the abundance of such resource as illuminates the glow-blue

bodies and gold-skeined wings of flies swarming the dumped guts of a natural slaughter or the coil of shit and in no way winces from its storms of generosity; when you consider

that air or vacuum, snow or shale, squid or wolf, rose or lichen, each is accepted into as much light as it will take, then the heart moves roomier, the man stands and looks about, the

leaf does not increase itself above the grass, and the dark work of the deepest cells is of a tune with May bushes and fear lit by the breadth of such calmly turns to praise.

Where does a practice of generosity connect with following Jesus' way?

How do I want to practice this discipline of generosity here at All Souls?

Storage

— Mary Oliver

When I moved from one house to another
there were many things I had no room
for. What does one do? I rented a storage
space. And filled it. Years passed.

Occasionally I went there and looked in,
but nothing happened, not a single
twinge of the heart.

As I grew older the things I cared
about grew fewer, but were more
important. So one day I undid the lock
and called the trash man. He took
everything.

I felt like the little donkey when
his burden is finally lifted. Things!
Burn them, burn them! Make a beautiful
fire! More room in your heart for love,
for the trees! For the birds who own
nothing — the reason they can fly.

Where do I see the Realm of God being built up here in this community?

When We Breathe Together

— Jan Richardson

This is the blessing
we cannot speak
by ourselves.

This is the blessing
we cannot summon
by our own devices,
cannot shape
to our purpose,
cannot bend
to our will.

This is the blessing
that comes
when we leave behind
our aloneness
when we gather
together
when we turn
toward one another.

This is the blessing
that blazes among us
when we speak
the words
strange to our ears
when we finally listen
into the chaos
when we breathe together
at last.

What are the next steps to which I am being called? How do I want to respond, act, and reach?

God, as we begin again, we place our trust in you. As the seasons turn, we give thanks for your presence with us. Help us to entrust our lives to you with the delight and confidence of one who loves and is beloved. Guide us to live in your light. We lift up these prayers in your name: Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of our days. Amen.