

# A Winter's Walk



Today I'd like to invite you into the wild (and not just because I'm a rubbish gardener!)

To take time out from your routine and walk into the irregular. This is an in-between, liminal space which you can use to explore and listen. Since you may not know the way I invite you to embrace the lack of certainty, the unknowing and the waiting aspect. To let go and be brave in your walk and your thoughts until you reach familiar ground again.

## The Grove

Find a bench or a place to stop.  
Welcome. Take some time to stop and breathe. To savour and simply be.  
Say 'Hello' (see notes) to;

- Yourself here in this space (you made it!)
- The place around you
- The present moment



Find a stone, and hold it. Think of the expectations you have for today, your worries of the past and the fears of the future. Put the stone, worries and fears in your pocket for later. Be open to new possibilities.

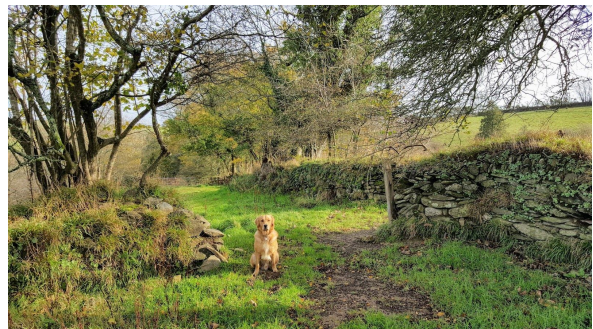
Carry on with your walk

## The fields

If possible walk by a road, house or block of flats. A place that is man-made or worked on by people. As you walk along, consider the difference between the fields and the woods.

They can be seen as a metaphor in our lives, where the fields represent our 'work',

whatever that may be, the organised part of our lives where we are obligated to produce, care for others and strive. The woods represent coming away from work, to rest and enjoy a mini sabbath. You are invited into the silence and solitude and wildness of the woods today. (Idea from Sabbath by Nicola Slee and Wendell Berry's poem by the same name) A place where we have the time and quiet to listen to other voices in our lives rather than the usual ones.



Find a place to stop for a few minutes, perhaps a bench or wall to sit on.

### **The Hermitage**

Take time here to reflect.

If this is part of your tradition, I invite you to take communion here. Thinking especially of the time in-between Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday, when no-one knew what was about to happen. An in-between time of confusion and despair. People wanting to hope but uncertain of the outcome. (Similar to this coronacoaster!) A time of winter and waiting. See the piece below about 'Waiting on Easter Saturday'.

If this is not your tradition, think about this time of winter; leaves falling, decay and 'when despair for the world grows in me'. Read the poem 'The Peace of wild things' as you gaze out on the view and have a drink from your flask.



If you are able, find some woods or a place that isn't quite as organised or worked on (this may be difficult in the city). A place that is a bit more wild.

### **The Dell**

Find some trees or a tree to sit or stand under. Take some time here to enjoy the sounds. Notice whatever they are: cars, people, birds etc.



Winter is an in-between time, as leaves fall and decay, where we find ourselves waiting and longing for the spring. But it is an important time for nature; one of rest, hibernation, rejuvenation and transition. One that can't be rushed through. We too go through times of winter as we; wait for an answer, reel from the failure of a project or relationship or struggle from a recent loss. As we grieve, however, we often resist the idea of waiting in this space and saying 'Hello' to it.

What are the things you would like to say Hello to?

Find something that is decaying or a leaf that has fallen - use it to think about something you feel is decaying in your life. Say 'Hello' to it, notice how it makes you feel and acknowledge it. Keep it to use later at the labyrinth.

Note that decay is an important part of the life cycle. Look for the use and beauty of it.

If you like, read the poem 'Clearing', or notes on grief.  
Keep going on your walk until you find a space where you can walk slowly, without anyone bumping into you (I know, tricky in the city) if possible in a large circle or spiral.

### **The Labyrinth**

Ours is a 'Cretan' Labyrinth. The pattern has been found carved in rocks over 3,000 years old and has been used in many different ways. See notes for some suggestions. In the absence of a labyrinth, slowly walk round your circle.



With your leaf or decaying object go around the 'labyrinth', reflecting on the issue it represents.

1. At the entrance pause, take a few deep breaths and acknowledge the start of your journey
2. As you slowly walk in, in your mind start to let go of your 'decaying leaf'
3. At the centre put down your physical leaf, reflect and take time to listen to the still small voice
4. Walking back out, accept anything you have received, think about how to take it back into 'normal life' and give thanks for it.

Continue on your walk

### **The Bench**

Find another bench or place to sit.  
Winter is a season which is followed by Spring and signs of growth.



"Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is, destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal."  
Jesus in the Message version of the bible.

Find around you a sign of new life; a leaf or bud and think of something that is growing in you - a hope, idea, relationship, dream, human being! Say 'Hello' to it, acknowledge it and notice how it feels. This too is part of life; growth and hope.

But note that you don't need to rush to this time, sometimes we need to stay deep underground for a while, in the waiting space, not looking for answers, just being. If you wish, read the poem 'Slowly' or 'Time to be slow' or 'Honouring grief and disappointment.'

**The Compost Heap** (if you fancy it)

At Treargel we have a large compost heap.

Here is the ecology of nature at its best. The death and decay of one product forming the seedbed and food for the next.

What cycles do you have in your life of work and rest, summer and winter, of burying deep down, unfurling and reaching out.

Give yourself a pat on the back! You are doing just as creation and nature intended.

**Back in the car or on the bus or walking home**

Take out your stone and the thoughts that went with it.

What, if anything, has changed?

What will you take away from today?

Rejoice in the flow of the seasons. Rejoice too in the extra-ordinary and the ordinary, as you make your way home and all that waits for you there.



## Notes on walking a labyrinth

The labyrinth is a sacred place set aside for you to reflect, look within, pray, negotiate new behavior. The rhythm of walking, placing one foot in front of the other, empties the mind, relaxes the body and refreshes the spirit. Follow the pace your body wants to go.

There is no right or wrong way to walk a labyrinth. A basic approach is to quiet the mind and open the heart. It has sometimes been called “body prayer” or walking meditation as we let go of thinking and move with intention. There is only one way in, and one way out. It isn’t a puzzle or maze to be solved so we can disengage from mental activity and simply be present.

The labyrinth can be walked in four stages.

1. **Remember**

Before walking the labyrinth. Take time in gratitude to be thankful for your life. Bless the people in your life. If there’s a specific event or situation troubling you, bring it to mind and form a question if possible.

2. **Release**

Walking into the labyrinth. This is the time to quiet the mind, let go of the mind chatter and release your troubles. Open your heart to feel whatever it might feel. Become aware of your breathing. Take slow breaths. Relax and move at your own pace.

3. **Receive**

Standing or Sitting in the Center. This is a place of reflection. Pause and stay as long as you like. Open yourself to your higher power. Listen to that small inner voice. In the safety of the labyrinth have a heart-to-heart talk with yourself.

4. **Return**

Walking out of the labyrinth. When you are ready, begin walking out the same path you followed in. Walking out, integration of your experience happens. Experience the sense of well-being, healing, excitement, calm or peace. Each labyrinth experience is different. You may feel nothing or have a powerful reaction. Whatever, listen to your heart and take all the time you need.

### Saying Hello

Padraig O'Tuama speaks about the word "hello" in his book 'In the Shelter'.

The idea was that finding a way to greet things in our lives can be an important thing, especially the things we don't want to greet. So hello to old wounds, hello to our lack of capacity to control, hello to this circumstance that doesn't seem to be ending quickly, hello to the unexpected phone call, hello to the unexpected sadness, hello to the unexpected happiness and consolation. And by saying hello to something, you're saying, "you're here," and, "I'm here with you, here." And what does that mean? It asks us to do a radical act of naming the simple truth of the present. You know, my profound anxiety, my worry, my grief, the way that I don't like crying in front of other people, the way that I do like crying in front of other people... whatever is happening. It doesn't ask you to have complicated degrees in psychoanalysis, it just asks you to have the capacity to listen to what's happening in your body and to greet it. Not to control it, but also not to let it control you. To simply let it be and to speak within that context.

### Waiting on Easter Saturday

*'Symbolically it represents times in our lives, both as individuals and communities, when we stand in that in-between, liminal space between death and life, after the breakdown or loss of what is most precious to us and before anything new emerges out of death.'* A place of unknowing, waiting, paralysis, shedding one reality in order to discover something new. *'It can be a space which is experienced as terrifying or as numbing, as disorienting and excruciatingly lonely, as bewildering or as potentially liberating. Like the desert, this space can be dangerous but it can also manifest its own alluring beauty.'*

Nicola Slee, Seeking the Risen Christa, p94 & 95

### The Peace of Wild Things

Listen

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

by Wendell Berry

### Clearing

Do not try to save  
the whole world  
or do anything grandiose.  
Instead, create  
**a clearing**  
**in the dense forest**  
of your life  
and wait there  
patiently,  
until the song  
that is yours alone to sing  
falls into your open cupped hands  
and you recognise and greet it.  
Only then will you know  
how to give yourself  
to the world  
so worth of rescue.  
By Martha Postlewaite



### Time to be slow

This is the time to be slow,  
Lie low to the wall  
Until the bitter weather passes.  
Try, as best you can, not to let  
The wire brush of doubt  
Scrape from your heart  
All sense of yourself  
And your hesitant light.  
If you remain generous,  
Time will come good;  
And you will find your feet  
Again on fresh pastures of promise,  
Where the air will be kind  
And blushed with beginning.  
By John O'Donohue

### Grief

“Grief is different from despair (Rowan Williams) Despair says nothing will change, grief says - things have changed and things will change, if they are to change for the better rather than the worse I've got to understand the grief and go into it and somehow make sense of it. Looking at it with intelligence and imagination, turns us away from despair.”

To hear more of this listen to the podcast  
<https://www.nomadpodcast.co.uk/everybody-now-climate-emergency-and-sacred-duty/>

### Slowly

She celebrated the sacrament of  
Letting Go...

First she surrendered her Green  
Then the Orange, yellow, and  
Red...

Finally she let go of her Brown...  
Shedding her last leaf  
She stood empty and silent,  
stripped bare

Leaning against the sky she  
began her vigil of trust...

Shedding her last leaf  
She watched its journey to the  
ground...

She stood in silence,  
Wearing the color of emptiness  
Her branches wondering:  
How do you give shade, with so much  
gone?

And then, the sacrament of waiting  
began

The sunrise and sunset watched with  
Tenderness, clothing her with  
silhouettes

They kept her hope alive.

They helped her understand that  
her vulnerability

her dependence and need

her emptiness

her readiness to receive

were giving her a new kind of beauty.

Every morning and every evening she  
stood in silence and celebrated  
the sacrament of waiting.

By Macrina Wiederkehr



### Honouring Grief and Disappointment

This grief and  
disappointment  
of '[Easter]  
Saturday': the  
experience of life  
feeling  
profoundly  
uncertain - is  
fundamental to  
the entire Easter

story of transformation and freedom,  
and it is this 'in between' day that solace  
can be found, even though meaning and  
sense-making are overshadowed by our  
fear, anxiety, grief and for some,  
sickness. What would it be if we could  
allow ourselves to be upended and  
transformed by a narrative of grief and  
disappointment and in this to reside in  
the Saturday 'pause' without rushing  
into any attempt to make sense of the  
pain, or find a way to justify it?

Cathryn then encourages us; 'The  
antidote to disappointment and grief is  
loving relationship, ... a communal  
encounter that can be shared ... a  
pause-together.' 'We have an  
opportunity now to choose compassion  
and accompany one another.'

Dr Cathryn McKinney

To read the rest of this article go to;

<https://vox.divinity.edu.au/opinion/easter-saturday-honoring-grief-and-disappointment/>