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Being Christ's Beloved

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Table of Contents

Introduction – p. 2

Introduction and retreat background purpose

Settling In – p. 3

Centering Prayer, Welcoming Prayer – 10 minutes

Imaginative Prayer – pp. 4-6

Engage the Beloved Child Within – Dialogue + Visual Journal – 30 minutes (15 minutes each)

Lectio Divina – pp. 7-8

Isaiah 43 modified – 30 minutes

Poetic Reflection – pp. 9-10

"The Eyes of Jesus" by John O' Donohue – 5 minutes

Visio Divina – pp. 11-12

Byzantine Icon "Jesus and the Beloved" – 30 minutes

Closing – pp. 13-14

Henri Nouwen thoughts, Music Meditation, Benediction – 15 minutes

Suggested Schedule

First hour – Settling In, Imaginative Prayer, Lectio Divina

Break – Enjoy unstructured time with Christ (walk, eat, nap, play, create – be led by God)

Second hour – Poetic Reflection, Visio Divina, Closing

Supplies

Retreat guide, art journal or several pieces of unlined paper, pen or pencil, colored pencils, device for listening to music.

Being Christ's Beloved

"Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life." -Jesus (Matthew 11:28b, MSG)

Introduction

Welcome to "Being Christ's Beloved," a guided spiritual formation retreat. This retreat can be taken individually or communally and is designed to be restorative to your whole being. Our prayer is that it reorients your awareness of your sacred identity, your true self hidden in Christ, and your treasured existence formed and knit together by God for his utter delight. You, dear one, are the beloved of Christ.

So often we root our identity in what we do, how well we do it, what others say about us, what we believe others think about us, what's been done to us, and what we've done to others. We suffer from amnesia. We forget we had a created and given identity before we had responsibilities and human relationships. We forget who we were when we were "made in the secret place" (Psalm 139:15).

The psalmist, aware of such a sacred, beloved identity, converses with God, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:13-16).

Come away, beloved. Spend time alone with your Beloved. Engage in practices to foster recovering, remembering, and rejoicing in your identity as Christ's beloved. Do the activities that feel invited by the Holy Spirit. Release or save for later the others. Be led. Be loved.

"When I take time for a daily practice, I am reoriented to the truth of my belovedness. I remember that I'm not important to God because God can work through me and help more people. I'm valued because God cares about me: my work, my relationships, and my well-being. I live knowing I am loved, instead of striving to be loved. Being the beloved changes everything."
-Bethany Dearborn Hiser, *From Burned Out to Beloved*

May God's Spirit grant you peace, refreshment, and delight as the beloved of Christ.

In Christ's love,

Julie Meissner
Assistant Director of Spiritual Formation

Welcome, Beloved

“Let the beloved of the Lord rest secure in him,
for he shields him all day long,
and the one the Lord loves rests between his shoulders.” (Deuteronomy 33:12)

As you enter into retreat with God, let your heart, mind, and body settle. Rest as Christ’s beloved.

Settling In

Take a few deep, cleansing breaths to center yourself upon the presence of God – in silence or while listening to [calming music](#). Do this as long as needed. Imagine a basin and a pitcher filled with water being poured into it. At first, the water flows and swirls, round and round the basin, quite disturbed and rippled. But gradually, the water settles into complete stillness, a mirror for reflection. Become centered in the silence. Remain in this posture as long as you desire.

Now open yourself to God and his desires for you during this time together by offering this “Welcoming Prayer” by Adele Calhoun. Turn your hands palms up to embody letting go.

Welcoming Prayer

Jesus, I let go of my need to be safe and secure. Welcome.
(Breathe in. Breathe out.)

Jesus, I let go of my need to be accepted and approved of. Welcome.
(Breathe in. Breathe out.)

Jesus, I let go of my need to control this person or event. Welcome.
(Breathe in. Breathe out.)

Jesus, I let go of my need to change reality and receive it as it is. Welcome.
(Breathe in. Breathe out.)

Pause in silence before continuing.

Imaginative Prayer

"I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." (Song of Solomon 2:16a)

"Prayer is obviously a relationship, an encounter, a way in which we have a relationship with the living God. There is a moment when this relationship becomes something live.

A relationship becomes personal and real the moment you begin to single out a person from the crowd...when it is no longer a relationship in the third person but in the first and second persons.

And then there is another moment...the moment when we look for a name for a person...when we begin to see how this person relates to a name...a name which only two people use...who are so deeply and so intimately linked to each other that the name is filled with meaning for them, because it is supremely personal."

-Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray*

Engage the beloved child within

your true self, hidden in Christ, created in the image of God

"For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness within our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." (Romans 8:15-17a)

Dialogue

Begin dialoguing with your inner, beloved child using the following questions. Write out the dialogue on a piece of paper or in a journal. Use your dominant hand to write your question, then pass the pen/pencil to the other hand. Use your non-dominant hand to write your response. This practice engages your whole brain in the process. Relax into awareness of God's presence and use your breath to help you return to that awareness if you find yourself distracted or if your critical mind interferes.

Questions:

1. Hello. What name would you like to be called? (Be willing to wait for the response. Trust.)

2. How do you feel today?

3. What do you like?
4. Tell me what I could do for you that you would like?
5. Would you please tell me about God?
6. What name do you most like to call God?
7. What would you like to do with God today?

Visual Journal

“Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time.” – Thomas Merton

Prepare by getting colored pencils, paper, and a pen or pencil. Center your awareness on the presence of God within and around you.

“My beloved is mine”

- Choose a colored pencil to trace your hand. Turn over your non-dominant hand, palm facing up, onto the piece of paper and trace it (this may feel different, even vulnerable, since as children we usually trace our hands with our palm to the page).
- What name did you use for God in question #6 above? Choose another colored pencil and write your name for God in the palm of your traced hand.
- Invite your hidden self to express your interior landscape in color, shape, and image in and around your hand with God’s name. If a verse surfaces around your name for God, consider adding it to your visual journal if you desire.
- Sit back and pause. Breathe. What stirs within you as you observe what you have created? What do you want to say to God?

“And I am his”

- Using the other side of the paper or a new piece of paper, repeat the first step by turning over your dominant hand this time. (You will likely find it more awkward to trace with your non-dominant hand. Go with it. You have asked Jesus to help you let go of control. Let it be what it is.) Use whatever colored pencil you like.
- What name did you use for your hidden child in question #1 above? Choose another colored pencil and write this name in the palm of your traced hand. This is God's hand.
- Once again, invite your hidden self to express your interior landscape in color, shape, and image in and around God's hand with your sacred name.
- Consider adding all or a portion of this verse to your visual journal:
"Can a woman forget her nursing child or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these might forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands." (Isaiah 49:15-16a)
- Sit back and pause. Breathe. What stirs within you as you observe what you have created? What do you notice God saying to you as you listen?
- Now observe both drawings. What awareness or prayer rises within as you ponder them?

Rest.

Be still.

You are held.

You are loved.

If you like, listen to more [calming music](#) while you rest in God.

Lectio Divina

“Listen! My beloved!” (Song of Solomon 2:8a)

Lectio Divina is an ancient form of praying scripture. Latin for “holy reading,” Lectio Divina is a practice of listening to the voice of God through scripture.

As you begin, ask the Holy Spirit to give you ears to hear, a mind to notice, and a heart to receive what your Beloved desires for you in this time.

Rhythm for Lectio Divina

Read the scripture passage four times, either aloud or silently. After each reading, pause to let the words sink from your head to your heart. Listen for what God is saying to you, what the Holy Spirit is inviting you to notice – images that arise, words or thoughts that become clear, bodily sensations that are felt, memories that surface, passions that are touched, and any other stirrings within you as you read and reflect.

Silence – begin with a minute (or more) of silence.

First reading – read through and simply listen to the words as if hearing them for the first time, then pause for a few minutes of silence.

Second reading – read through and notice words, phrases, or sentences that are highlighted to your awareness, connect with your life today, stir something within you, or jump off the page. Underline those words. Draw them in color if you like.

Third reading – read through and ask the Holy Spirit how you are being invited to respond. Write out a prayer, a poem, a song, paint a watercolor picture, sit in silent prayer, dance, sing, kneel in prayer – whatever feels invited by Jesus as your response.

Fourth reading – read through, then rest in God. No words are needed. Simply rest in the arms of your Beloved.

Isaiah 43

Isaiah 43:1b-3a, 4a, NRSV

¹ But now thus says the Lord,

he who created you...

he who formed you...

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name; you are mine.

² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you,

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

and the flame shall not consume you.

³ For I am the Lord your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

⁴ Because you are precious in my sight

and honored and I love you,

Record your Lectio Divina reflections in your journal.

Take a break to stretch, move, eat, play, walk, dance, sing...whatever feels invited!

Poetic Reflection

"The Eyes of Jesus" by John O'Donohue

I imagine the eyes of Jesus
Were harvest brown,
The light of their gazing
Suffused with the seasons:

The shadow of winter,
The mind of spring,
The blues of summer,
And amber of harvest.

A gaze that is perfect sister
To the kindness that dwells
In his beautiful hands.

The eyes of Jesus gaze on us,
Stirring in the heart's clay
The confidence of seasons
That never lose their way to harvest.

This gaze knows the signature
Of our heartbeat, the first glimmer
From the dawn that dreamed our minds,

The crevices where thoughts grow
Long before the longing in the bone
Sends them toward the mind's eye,

The artistry of the emptiness
That knows to slow the hunger
Of outside things until they weave
Into the twilight side of the heart,
A gaze full of all that is still future
Looking out for us to glimpse
The jeweled light in winter stone,

Quickening the eyes that look at us
To see through to where words
Are blind to say what we would love,

Forever falling softly on our faces,
His gaze plies the soul with light,
Laying down a luminous layer

Beneath our brief and brittle days
Until the appointed dawn comes
Assured and harvest deft

To unravel the last black knot
And we are back home in the house
That we have never left.

From *To Bless the Space Between Us*, Doubleday, 2008.

Visio Divina

Byzantine Icon of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple

"Visio Divina is a way of praying with the eyes open – 'holy seeing' – a way to behold created beauty that leads us to prayer, pondering what we see as through the Creator's eyes of love." – Adele Calhoun

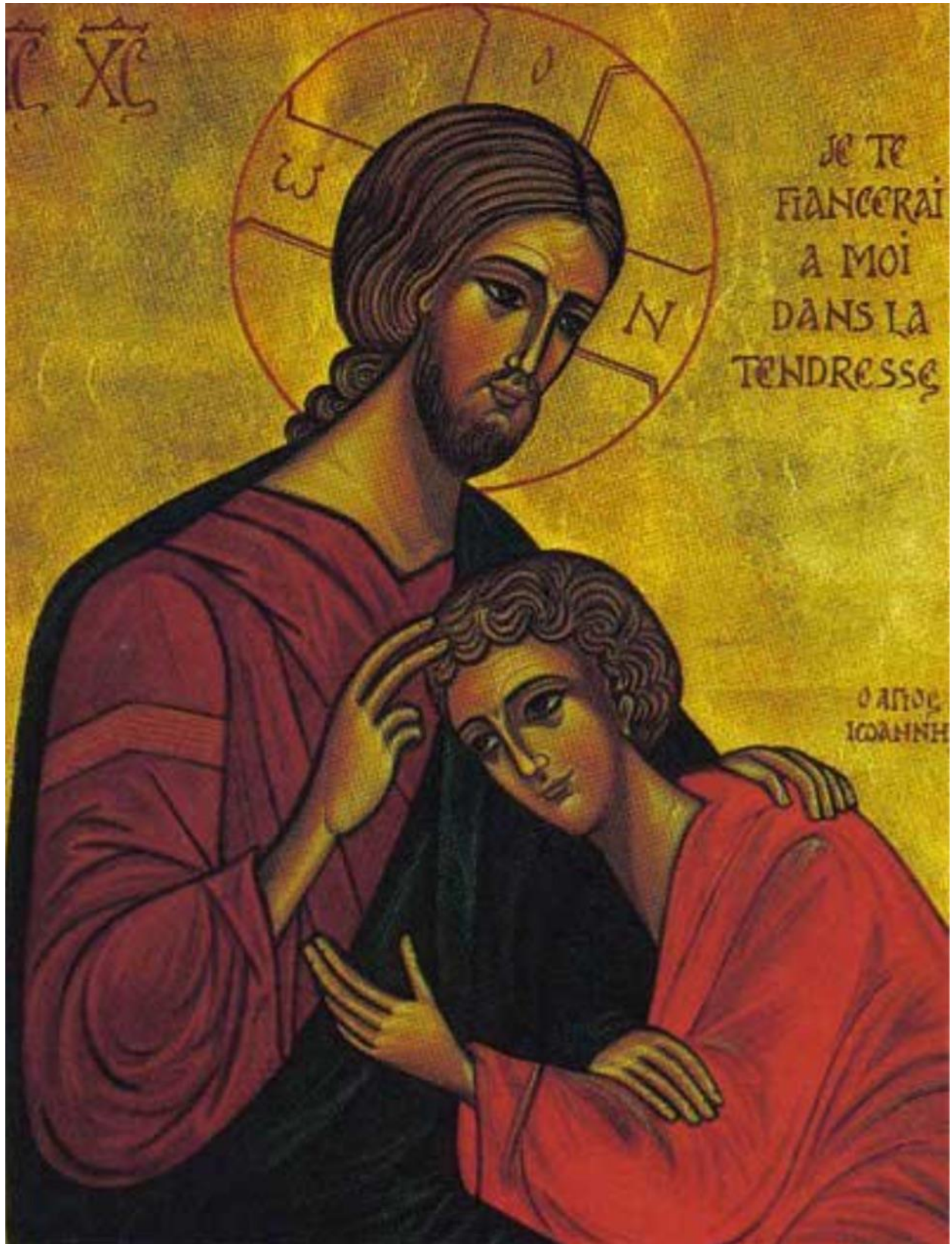
"There is no event so commonplace, but that God is not present within it, always hidden, always leaving you room to recognize him or not." – Fredrick Buechner

Notice the French wording on the icon (next page), "Je te fiancerai a moi dans la tendresse." In English, this is translated, "I will betroth you to myself in the tenderness." It comes from the book of the prophet Hosea.

"I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion." – Hosea 2:19, NIV

Let these words hold sacred space for you. Allow your inner noise to settle, placing yourself in God's presence. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your prayer.

- Gaze at the painting with openness, asking the Holy Spirit to help you see with God's eyes.
- What do you notice as you contemplate the scene? Consider all the details standing out to your awareness. Ask "I wonder" questions. (e.g., "I wonder what it feels like to be held close by Jesus.") Notice and wonder.
- What in the image draws your attention to a deeper pondering? Stay with what you are noticing. Continue to wonder.
- With your sanctified-in-Christ imagination, place yourself in this scene as the beloved, leaning into Christ's embrace. What does God want to say to you?
- What responses, memories, and feelings does the image evoke? What connection does it make with your present life? Take your time.
- Respond to God about what you are seeing and experiencing. Let your ongoing contemplation of this scene lead you to gratitude and worship.
- What will you take with you from this time of prayer? Rest in Christ.



Closing

As you bring this prayer retreat to a close, let the Holy Spirit continue to nourish your soul through rhythms of silence and music, of rest and worship, in the arms of your Beloved.

"Listening to that voice with great inner attentiveness, I hear at my center words that say:

'I have called you by name, from the very beginning. You are mine and I am yours. You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests. I have molded you in the depths of the earth and knitted you together in your mother's womb. I have carved you in the palms of my hands and hidden you in the shadow of my embrace. I look at you with infinite tenderness and care for you with a care more intimate than that of a mother for her child. I have counted every hair on your head and guided you at every step. Wherever you go, I go with you, and wherever you rest, I keep watch. I will give you food that will satisfy all your hunger and drink that will quench all your thirst. I will not hide my face from you. You know me as your own as I know you as my own. You belong to me. I am your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your lover, and your spouse . . . yes, even your child . . . wherever you are I will be. Nothing will ever separate us. We are one.'

Every time you listen with great attentiveness to the voice that calls you the Beloved, you will discover within yourself a desire to hear that voice longer and more deeply. It is like discovering a well in the desert. Once you have touched wet ground, you want to dig deeper."

-Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*

Music Meditation

Close your time of retreat by listening to [**"I Am Your Beloved"**](#) by Jonathan David and Melissa Helsler. Worship and commune with the One who loves you eternally.

"My beloved speaks and says to me:
 "Arise, my love, my fair one,
 and come away,
 for now the winter is past,
 the rain is over and gone.
 The flowers appear on the earth;
 the time of singing has come,
 and the voice of the turtledove
 is heard in our land.
 The fig tree puts forth its figs,
 and the vines are in blossom;
 they give forth fragrance.
 Arise, my love, my fair one,
 and come away.
 My beloved is mine, and I am his."

– Song of Solomon 2:10-13, 16a

Benediction

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, who calls you "Beloved." Amen. (Numbers 6:24-26, modified)

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Written and curated by Julie Meissner, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, 2022.