

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

The Healing Power of Trees

BY AMY

Spring officially burst into bloom last week. This time of the year, our campus becomes especially beautiful as white, yellow, and pink blossoms unfurl themselves against a background of green leaves. Of course, this riot of color never lasts more than about three weeks or so. The wind has already blown last week's white and pink blossoms across the Dell. Fortunately, the dogwoods are budding and getting ready to put on their show, though these too will be gone before long.

As beautiful as the flowers and the trees are, we can also see them as spiritually significant. In the New Testament, Jesus uses the lilies of the field as a model for human flourishing and an example to follow (Matt 6:28-31). Or we could note the significance of blooming cherry trees in Japan where the cherry blooms signal both renewal and the fleeting nature of time. Erika Mork, University of Lynchburg's Director of Institutional Giving, spent last spring in Japan and taught some of us about the custom of *hanami*, gazing at and meditating on the spiritual significance of the trees. *Hanami* is usually celebrated with family and friends in a festive way.

Thanks to the social sciences, we also know about the spiritual power of trees and flowers for healing. According to the Center for Spirituality and Healing at the University of Minnesota, gazing at nature, even if it's just a picture, can create eco-healing. Focusing on a beautiful landscape or tree can reduce one's anger, heart rate, and muscle tension. It can also induce feelings of calm, gratitude, and happiness. Eco-healing can also nurture a sense of reciprocity - a desire to care for the larger world that has given us so many gifts.

As we approach the busiest time of the semester, I invite you to consider this simple meditative practice, which takes about ten minutes. Begin by straightening your spine and sitting comfortably. Take the time to gaze at the beautiful picture of one of our campus dogwoods (Top Right - courtesy of campus photographer, John McCormick). As you look at it, be attentive

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to your breathing. Enlarge the picture if you can so that you can meditate on its beautiful details. Use your senses to connect to the image: what do you think the leaves feel like? What do you notice about the colors and the light in the picture? Can you hear the branch swaying in the wind? Can you smell the scent of the tree?

After several minutes of breathing and gazing, you might take a few minutes to write down your experience. You will be amazed at the beauty that flows from your pen! I tried this exercise last week in one of my classes and the impact was powerful.

Our beautiful trees and flowers on campus do so much for us. Whether we take the time to meditate on them while we are on the Dell, or inside gazing at a picture, they can help ground us, provide some much-needed calm, and foster our connection to the larger world.

Sympathies, Concerns, and Congrats

Our sympathies are extended to:

- **Meg Dillon** (Accessibility and Disability Resources), whose grandmother, Charlotte Carrasco, died.
- **Sandra Perez** (Academic Affairs) on the death of her mother, Stefanie Becker Garrett. Visitation (1 p.m.) and a Celebration of Life (2 p.m.) will be held on Sunday, April 3, 2022, in Snidow Chapel.

The Chaplain's Corner is a newsletter published by the Spiritual Life Center (SLC) at the University of Lynchburg. We share campus concerns and updates, spiritual life events and activities, and words for the journey. If you have a joy or concern you'd like to share, reply to this message, email the SLC office - spirituallife@lynchburg.edu, or call 434.544.8348. We only share with your permission. Current and previous issues are on the SLC page of the University website - go to Link in signature (www.lynchburg.edu/spiritual-life) and click on "Newsletter."

Dates to Remember

Sundays at 4:30 p.m.
Weekly ROMAN CATHOLIC MASS
Snidow Chapel

April 2 - May 1
RAMADAN
in the United States

Monday, April 4
CAKE CHAT
Topic: Afterlife
7:00 p.m. - Schewel 231

Friday, April 8
BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY

For more information about the Spiritual Life Center, including info on student spiritual life groups, go to our webpage - link in the email signature. You can also visit our Linkt.ree (link is in email).