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## On Retreat

"My help comes from God, the maker of heaven and earth." Psalm 121:1

Dear Ones,

I am thinking of you as I sit down to write this letter, and wonder where you are reading it... on your laptop in the living room? At your computer in the corner of the bedroom? On your cell phone down on the beach when you are standing 2 meters away from everyone? Where ever you are send me a smile. Did you know that simply by moving your smile muscles you can improve your mood? Smile like a holy fool, as I am doing, thinking of you.

In this period when we are being forced to stay inside, I thought it might be helpful to tell you about people who actually *choose* to stay alone and apart. These are people who decide to go on a spiritual retreat. Many of you will know that I have taken both 5-day and 10-day silent meditation retreats (I know that some of you think that I am crazy to do so!). In the Buddhist tradition, there are even some monks – highly trained and skilled – who go on retreats which last many years. A three-year retreat is a requirement for some levels of training, and it is not unknown for very skillful practitioners to retreat for a decade or more.

Tenzin Palmo, who grew up in England and trained to be a librarian, left her homeland when she was 21, and became a Buddhist nun in Tibet. After significant training, she felt called to retreat entirely, and spent 12 years in a cave – the last 3 without seeing anyone. Her days were passed peacefully, meditating, tending her garden, and simply being. She says,

"Most people worry too much even when things haven't happened; they get all worked up over scenarios of what might happen. The retreat helped me to develop inner resourcefulness and confidence: you learn that you generally do cope with whatever happens." Tenzin Palmo ('I spent 12 years in a cave', *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/may/15/buddhist-retreat-religion-first-person>)

I invite us all to "choose" the life we have right now – to see the freedoms which it provides: freedom from stress, from rushing about, from social pressures, for instance. I invite us to relax and enjoy the richness of each moment – from water running over our hands, to the smell of fresh coffee, to the sun inching along the horizon as the days lengthen. You might be surprised to find – once this is all over – a certain wistful longing for the simplicity of the life we are living now. Take time to relish what you can, while you are living it!

**Grace to you, and peace,**

Kate

*"Our relationship with God and each other strengthens us, and helps make the world a better place.  
We welcome and include **everyone** into congregational life."*