

from *Opening The Invitation*

Some days things unfold in my life in a way that make me wonder why I am so certain that I need to diligently plan and work and try to make things come out right. Oh, I'm not suggesting that planning and working don't sometimes pay off, don't sometimes render hoped-for results. But when you follow the impulse that comes from a deep stillness without the smallest thought or a shadow of an expectation about the outcome and then watch as things effortlessly unfold in a way you would not even have dared imagine, it makes you question all this trying, this dark certainty that everything must be earned or fought for. It makes you consider grace and the blessings of a human life that are ours simply by virtue of being alive. It opens you to the possibility of real surprises. It reminds you of how limited our perspective is, of how we often can't even imagine what is possible as we take a deep breath and plunge into another day, throwing a load of laundry into the dryer and stacking dirty dishes in the sink as we rush to make the morning bus, juggling deadlines at work against parent-teacher interviews, cringing as we vow once again that this will be the last time we pick up fast food or order pizza for dinner.

But sometimes, unexpectedly, a quiet moment finds us and we drop down into the life we have beneath all the rushing and the trying and the endless daily details, sinking into the fertile soil of the sometimes neglected inner life, where the seeds of remembering what matters are planted. What comes from that place when we give it half a chance flowers in our lives and the world, creating unexpected changes in the direction of our journey and offering unanticipated blessings to us and those around us.

This is what writing "The Invitation" was like for me. It came in a quiet moment late at night when tiredness stopped my head from censoring the words that flowed from my heart onto the page. I had just returned from a party. I'm not good at parties. I always feel slightly confused standing around talking to strangers about things that don't really matter. I can't quite figure out what it is we're supposed to be doing. If we are celebrating something, someone's birthday or graduation or retirement, I want to do something together that will mark the occasion, have people offer prayers or stories or meditations that bring us into mindful awareness of the occasion and the person we are there to celebrate. And if we are just there to get to know each other, then I want to talk about things that matter, want to know how others feel about their daily lives, want to hear their hopes and disappointments, want to know what they think about just before they fall asleep at night, how they feel when their alarm clocks pull them up out of dreams in the morning. I'm not suggesting that my attitude toward parties is necessarily a good one. At times I wish I understood the purpose and practice of just hanging out with others, but the whole thing eludes me....