



## The kingdom of God is within you Luke 17:20

Even between the closest human beings, infinite distances continue to exist, a wonderful living side by side can grow up, if they succeed in loving the distance between them which makes it possible for each to see the other whole and wide against a wide sky!

Rainer Maria Rilke



We have so little faith in the ebb and flow of life, love and relationships. We leap at the flow of the tide and retreat in terror its ebb. We are afraid it will never return. We insist on permanency, on duration, on continuity; when the only continuity possible, in life as in love, is in growth, in fluidity – in freedom, in the sense that dancers are free, barely touching as they pass, but partners in the same pattern...where lightness of touch and living in the moment are intertwined.

Gift from the Sea , Anne Morrow Lindbergh

### ACTION

Nouwen leaves us the image of the prodigal son, one of intimacy. Yet to this he later adds the word 'distance', and 'the open hand', one that does not cling. As you look on the standing stones ponder the casting and not casting of shadows, one onto another.

Live standing, live straight,  
not pulling away from your deepest self,  
where God is.

### DISTANCE AND INTIMACY

The Dutch priest Henri Nouwen is renowned as an eloquent commentator and witness of the inner life. Having graduated to teaching pastoral and liberation theology at America's prestigious universities he felt as if his inner life was wasting away. Offered a home at a community for adults with learning difficulties (Daybreak, a L'Arche community) he discovered a place of belonging. Having tried to satisfy the voice that said 'Make your way in the world, be a success!' he yearned for that place of unconditional love, of family, friendship and intimacy – of home..

*'The greatest challenge for him was to let go of his reputation, his ambitions, and his ego and to enter more deeply into his soul so as to enter more deeply into humanity and the mystery of God himself...the typical movement of mid-life.'*\*



With the breakdown of a close relationship he moved away in order to learn how best to be at L'Arche. His later days ruminated on the thought, 'What is home?'

He says that he had **mixed up first love and second love**. The first love being the source and base love, that of God for and toward us. The second love is received by family and friends, an expression of the first. To seek and expect the first love fully from the second creates pain and wounds.

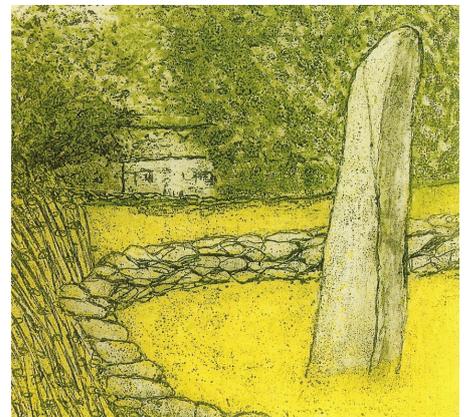
*'Where people fear loneliness they tend to cling to others instead of creating space for them...Intimacy is like a cupped hand that holds a bird, neither totally open nor totally closed, It is the space where growth can take place.'* (Reaching Out)T

When considered in relation to God such an open space, a 'lightness of touch' can seem like a disconnected distance. It is the aspect of God that is impenetrable, cloudy– 'you cannot see me face to face'. It is such mystery that deepens our awe of God and hollows out our familiar hearts.

Nouwen continues. **First loneliness** is that desire for intimacy that is found from friends and family, its finding a home. Yet there is **a second loneliness**, some form of dislocation or distance is experienced which when allowed opens up in us the desire to let God be all and all, the very centre of one's life. This then reinforces what home is, and allows re-engagement with our close-knit 'family and also with a wider community.

In short, to give ourselves to an inner journey is to give ourselves to God and to then emerge with a deep connection with humanity. It is a journey of ebb and flow between intimacy and distance that ultimately deepens communion and integration.

Read Peter Feldmeier, *The Developing Christian\**, Henri Nouwen: Exemplar of the Spiritual Journey, pp226-228 and [www.henrinouwen.org](http://www.henrinouwen.org) interview.



The Long Stone, Gail Kelly