

Jennifer K Nichols

Process Art

*Where the process of learning, loving, and living, **is** the goal*



WELCOME!



Hello Friends! It's the middle of October, and with it comes a return of cool mornings and sunny afternoons here in Alabama. It's not soup weather yet, but it isn't too far off. Currently my neighborhood is festive! Joel and I often walk Kona after dark and we enjoy the cheerful orange and purple twinkle lights! Though I'm not a fan of the grotesque decorations, I am fond of the opera-singing pumpkin next door (see the top left picture!). It isn't too loud to be obnoxious, and it is just noticeable enough when you walk by to make you giggle. I was, however, disappointed to discover that the ghost I thought was wearing a hipster beanie turned out to be a witches hat (picture just below). Joel sees an entrepreneurial opportunity in ghost balloons now – a hipster ghost is needed!



Unexpected life flourishing in unexpected spaces



**The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.**

John 1:5

Three times this month I've run into flowers growing where they *absolutely should not be*. The first time was when I parked my car and started carrying school supplies into tutoring and stumbled across a

time was when I parked my car and started carrying school supplies into tutoring and stumbled across a pink flower growing right out of a crack in a large concrete loading dock. Amazed, I took out my camera and snapped a picture.

The second time, I was watering a rosemary on my front porch when I noticed a tiny little blossom poking out between the rosemary and the side of the pot. A stray, white periwinkle seeded itself in the rosemary and started to blossom. Fascinated I took a picture and remembered the other unusual flower.

The third time, I was playing ball in the backyard with Kona. She got distracted by something under a bush and when I went to see what she was into, I noticed a tiny begonia growing in a patch of annoying weeds at the edge of the steps leading up to the porch. It was all the more remarkable because I didn't plant any begonias this year, and they are not perennials. But there it was, gracing us with its beauty. I went and found my phone and snapped a picture, and I said aloud, "Okay, Lord you have my attention!"

Apparently, God *still wanted* my attention.

The next morning, I picked up a collection of writings from women in church history to read. The first essay told the story of two Christians, one free and one enslaved, named Perpetua and Felicitas. They were both young mothers. Perpetua was nursing her young son and Felicitas was eight months pregnant. They were arrested for being Christians and imprisoned and sentenced to death for refusing to renounce Christ in 202 CE. Thrown into a dark prison, their Christian community visited them and paid for them to move into better conditions though they still endured derision and intimidation. I won't recount the whole story here. But I will say that what reverberates out of their account, told by Perpetua and possibly edited by Tertullian, is their friendship, their courage, their faith, their persistent hope, and their compassion. They cared for each other, for fellow prisoners, and they faced injustice and cruelty with grace. By the time of their death, the prison warden had become a believer. These women flourished, full of life in the Spirit, right up to the moment of their martyrdom.

Life blossoming, delicate and beautiful, growing out of harsh, difficult, crowded conditions. Unexpected compassion and faith so potent it is still shining out of the darkness thousands of years later. Flourishing life is not cruel nor is it full of vengeance. It does not bow to fear and it is not afraid to speak truth to powerful people. Flourishing life makes itself known by gentleness, beauty, and kindness. It grows in unexpected places, unexpected conditions, and unexpected ways. It shines in the dark and cannot be hidden.

*Where have you encountered unexpected life growing?
What is flourishing inside you?
What might want to come to life in you?*



I hope that you will keep watch for the places where life is flourishing, nurture it, and rejoice. You found the kingdom of heaven bursting into your midst.

Jennifer (and Kona)



A practice of **prayer** for the middle of October

St. John of the Cross (a 16th century saint who also flourished in persecution) wrote that silence is the first language of God. Before God calls forth light in Genesis, there is silence. Then God moves over the waters and speaks. In Revelation, before the angel gathers up the prayers of the saints, mixes them with incense, and tosses them back to earth where they fall with thunderclaps, *there is a full thirty minutes of silence*. People from every tribe and every nation stand with the Lamb of God and together they keep silence in heaven.

This silence is expectant. It is holy. It is generative.

It is God's first language.

This month, consider spending time with God in silence. Meet with God in God's first language. Take a walk without your phone. Drive without the radio, or a podcast, or music. Spend time with God where you do not read and do not scroll. This is prayer.

Simply be with God in silence. You will carry peace back into our noise.

The peace of Christ be with you, friends.

For God alone my soul waits in silence,

for my hope is from him.

Psalm 62:5

A question I am asking myself in the middle of October

What practice invites me to encounter the holy in a process that takes time, skill, and devotion? (from *The Sanctuary of Women* by Jan Richardson)

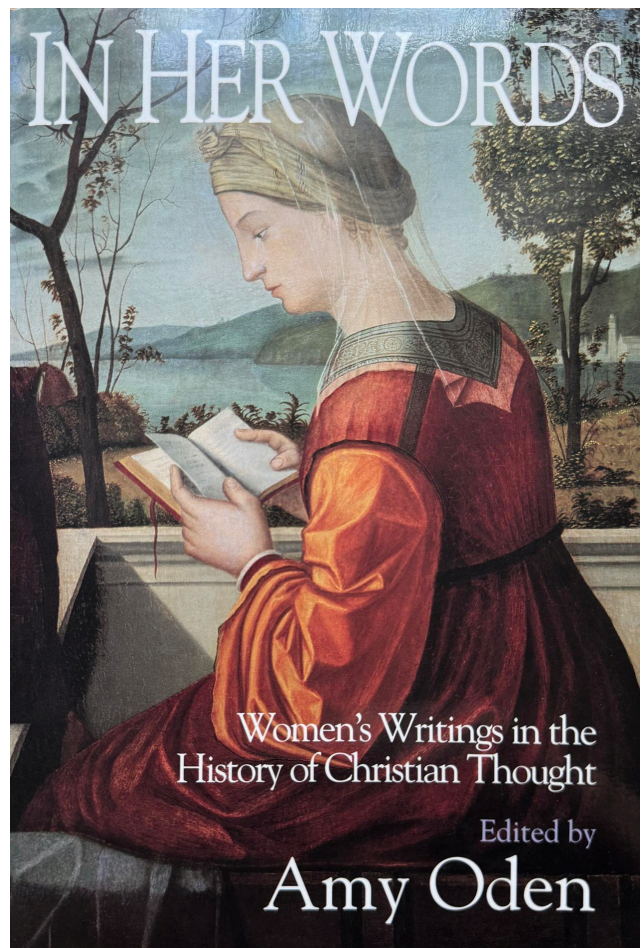
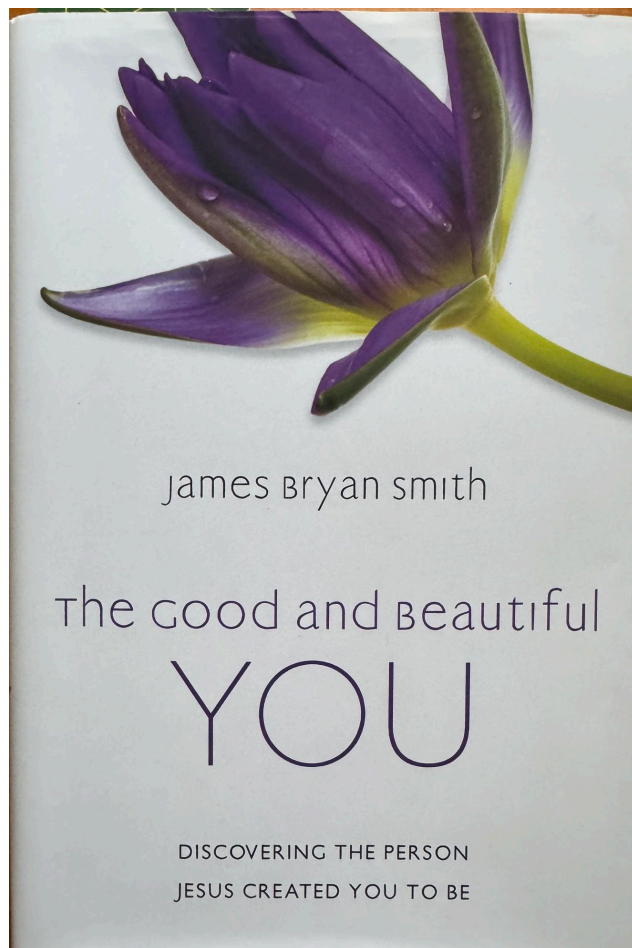
Consider keeping a list of what comes to mind in a journal.

Last month I kept a list of the worries I need to surrender.

Here are a few of the things I wrote down:

- That my sprained ankle won't be the same as it was.
- That I won't find a publisher for the book I'm writing.
- That I will find a publisher for the book I'm writing. (sigh....)

A book (or 2) that I am in the middle of reading currently.



The Good and Beautiful You, by James Bryan Smith. This is the fourth book in his Good and Beautiful series. This one names distorted, false narratives we carry about ourselves and replaces them with the Biblical truth. I'm enjoying it. I highly recommend all four in the series!

In Her Words, edited by Amy Oden. This is the book that has the story of Perpetua that I mentioned above. It's another one of my mother's books that I pulled off the shelf to read. It is doing my soul good to read what women of great faith say and do.

What I notice that is **beautiful** right now.



October

- Later sunrises and earlier sunsets!
- The warm, spicy orange color of roasted pumpkin and pie spice in my oatmeal.
- Artwork created by people living with Alzheimer's-related-diseases at my church.
- The smile on face of the person who made that artsy spider!

Naming what is beautiful helps me see where life is flourishing. I don't want to miss the places the kingdom is bursting in around me. I want to see it and join in!

Let's live like this!

FORMATION FLIGHT



There are new posts up at Formation Flight on Substack! Look for mine in November! This autumn we are considering the ways we live in rhythms!

What rhythms bring you joy?

[Click here to read Formation Flight!](#)

**But the Lord is in his holy temple;
Let all the earth **keep silence** before him!
Habakkuk 2: 20**

SEE YOU IN THE **MIDDLE OF NOVEMBER**

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