



Cultivating a Sense of Place

Third Act Gathering, October 2025

Douglas E. Christie, Ph.D.



Redwoods Monastery



Always Home

“Where are really going? Always home.”

Novalis

Recovering a Sense of Place as Sacred

“There are no unsacred
places/ there are only
sacred places/ and
desecrated places.”

Wendell Berry





Place Loss

“We are losing splendid and intimate modes of divine presence. We are, perhaps, losing ourselves.”

Thomas Berry

Place and Memory



I liked the bellows operated by rope.
A hand or a foot pedal – I don't remember.
But that blowing and blazing of fire!
And a piece of iron in the fire, held there by tongs,
Red, softened, ready for the anvil,
Beaten with a hammer, bent into a horseshoe,
Thrown in a bucket of water, sizzle, steam.
And horses hitched to be shod,
Tossing their manes; and in the grass by the river
Plowshares, sledge runners, harrows waiting for
repair.
At the entrance, my bare feet on the dirt floor,
Here, gusts of heat; at my back, white clouds,
I stare and stare. It seems I was called for this:
To glorify things just because they are.

Cultivating a Sense of Place

What does it mean to *cultivate a sense of place*?

What will it mean for us to recover a sense of place—a sense of *home*--during a time of acute and widespread *displacement* (social, racial environmental, spiritual)?

What *practices and dispositions* can help us deepen the contemplative work of place-making?



The Touch of Place

“Where you touch the pulse of the living planet; you feel its breath upon you.”

N. Scott Momaday

Medicine Wheel, Wyoming

Place and Identity

“Tell me the landscape in
which you live and I will tell
you who you are.”

José Ortega y Gasset





The Particularity of Place

“No one lives in the world in general.”

Clifford Geertz

Rootedness

“To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.”

Simone Weil





Reanimating Home

Home is “our corner of the world. . . our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word. All really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home.”

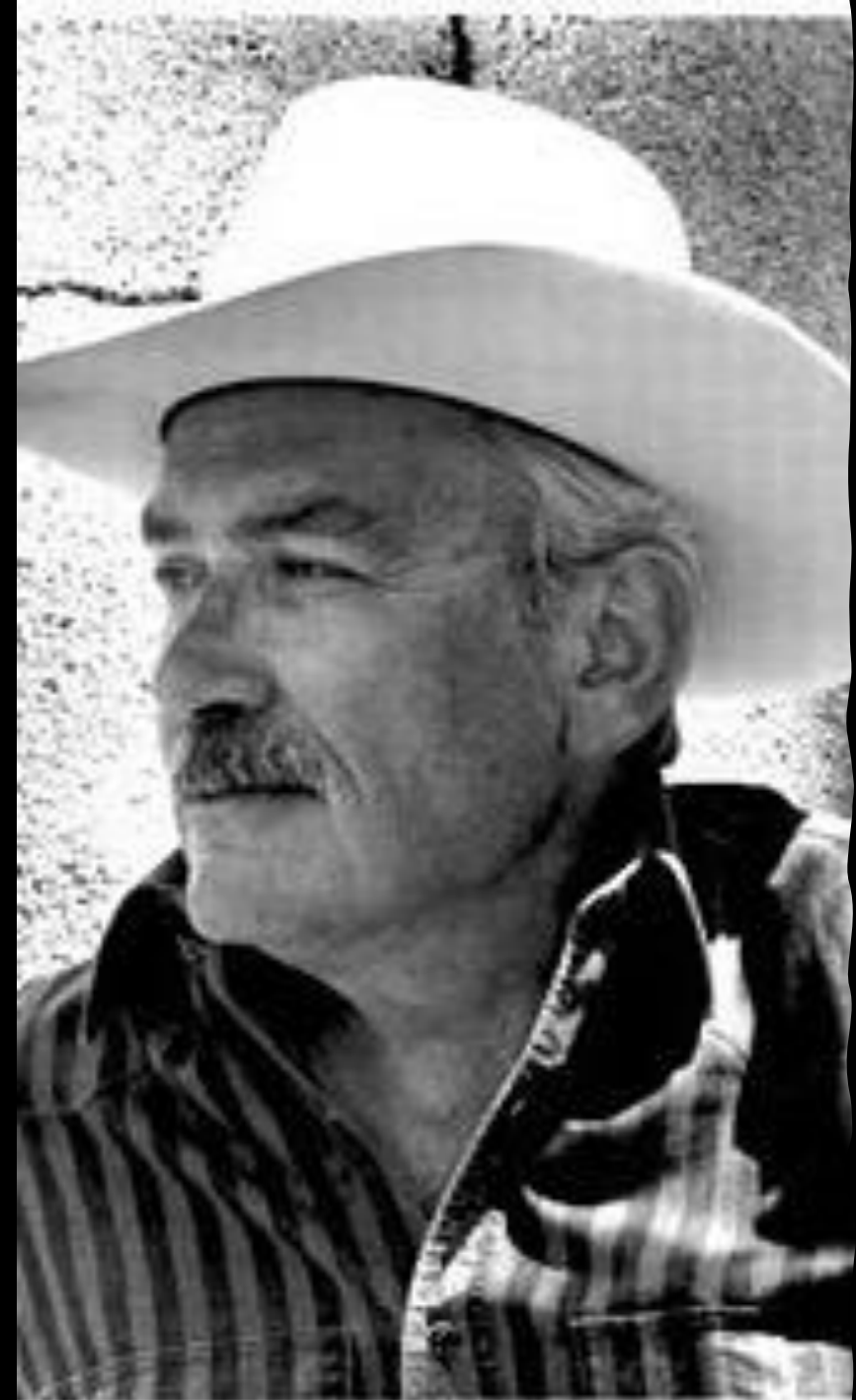
Gaston Bachelard

Pieter de Hooch, *Maternal Care*, 1658

Recovering our Place-Worlds

“[W]hat people make of their places is closely connected to what they make of themselves as members of society and inhabitants of the earth. . . We *are* in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine.”

Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*





Place-making as Contemplative Practice

“... places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become. And that is not all. Place-based thoughts about the self lead commonly to the thoughts of other things—other places, other people, other times, whole networks of associations that ramify unaccountably within the expanding spheres of awareness that they themselves engender.”

Keith Basso

The *Sense* of Place

“It is the feeling, assenting,
equable marriage between the
geographical country and the
country of the mind, . . . that
constitutes the sense of place in
its richest possible manifestation.”

Seamus Heaney





Place-Making: Remembering, Telling, Loving

“No place is a place until things that have happened in it are remembered in history, ballads, yarns, legends, or monuments.”

Wallace Stegner

Storied Places

“I will tell you something about stories. They aren't just entertainment. They are all we have to fight off illness and death. You don't have anything if you don't have stories.”

Leslie Marmon Silko,
Ceremony





Liberating Place

"This land was a place where I could imagine myself beyond the structures of domination."

bell hooks, "Kentucky is my Fate."

Homecoming

“All authentic spirituality is a homecoming. Home is the place where abandonment can’t ever happen. . . .We don’t just walk each other home to wholeness: we are home to each other.”

Fr. Gregory Boyle,
Cherished Belonging







Love and Care for the World

“We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love or otherwise have faith in.”

Aldo Leopold