

Dancing Into Joy: A Spiraling Easter Dance

M. Kathleen Chesnut

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In this collection of prose and poetry, minister M. Kathleen Chesnut meditates on her own troubled past and the joy that her faith has brought her. Abused as a child, Chesnut asked Jesus to “fix” her when she was five years old. While she didn’t love herself during the dark years of her childhood and adolescence, she never doubted God’s love for her. Mired in a deep depression that had lasted for decades, Chesnut began healing at the age of thirty-one.

Dancing Into Joy: A Spiraling Easter Dance is a collection of poems, meditations, stories, and sermons that detail Chesnut’s struggle to regain light and life. Dance is her central metaphor: the dance of the spirit with God and the reaching out to others that happens in the dance. “Dancing alone, yet encircled / Dancing together yet as one. / Dancing with the ones / who listen.” She finds that it takes trust to dance through life, to move forward without the fear that the world is waiting at every corner to harm you.

Some stories and poems here date from 1989, a pivotal year in her healing process. Others are from 2000 through 2005, exhibiting a deeper understanding of her growth and telling stories of others who have reached out through pain to grasp the joy that comes with vulnerability. Throughout the book, she describes her experiences in cycles: darkness, the struggle to process pain, the breakthrough, and the light and joy of self-love that are tested as new memories come to light, only to begin the cycle again. She ties these archetypal circles to the cycle of Jesus’ resurrection: darkness gives way to light, the “Spiraling Easter Dance” she refers to in the title.

Chesnut’s work radiates joy and compassion. It takes a strong will to live with joy, to decide each day that you will find the good in your circumstances and in the people you meet. “Two roads- a personal decision / to determine the way a world will glow / a radioactive lump of clay, diseased- dead / a life-filled light spreading through the universe. / A decision, mine.” Her journey into joy will offer hope to those struggling through their own dark periods.

M. Kathleen Chesnut, a United Church of Christ minister, is pastor of the First Congregational Church in Dickinson and the First Presbyterian Church in Belfield, North Dakota. Before becoming a minister, she taught high school English on Indian reservations in South Dakota.

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