

Simplicity as spiritual practice

6 december 2009

three points and some music

- difference between simplistic and simplicity
- finding balance in a culture of zzzzzzap! requires adaptation
- adaptation requires relationships of agency and accountability



what is simplicity?

- we know it's not about being simplistic
- numerous orders and various Christian communities have long argued it's a constitutive element of Christian life
- perhaps this song might help





'tis a gift to be simple.... but we are "in over our heads"

Robert Kegan suggests...

- shift from traditional to modern to postmodern cultures demands adaptation for which our culture provides no curriculum
- the paradox of “simplicity” is that we have to have complex abilities to structure it (Maede, et. al.)
- for example, Christmas time in middle class US culture

Christmas is...

- a celebration of the birth of Jesus
- a massive consumer spending binge
- a time to be with family and close friends
- an uneasy navigation around and negotiation with strong feelings
- a demand for, and an invitation to, ponder joy



joy is...

- deeper than happiness
- often intertwined with a recognition of vulnerability, even with pain (think of the joy of childbirth)
- usually comes with longing, grows out of desire
- a gift from God, flowing from grace
- in Christian theological terms, something that comes from kenosis (from “pouring out” of Godself)



our culture provides a curriculum of desire

- desire for things
- desire for “zzzzzap!”
- desire for instant gratification
- amnesia or denial about deeper pain and the vulnerability/fragility of life
- fatigue, stress, inability to do anything to make a real difference



paradox: we long for joy, we are offered instant happiness through things

authority, authenticity, agency... of these three,
agency figures most deeply and invisibly in media
culture

agency: activity, means, effect, influence, force,
power

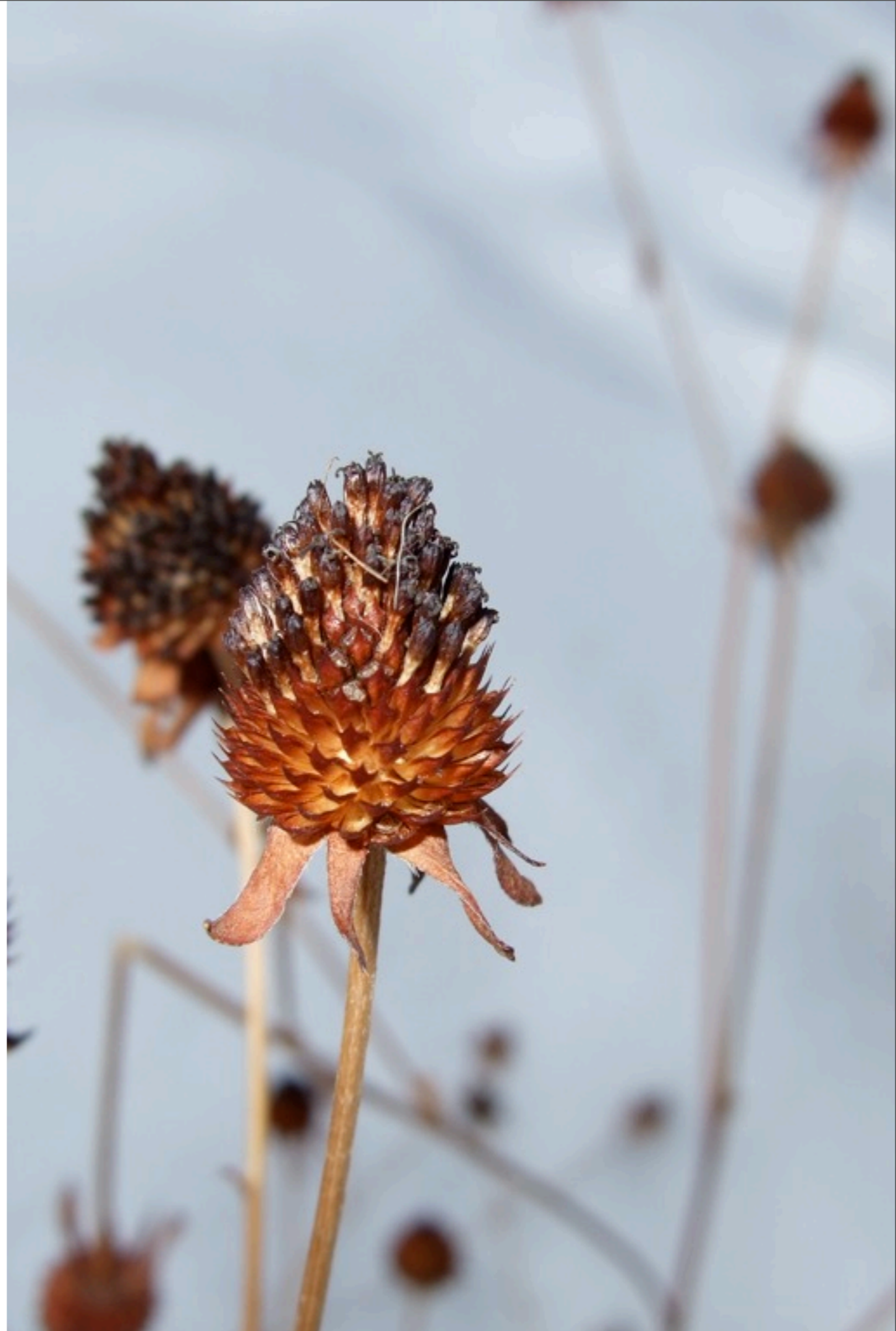


our culture offers us a curriculum of agency through consumption

we need to help each other adapt, by learning how
to have agency that builds joy

voluntary simplicity

- slowing down
- paring to essentials
- building traditions to sustain relationships
- teaching that joy comes with time, with longing, often with pain
- learning from elders
- **CREATING!!**



possibilities

- story-telling
- music (singing carols!)
- preparing food
- family rituals
- art (scrapbooking, photos, digital story-telling, etc.)
- play



next week: time and simplicity

more info:

[http://www.luthersem.edu/mhess/web/
Simplicity.html](http://www.luthersem.edu/mhess/web/Simplicity.html)

