

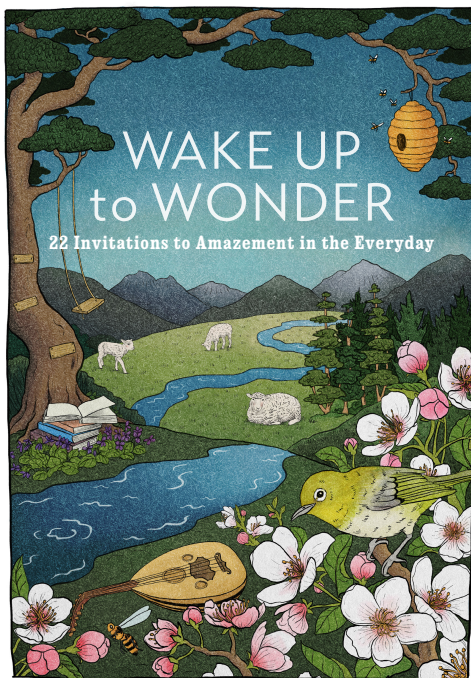
# The Daily Progress

## In new book, Karen Wright Marsh urges readers to 'wake up to wonder'

TOP STORY July 12, 2023 BOOKS  
By Jane Sathe

In her conversations with college students seeking spiritual encouragement, author Karen Wright Marsh urges them to keep their eyes open to the world around them — and their hearts open to a healthy dose of wonder.

"I talk with students a lot about spirituality being an invitation," Marsh told The Daily Progress. "The best life is one of curiosity and amazement and wonder."



KAREN WRIGHT MARSH

She will participate in a book talk and signing for "Wake Up to Wonder: 22 Invitations to Amazement in the Everyday," at 7 p.m. Saturday at New Dominion Bookshop.

"I love that it's coming out in the summer," Marsh said of her book, which is being released this month from Brazos Press. "It feels like a summer invitation."

Marsh is the founding director of Theological Horizons, a ministry at the University of Virginia that offers lectures, dialogues, mentoring and spiritual studies. She lives at UVa's Bonhoeffer House with her husband, professor Charles Marsh, and also is the author of "Vintage Saints and Sinners: 25 Christians Who Transformed My Life."

Her new book, "Wake Up to Wonder," introduces readers to 22 people from diverse backgrounds and time periods whose experiences she found inspiring in her own quest. She examines the lives and practices of both modern figures, including Dorothy Day, Fannie Lou Hamer, Henri Nouwen and Wangari Muta Maathai, and saints, including Saint Patrick of Ireland and Saint Francis of Assisi. One need not follow any organized religion to connect with her examples in the book.

Marsh said it is important to remind students that inspiration for a fulfilling life can come from unexpected sources, and that exemplars need not look like us or share a lot of similarities on the surface to stir the conscience and heart. She said she chose for her book "people who find meaning and purpose wherever they are."

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, for example, a lay brother in a Carmelite monastery in Paris in the 1600s, "was a person who learned contemplation and meditation while working in the kitchen of a monastery, washing pots and pans," Marsh said. "He was a spiritual innovator. He didn't speak Latin. He didn't know the liturgies. He was creative where he was."

Examples set by Dorothy Day, a journalist and social activist who helped found the Catholic Worker Movement to serve the poor in the 1930s, often inspire students who are trying to reconcile living their beliefs with participating in a culture that can offer conflicting messages about success and worth.

"She said that if you have two coats in your closet, one of them belongs to a poor person," Marsh said. "For those of us who struggle with Christianity as a religion of privilege and wealth, she turned it on its head."

Although Day gladly sacrificed trappings of success to serve others, her life was more than "ladling soup and suffering," Marsh said. "She loved to get away and go to an island and rest with the sound of the waves. She surprises me because she has small pleasures, and so I can have small pleasures."



*Image: Karen Wright Marsh is the founding director of Theological Horizons, a ministry at the University of Virginia that offers lectures, dialogues, mentoring and spiritual studies.*

In her new book, Marsh offers writing prompts, spaces to jot down personal reflections and a "Try This" feature with each historical figure segment to offer ideas for daily living. Her section on Trappist monk, social activist and mystic Thomas Merton includes a simple breathing exercise that can feel centering on a hectic day.

"It's just a basic breathing exercise, but you could do it at a red light," she said. "We know that breathing will help calm our bodies down."

In her Brother Lawrence section, Marsh offers suggestions for choosing an intention that can be relied on as needed to soothe, refresh and inspire. Intentions can come from snippets from psalms or scriptures, or quotes from people one admires. Marsh likes a James Baldwin quote: "Our crown has already been bought and paid for; all we have to do is wear it."

Marsh said her book offers a fresh take on the idea of a beach read because it's accessible and inviting for summer use. "You can read it while you're waiting for a swim team practice to be over or a Zoom call to begin," she said. "I wrote it for people like me — people who get overwhelmed and

need some encouragement, and some amazement."

Marsh has the same message for busy college students and exhausted adults alike: Enchantment is a great remedy for burnout. It's readily available, and it's free.

"We are hungry for moments of amazement," she said. "My message is that it's all around us. We live in awe every day."

Marsh said she keeps finding inspiration in a quote from "I Asked for Wonder" author Abraham Joshua Heschel: "Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement ... get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed."

*The staff at New Dominion Bookshop recommends arriving early to get the best seating. For information, go online to [ndbookshop.com](http://ndbookshop.com) or call (434) 295-2552.*

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