



FINDING A STILL CENTRE

In the midst of our busy lives
A quiet place in the heart of our community
November 7th, 2021

Welcome: While we are separated by space and perhaps time, we meet knowing God is with us.

Music: Piano Concerto No 23. 11 Adagio (Mozart)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8e0fBlvEMQ>

(Just a reminder to skip the ads quickly and view performances in full screen, they are just beautiful!)

Opening prayer: Faith and Doubt

Lord, when my season is joy, let me celebrate
and be thankful;
When my season is pain, let me discover
you healing me;
When my season is doubt, let me know
the seedling of faith stir again;
When my season is loneliness,
bring a friend to me;
When my season is full of loathing,
take my bitterness away;
When my season is loss, show me you
have not forgotten me.
Help me Lord, to discover you in all seasons
of my life.

Amen

'Faith and Doubt', Iain Gow, in "Be Still" p.45

Reflection



Pixabay

Happy are those whose delight is in the law of the Lord.....They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. Psalm 1: 2-3

Lectio Divina: John 20: 24-29 NRSV (A Guidance sheet can be found on page 4)

Context

Background to passage: The gospel author is thought to be John. His gospel was published near the end of the 1st Century, and included in the bible alongside the other three 'synoptic' gospels. John's main

difference to the others lies in the way he uses symbolism. His goal to show Jesus as the object of faith and belief underlies the story of Thomas. To believe or not to believe? Thomas embodies this struggle.

The cultural context of this passage was one of great unrest. The harsh power of Rome for the Jews, meant that freedom to worship in their holy place, the Synagogue, depended upon acceptance of the status quo. Roman power was a reality. Thomas had been absent the night of Jesus resurrection appearance in the upper room, a night recorded as one of fear. That is until Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit changed his friends forever. Until then, Mary's testimony that she had seen Jesus, had not been believed nor had its significance been recognized. Thomas hearing of events later had difficulty in believing.

A week later the disciples are in the upper room, when Jesus appears to them and to Thomas. This time there is no mention of fear. John's emphasis is on Jesus' invitation to Thomas to see and believe rather than to castigate him.

In translating the words used here, scholars suggest that more accurately we might read...."Do not be unbelieving, but believing". Despite his earlier proclamation that he must see and touch Jesus with his own hands, Thomas does *not* touch, but simply responds in awe. "My Lord and my God!". While the other disciples have recognized Jesus as Lord, it is only Thomas who declares that this is the Word, that was God!

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Centering Prayer and time of silence: (A guidance sheet and information for letting go can be found on p4-5)

Music: "Bring us Oh Lord" (William Harris) Performed by Voces8

https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=skwx_n8DNXc&list=RDAMVMskwx_n8DNXc

(NB: The words to this choral piece are a little hard to hear so they are included below.)

*Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening into the house and gate of Heaven,
to enter into that gate and dwell in that house,
where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light;
no noise nor silence, but one equal music;
no fears or hopes, but one equal possession;*

*no ends or beginnings, but one equal eternity,
in the habitations of thy glory and dominion, world without end.*

Closing Prayer: Community Prayer

Holy God, parent and child,
we seek a new view.
Immersed in your presence,
open us to our neighbours.
We admit that we don't know where to start
and that our neighbour sometimes
seems mysterious and unknowable.
Help us to see and appreciate diversity
in our community.
Break our stubborn hearts.
Open our minds to recognize the daily challenges of others.
Rather than provide answers
or try to fix situations we may not understand,
fill us with childlike curiosity so we can explore life together.
Bring an awareness of young voices into our lives.
Renew in us the promise of possibilities.
And keep us honest, God.
Let our efforts be unsullied by ulterior motives like
increased membership or maintenance of the status quo.
We seek new vision and renewed spirit
for the pure joy of learning and being in relationship. Amen



Herbhand-wordpress.com

Living Relationally in a Culture of Acquisitiveness, A time of dramatic inequalities, and a fragile creation, in "A Child Laughs", Prayers of Justice and Hope, Maria Mankin & Maren C. Tirabassi. P196

Blessing:

Go in faith.
And may God the Creator be nearer than breath.
Christ our friend hold your hand
and the Spirit surround you with Grace. Amen

From The Glory of Blood, Sweat and Tears, by Dorothy Rae McMahon, Liturgies for living & dying, p120



Oecd-environment-focus.blog

Guidance sheet for Lectio meditation

Begin by taking a moment to adjust your posture so you are comfortable yet upright, notice your breath....as it comes and goes...

Sit with each phase for 5 minutes.

1: As you read the text for the first time simply notice what strikes you, (*positively and/or negatively*) **about the reading itself.** What stands out or resonates? Mull over what strikes you most about the passage itself? What might your responses as a listener of this time be?

2: Meditatio (Meditation)

As you read the text for the second time notice what resonates this time, as you allow the passage to speak to you and your life today? How might this relate to you? Notice your responses, your thoughts and feelings. What comes to your mind? Allow yourself to dwell meditatively and compassionately on whatever arises.

3) Oratio (Prayer) and **Contemplatio** (Contemplation)

In this third phase after you read the text, silently share your thoughts, and responses with God responding simply with heart and mind. Speak to God quietly within, about any new word spoken and any desires it has stirred in you. Is there any action the Spirit may be calling you to consider? Listen for God's response. True prayer calls for honesty with ourselves and transparency before God. Rest in quiet awareness of God's presence.

Guidance for Prayer of the heart

Centering Meditation, or Prayer of the Heart, simply sitting quietly with an open heart, in God's presence for 20 minutes.

1) In preparation

-pay attention to your breathing, simply noticing your breath come and go.

-choose a word, or a phrase, as your 'sacred word' for this evening.¹

This **'sacred word'** gives an anchor for the mind, to help you let go of all that gets in the way of deeply opening to God.

You may invite a word, image or phrase to arise within you. A fresh image of God may draw you, perhaps a word or phrase from the opening prayer. Give yourself a moment now to choose your sacred word or phrase for tonight.

2) Begin by silently saying your sacred word or the phrase you have chosen, rhythmically and repetitively within.

3) When distractions or thoughts arise, simply notice them and let them go gently. Simply return to your word or phrase in an attitude of consent, or saying Yes to God. Imagine the distractions are clouds floating gently across the sky and let them go.

4) Should the word or phrase drop away, rest effortlessly in the silence and loving presence.

'Learning to Let Go'

The theological basis for Centering Prayer lies in the principle of kenosis, Jesus's self-emptying love that forms the core of his own self-understanding and life practice. . . .

Centering Prayer is a devotional practice, placing ourselves in God's presence and quieting our minds and hearts, but as Cynthia Bourgeault explains, it doesn't only work on that level. What the desert abbas and ammas, the author of the Cloud of Unknowing, and even Thomas Keating could not have known when he formally started teaching the practice five decades ago, was that it works on a physiological level as well, strengthening neural pathways, and making "letting go" that much easier. When it comes to releasing our strong preferences, especially our desire for power and control, it seems safe to say that some practice of kenosis (the act of letting go) is necessary for any movement forward.

The gospels themselves make clear that [Jesus] is specifically inviting us to this journey and modeling how to do it. Once you see this, it's the touchstone throughout all his teaching: Let go! Don't cling! Don't hoard! Don't assert your importance! Don't fret. "Do not be afraid, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!" (Luke 12:32). And it's this same core gesture we practice in Centering Prayer: thought by thought by thought. You could really summarize Centering Prayer as *kenosis in meditation form*. . . .

Every time we manage to let go of a thought in Centering Prayer, "consenting to the presence and action of God within," the gesture is actually *physically embodied*. It's not just an attitude; something actually "drops and releases" in the solar plexus region of your body, a subtle but distinct form of interior relaxation. . . . **And in time**, this gentle and persistent "inner aerobics," undertaken under the specific banner of Centering Prayer and in solidarity with Jesus's own kenotic path, will gradually establish that "mind of Christ" within you as your own authentic self.

