

*More than information.* A sermon preached on September 16, 2018 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: PSALM 46

MATTHEW 8:23-27

Last Sunday I introduced you to the call and the challenge to be an “urban contemplative” – to practice in your own lives some of the tested and found to be beneficial methods or approaches of waiting, anticipating, looking for God to break through the broken, and bruised aspects of not only our lives, but also the lives of those around us. To live knowing the unexpected, unnecessary, unwanted and unfair will happen in our lives, But knowing that these are not the last word.

To realize that God continues to be with us in a real and personal way.

To be an urban contemplative then is to be neither passive nor inert.

It is to see, touch, hope, believe, respond, and live in the light of God's promises and truths

To make these and not the beguiling voices of our world our centre...

Last week,

We reflected on the practice of the Examen – at the end of each day, examining that day – when did we feel closest to God

When did we feel God to be distant?

Why was that the case?

Is there anything for which we need to ask God for forgiveness?

What are we expectant about God doing in our lives the next day?

This morning,

A practice called *lectio divina* or holy or spiritual reading.

Like the Examen, *lectio divina* may first conjure up images of wizened monks bent over ancient Bibles.

Well,

I suspect that when St. Benedict was formulating his Rule in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the first practitioners of *lectio divina* were wizened monks bent over their ancient Bibles.

Today, *lectio divina* as St. Benedict outlined it is practiced by a variety of ages and people who have a variety of experiences of the certainty of the Risen Lord.

St. Benedict did not invent the practice. I think Jesus and the disciples practiced some form of it. As did Biblical people – if Psalm 1 is to be held to be recognized scripture

**<sup>1</sup> Happy are those  
who do not follow the advice of the  
wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
or sit in the seat of scoffers;**

**<sup>2</sup> but their delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law they meditate day and  
night.**

**<sup>3</sup> 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.**

**<sup>4</sup> The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives  
away.**

**<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the  
judgement,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the  
righteous;**

**<sup>6</sup> for the LORD watches over the way of the  
righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.**

The scriptures of the Old and New Testament have always been seen as the primary way we learn who God is and our relationship to Him.

But the scriptures have never been viewed as some sort of talisman that we hang around our neck to ward off nasty things.

The Bible is not the book you place on the coffee table and never crack open to read.

If you begin at the beginning of the Bible and just read it, I can almost promise you that sooner rather than later, the words you are reading shall just be words.

If you struggle to the end, and “read every word” as my mother used to question me with my reading habits – some people will be impressed and compliment you on your diligence.

But if you are asked, what does the Bible say, again, I can almost promise you may remember some of the personalities, some of the incidents, perhaps even see some of the common threads and images, But you WILL stumble on the question – what did you learn for yourself from this book – The BIBLE

Regular – read every word – begin at the beginning and finish at the end reading of the entire Bible will add to the names, stories and themes, but something will be lacking

--for the Bible was never meant to be read as one might read a textbook, a sports magazines or novel. Read the Bible only for information and often Bible reading will become lifeless, repetitive, vague and unclear.

HOW SAD – for this is not how the Bible was ever to be treated.

It is God’s gift to us to help us see that we are part of a bigger and never ending story about God’s relationship with his creation (you and I).

It is given to help us see that God is truly a personal and loving Creator.

It is given to encourage and help us see our own lives are important to God.

We matter

You and I count

In God's eyes, each one of us is precious.

The Bible is a gift given – so we as believers can hold the course as it were – of modelling the promises of God,

The ways of Jesus – to be **in Christ** as Paul phrases it in his letters.

If the Bible is to do for us all this and more,

Then how ARE we to approach its content?

How ARE we to read and reflect on the scriptures?

How do we begin to see our stories in the Biblical stories?

One tried and proven method is *lectio divina*.

A practice where we take a particular passage of scripture – and not rush through it,

But literally sit with it and listen...

*Lectio divina* then is a reflective and prayerful kind of reading.

It is about quality, NOT quantity.

It is about staying for a time with a particular text – not about covering a lot of territory

*Lectio divina* then is NOT a race through scriptures – it is prayerful lingering.

What does the text say?

What is going on?

What does the text say to me?

What relevance does the passage have for my daily, our daily lives?

What do I want to say to God about this text?

You begin to have an honest conversation with God through the promptings of this text.

What difference will this text make in my life?

So *lectio divina* – sacred reading is a slow contemplative praying of the scriptures.

We set aside a time every day to listen to God,

To seek God in silence

God does not reach out and grab us – so do not expect lightning, ecstasies or burning bushes.

In lectio, God gently invites us to enter more deeply into His presence.

This morning I want to give you a sense of the practice of *lectio divina* by joining me in an abridged exercise of the practice using for our consideration the Gospel lesson Carol read moments ago – **Jesus calming the storm**

If you will turn to that page now – page 8 in the NT.

Some introductory comments – in the matter of what lesson or text to read, there is no set, written in stone list

If you are brand new to this practice, go to a passage of which you are particular fond or familiar.

Begin there

Or if you are a follower of the daily lectionary or read a devotional book –use the story and the Bible verse to think more deeply about the daily portion.

I would suggest for beginners to stick to a passage from one of the Gospels or epistles or one of the better known Psalms

Limit the text to 10-15 verses.

Also remember, *lectio divina* works best with smaller groups than full congregations.

Smaller groups give every member a chance to respond.

Smaller groups are usually quieter

So we begin – Jesus calms the storm – Matthew 8:23-27

1. INVOKE or prepare – put yourself in the Presence of God. Become quiet and offer yourself to God.

Perhaps light a candle and put it in the center of the circle of people who have gathered.

The symbolism of the single lit candle is powerful – for it represents the light and presence of Christ in our midst.

Or before you begin looking at the scripture – a short prayer

You are the Potter O Lord and we are the clay in your hands. As we meditate on Scripture may your words form our hearts to be more like Jesus Christ.

AMEN

2. READ – have someone read the passage slowly

Savour each portion.

Imagine yourself in the story.

Listen for one word or thought that you are drawn to and then gently repeat that to yourself to quiet your thoughts.

Do not be afraid or self-critical of distractions.

They do happen when we are quiet

Separate piece of paper – after/ later.

READ THE TEXT.

Remember as you read the scriptures, God is helping you to see images, ideas from the text.

Jot down a word or thought you are drawn to

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READ THE TEXT AGAIN

Imagine yourself in this terrible storm at sea.

What are your emotions?

I wonder – do you feel scared

I wonder – are you angry at Jesus, at God or one of the other disciples.

With whom do you most identify?

What do you hear and experience as you watch and listen?

I wonder – do you blame yourself for anything  
 Is trusting God an issue in your life?  
 Again, jot down your thoughts,--perhaps as a  
 prayer.

RE-READ THE PASSAGE A THIRD TIME.

Rest in God's embrace.

Perhaps it will help you to imagine Jesus' face,  
 To hear his words and to "see" the sea calmed.

Ask Jesus to help you be present and calm in your  
 body and soul,

Just as he was in the storm at sea.

As a prayer, breathe in "peace" and breathe out "be  
 still"

Sometimes in *lectio divina*, you may return several  
 times to the text.

At other times, a single word or phrase will fill the  
 whole time set aside (15-20 minutes a day)

Be gentle with yourself

It is not necessary to assess anxiously the quality of  
 your *lectio divina* time.

You are not performing or aiming at some goal

It is not a race, a contest or a test for credit.

*The central purpose of lectio divina is to be in the  
 presence of God by praying the scriptures.*

*To listen to what He is saying to you.*

CONTEMPLATE or rest in God's presence and simply enjoy His nearness.

Good idea to record your experiences or any insight you receive during this time.

It is all so mysteriously wonderful as through lectio divina God opens up in new ways,

Who He is,

The ways He continues to teach and model His ways in our lives,

So we can model them to ALL OTHERS

Thanks be to God for His Word.

Thanks be to those like St. Benedict who gave us ways to consider the scriptures prayerfully, reflect fully and personally. AMEN