

## “Trading Thinking Caps”

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Psalm 46:10

Be still, and know that I am God.

Mark 1:35

In the morning, long before dawn, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a lonely place to pray.

Ephesians 4:1-4a, 12-13, 21-24

Live as people worthy of God’s call. <sup>2</sup> Be humble and gentle, bearing with each other. Accept each other with love, <sup>3</sup> and make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together. <sup>4</sup> We are all parts of one body, we have the same Spirit ...

<sup>12</sup> [Christ’s] purpose is to equip us for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ <sup>13</sup> until we achieve a unity of faith and knowledge of God’s Son. God’s goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, fully alive like Christ. ...

<sup>21</sup> If you have paid careful attention, you been well taught in the truth we have through Jesus. <sup>22</sup> We cannot use ignorance as an excuse. So, put aside your old self that has been corrupted by chasing illusory desires. Everything has to go. Instead, take on an entirely new way of life – a God-fashioned life, with new attitudes and thoughts. Clothe yourself with this new nature.

One thing I am looking forward to as I step back from pastoral ministry is rediscovering prayer. It seems like I’ve forgotten how to do it. I pray each night for the ones who are special in my life or have a known need. And whenever someone’s name or face comes to my heart or mind, I lift them up – saying something like, “Watch over Sandra” or “Take care of them.” But I used to make time simply to be with God, and I miss that. Maybe this week’s sermon will help me.

Today’s is our penultimate sermon on 12-Step Spirituality. Throughout this series, I’ve been drawing heavily from Fr. Richard Rohr’s book *Breathing Under Water*. Because of his decades working with A.A. and as a prison chaplain, he has much to offer about Spirituality and the Twelve Steps. Step 11, our focus for this morning, speaks of seeking through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of God’s will for us and the power to carry that out.

How would you describe your prayer life?

One day, as Jesus finishes praying, off somewhere, his disciples approach him. “John the Baptizer taught his disciples a prayer. We want one too.” Interesting. Jesus has not taught them a prayer. All their time together, and thus far, he has not found this to be important!

When Jesus prays, he goes off into silence and solitude. For all that we fill our Sunday mornings with words – spoken and sung – there’s no sign that this was Jesus’ pattern. But, we humans long for comfort and familiarity.

The Lord’s prayer, such a big part of many churches’ identities, gives us that. Interesting that it is Jesus’ response to a complaining disciple.

Rohr suggests that we have two very different mental operating systems. The first is rational and the second, contemplative. Both, entirely different types of software. Because our calculating mind is almost always in control – not only at work but as we do our morning puzzle, when we try a new recipe, when we are deciding between bowling and Ping-Pong, it has become our only operative system. We don't even recollect that there's another way. Are you with me?

This computing/assessing mind sees everything through the lens of our own needs, our memories and feelings. But, drawing on scripture and connecting it with Step 11, Rohr believes that we need a "spiritual revolution" such as Paul is writing about in our Ephesians lesson.

We need another way to help us process big issues like love, death, suffering, God and infinity. Otherwise, we will find that our attempts are totally inadequate for our needs. To pray about the big stuff, and to deal with the big stuff, we need something different. We need a contemplative operating system. Or, leaving the analogy of computer processors behind, we might think of this as changing our thinking caps.

When we pray, when we spend time with God or in considering spiritual matters, it's crucial that we take off one thinking cap and put on another, one that can shift us from a self-focus on our own wants and needs to a whole-being soul-focus. When we fail to make this switch, we find that our aim is too narrow. We are myopic. Our truths are too small.

So often, our prayers are about asking God to help us reach a solution we've already decided upon instead of asking God's help to learn what we really desire. What God's will for us is. We are supposed to grow beyond this adolescent-style of praying. Prayer is meant to draw us into another way of perceiving our lives and the world around us. And God.

Jesus says that true prayer is always answered. Yet we've all prayed for things and seemed to receive no answer. Some say, "Well, you're praying for the wrong things." So, we pray for peace and hope, but even this is only sometimes fulfilled, and imperfectly.

Prayer is always answered only when we can switch our minds to the mind of Christ. Only when we get our own agendas out of the way. Only then, when our prayer is about communion with God rather than trying to change or direct God. Only then, when we are willing to let God change us and move into a new place. When we're in that contemplative mindset, our prayer is already answered because our being is one with God.

Last week I talked about consciousness. About God within us. Today I asked, when you pray this way, who is doing the praying? Is it you or the Christ-in-you? A contemplative/meditative mind prays, and lives, from a different place. It abides in the great I AM and draws life from a deeper well.

When we pray this way, we experience at-one-ment with God that we cannot get when the calculating mind is in charge. While this mind is good for lots of things, it is not helpful in dealing with the existential questions. This is why it's so important to change thinking caps – because where the mind leads, the heart and body will follow.

Jesus says, "When you pray, go into your inner room, and close the door." Jewish homes of the time only had one room. So early listeners would have known Jesus was talking about the inner self, your personal inner room. When he says, "Don't babble on," maybe he's talking about something other than verbal prayer.

I have used the word surrender a few times during this sermon series. We need to surrender our hold on our own expectations and our ways of thinking and being in the world. To grow in our prayer, we also want to surrender our prayer to God. We want to come empty-handed, ready to simply be in God's presence and notice what God has for us as we are ready for it. This is the contemplative or meditative union that Step 11 speaks to. It is in this secret place that God resides. And it's what Jesus means when he says, "Don't you know that God's kingdom is within you?"

Jesus spends much of the Sermon on the Mount speaking against social payoffs – when we pray, fast, give, judge, when we wear or possess the right things. Jesus knows that these payoffs prevent us from going deeply enough to face our real issues. And how we live inside is how we live on the outside. When prayer, or any spiritual practice, is a performance, we have nothing to keep us grounded.

It takes courage and commitment to go off by ourselves to pray the way Jesus does. It's easier to simply go to church. And Jesus did participate in temple and synagogue services. But maybe there are limitations to the helpfulness of praying as a group.

Social prayer – like the Lord's prayer during worship or a pastoral prayer – can knit a group together but it does not automatically heal anything. So while we will continue praying the Lord's prayer, we also want the kind of prayer that has no words, that has the power to transform us from the inside out. The kind of prayer that brings us into present-ness with God. This kind of meditative prayer leads us to real awareness of God's will for us and gives us what we need in order to carry it out.

I think our Breakthrough Prayer is a little bit of both – social and contemplative – at least when we do it right and truly open ourselves to what God would reveal. Together each morning and each evening, we ask God to help us be and do as God intends. We ask for God's next great thing and ask to be attuned so that we can be a part of that. If you look back at our past BTPs, never has one been about us telling God what we want.

I spoke of synergy a few weeks back. Synergy is an interaction between two or more agents which produces a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects. This is what happens when we let God pray through us. We get to work creatively with the One who shapes all life. Our lives and all we connect with are fuller and richer because of this. We are living God's will because God is acting through us.

Yes, prayer as meditation or contemplation takes many of us way out of our comfort zone. It's unfamiliar ground. Totally new territory. But this is only because we are out of practice. God tells us, "I will put my instruction within them and engrave it on their hearts." Since the time of the Hebrew prophets, and before, God calls us to this kind of... communion.

So, pray. At home and wherever else your days take you. In your prayer closet, which we now realize is within us. Pray for an ever-widening perspective – to want what God knows is best for you and to live from that place.

Amen.