

Discernment: Finding Clarity in the Chaos

Week 1: What is Discernment?

Take-home questions

These are some questions and ideas for you to reflect further on today's worship and to join us in our collective Lenten study of Discernment.

Review 1 Kings 19:5-18, that we read and reflected on today in worship.
(You can find it online by googling it.) Re-read the passage.

How is Elijah feeling? Have you ever felt like Elijah? When? Why?

If you identify at all with Elijah's story, what was pursuing you?

In your life's story, what have been the wind, earthquake, or fire for you?

Various translations of the Bible translate verse 12 as God coming in "a sound of sheer silence" or "a still, small voice."

The Hebrew word, דַּמָּמָה "demamah" translates as "quiet—calm, silence, still, gentle."
What does this description say about God?

When have you experienced "demamah"? or "sheer silence," or the "still, small voice"?

Take a break for silence. Set a timer and sit in a comfortable place for 2-5 minutes (or more). Try to just focus on your breath. If a thought comes in, just let it pass on by, try not to follow it. Bring yourself back to your breath.

Listen for God in this experience.

During and afterwards, what do you notice?

Some suggested practices for the week ahead

These are some easy-to-try spiritual practices that can help you as you launch on a season of discernment. By no means do you need to try all at once. We invite you to try them out as you see fit, see how they feel and then report back to us next week. You are welcome to join us in study groups after Sunday worship in Lent or other times. Check out the home page link at the bottom of the page.

Spiritual Examen: a Practice to Try this Week

A spiritual practice derived from St. Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish Basque Catholic priest and theologian, who gave up a life of nobility and co-founded the religious order called the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in the 16th century. The examen was developed in the 1500s as a core practice is used to this day by Jesuits and other religious groups.

Find a quiet, comfortable place to spend about 10 minutes at the end of each day this week:

1. Give thanks for all God's gifts and benefits
2. Ask for light/ God's presence
3. Review the day: thoughts, words, deeds, desires, consolations, desolations
4. Express gratitude, sorrow or purpose of amendment
5. Ask for the graces you desire for tomorrow

You can make it as long or short as you want. Try repeating the practice throughout the week.

Practicing Gratitude

Another practice is to name and write down three *specific* things each day for which you are thankful.

It could be anything: time with a loved one, a delicious meal, an unexpected break in your day, a kind exchange with a stranger, something in nature.

The point is to make it specific, and spend some time in your mind re-living the experience, savoring the feelings and thoughts they brought up in you.

This is a core practice that neuroscientists suggest in helping change some of our brain patterns from our predetermined negative, anxious bias to a cultivated, more positive, hopeful outlook.

Prayer Partners – 5 minutes

We welcome EVERYONE at United Parish to try having a prayer partner in Lent.

You may think that you are not that spiritual, or that you don't know how to pray, or even if you do, you don't want to share that with someone else, that it's private. That's OK. Just give it a try.

It's a holy experiment, basically committing to having a spiritual buddy in the congregation with whom you talk for 5-15 minutes each week from now through Easter (April 12).

You can sign up here: unitedparishbrookline.org/prayer-partners-during-lent

An online “data-driven” daily discernment practice

Methodist colleagues at the Harvard-Epworth Church in Cambridge have created a daily discernment opportunity, in which they email you a question each day to answer as part of your own private discernment practice. You can check it out and sign up at 4oform.org/signup

Scripture for your Week ahead

Look again at the Psalm that we chanted in worship today: Psalm 139:1-24.

Take a few minutes to read and re-read it during the week, paying attention to how it lands with you at different times and in different situations.

For more info, check out unitedparishbrookline.org home page for “Opportunities during Lent”