

Lenten Study

Discernment

Finding Clarity in the Chaos

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Lent 2020

Session 3



UNITED PARISH IN BROOKLINE
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Session 3: Discerning Through Scripture, Saints and Prayer **(Week of March 15)**

75 minutes

Purpose of this four-week study

To expand our individual understanding of discernment as a “gift of the Spirit”

To learn and share spiritual practices that support us in discernment

To discover and experiment with how we may be most authentic with God.

To appreciate that each of us has our own unique approach to discernment.

Purpose of this session

To introduce spiritual practice of Lectio Divina, share some ancient prayer and provide a contemporary prayer journaling exercise to support discernment.

Check-in

Did you complete the spiritual gifts inventory?

Were there any surprises in your scores?

Share your reflections on your spiritual gifts.

(If you did not do the Spiritual Gifts Inventory yet, it is available on the website under “Opportunities During Lent” with Lesson 2.)

Icebreaker

Where did or do you see God or the Spirit this week?

How is it going with you amid the Covid-virus-19 pandemic response?

Scripture - with Lectio Divina

adapted from several websites including Busted Halo

Lectio Divina (literally *divine reading*) is a way of becoming immersed in the Scriptures very personally. It draws on the way Jews read the Haggadah, a text read during Passover that retells the Exodus story. Haggadah means “telling” and along with being a physical text, the word captures the practice of telling and retelling a story to find deeper meaning.

The Christian form of Lectio Divina was first introduced by St. Gregory of Nyssa (c 330- 395), and also encouraged by St. Benedict of Nursia (c 480-547), the founder of the Benedictine order. It’s a way of developing a closer relationship with God by reflecting prayerfully on God’s word in scripture. In Lectio Divina, the chosen spiritual text is read four times in total, giving an opportunity to think deeply about it and respond thoughtfully. When we practice Lectio Divina, we sometimes can imagine we’re actually involved in the events of Scripture.

Here’s how to get started:

Prepare

Light a candle and/or pray a prayer of invitation, saying something like, “God, let me/us hear from you,” and spend a few minutes sitting quietly so one’s mind is open to hearing from God.

Lectio (Read)

The first reading is an opportunity to get to know the Scripture passage. Listen carefully for any words or phrases that seem to jump out. Write down or share those words if you are doing this with someone. No need for lots of explanation, just share what caught your attention.

Meditatio (Reflect)

On the second reading of the same passage, listen for the deeper meaning God has infused in this scripture particularly for you in your life today. How does it make you feel? If there’s no immediate response, ask God to be more present with you.

Oratio (Respond)

After a third reading, what action could you take based on this message from God, that would keep up the conversation with God and deepen your connections to the Spirit.

Contemplatio (Rest)

After the final reading, spend around 5 minutes in silent contemplation. This doesn’t need to be a time of prayer or deep thought – just sit quietly and allow God to work. When the mind starts to wander and dart here and there, bring it gently back to stillness again.

The scripture is on the next page.

Romans 12

2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

Looking back through the century at Prayers related to discernment
Read these prayers below which span many centuries.

Which of these prayers speak to you today?

Are there other ancient prayers that speak to you, that you have used over the years in your prayer practice?

Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

*My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think that I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always,
though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.*

Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which
he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands,
with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours*

St. Patrick Prayer (387-461)

*Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.*

Exercise: Writing a Prayer to God ~ 30 minutes

This is a creative journaling exercise in writing a prayer to God. For the first part of the exercise, you will take 10 minutes to write a prayer to God, with whatever is on your heart, just as if you were having a direct conversation or correspondence with God. You do not need to share this prayer with anyone else. It is only between you and God. Feel free to spread out in the room to have as much privacy as you need.

This is a completely individual prayer. Some things you might include:

- praise and thanksgiving
- an honest exploration of what you're struggling with in your life
- confession
- prayer of hopes for the future
- prayer about people you need to forgive, or where you need forgiveness

After writing this prayer, review it. Then take 10 minutes to write a prayer of how you might imagine (or hope) God would answer your prayer. Take a few deep breaths and let God speak through you. It doesn't have to be a definitive statement, just an open exploration of how you think God responds to you – or how you would respond if you were speaking for God.

Discussion

What was this experience of this exercise like?

What did you discover in your letter to God?

What was the response like?

What did your response say about how you imagine God?

Take-away questions

Do you find writing prayers helpful or difficult?

Would you consider keeping a prayer journal, just recording your prayer for each day?

Closing Prayer

God, day by day, let us pause, listen, ask open honest questions, breathe deep, listen for your voice. Help us to feel your presence in the chaos. Give us the clarity and the strength to discover your inner peace and your undying love and share it freely wherever we go. Amen.

Exercise: write a prayer a day for the next week. It can be short or long, casual or eloquent. Just keep it genuine.

Next Week

We will look at a spiritual discernment practice from the Society of Friends (Quakers) called a “Clearness Committee” a way of gathering with two or more to get clarity about where God’s Spirit is leading you.