

Lenten Study

Discernment

Finding Clarity in the Chaos

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Lent 2020

Session 6

Last Supper: Invitation to Service



UNITED PARISH IN BROOKLINE

American Baptist • United Church of Christ • United Methodist

Session 5: Finding Our Purpose(Week of April 5)

75 minutes

Purpose of this Lenten 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 discern Jesus’ call to service, love and community and how it plays out in our lives.

Check-in

How are you feeling? Are you in contentment, clarity, chaos or something else?
Are you tuned into and ready for Holy Week?

Opening Prayer *as written or spontaneous*

Loving God, we come into your presence today with a spirit of discernment,
a longing to find your deeper will in our lives,
a connection to the story of Jesus’ last days with his beloved friends,
a willingness to explore together what the story means.

Whatever resistance, whatever hesitancy, whatever fears we have today,
we invite you to work through them, to speak through us,
that our lives may magnify more clearly your presence in the world around
us.

Be with us in our time together: in our speaking and our listening.

This we pray with grateful hearts and holy expectation. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Scripture

Take turns reading the scripture two times, asking the following questions before and after each reading:

1. What word or phrase jumps out at you?
2. What word or phrase do you need right now?

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

John 13: 1-17, usually read on Maundy Thursday of Holy Week

Now before the festival of the Passover,

Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him.

And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,

got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.

Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet

and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him,

“Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

Jesus answered, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet.”

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.”

Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”

Jesus said to him, “One who has bathed does not need to wash,

except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.”

For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe,

and had returned to the table, he said to them,

“Do you know what I have done to you?

You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am.

So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet,

you also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master,

nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.

If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Questions for Further Reflection

Looking over our Lenten discernment study experience together, we have covered a range of spiritual practices to assist in discernment of spiritual gifts and one's purpose. We have discussed how:

- Elijah and Jeremiah sought God's presence and understanding of God's will for their lives.
- Teresa of Avila's prayer from the 16th century challenges us to embody Christ in all our actions.
- St. Ignatius developed examen techniques for our daily realignment with God's purpose.
- The Quaker practice of a Clearness Committee showed us the power of witness to one other in the search for clarity.

In today's scripture, Jesus took a simple act of daily life—washing the dust from one's feet—as an opportunity to express love and connection through service, and teaching and leadership through the idea of “servanthood”.

Which of these discernment practices and stories has engaged and intrigued you?

Looking back at your life, do you have more clarity about events or feelings in your past where God was using you and your gifts?

As you have worked through this Lenten class, what are two or three “ahas” that helped you get clarity on your particular path for enacting your purpose as an agent of God's healing? (*Adapted from the last question in Mark Scandrette survey*)

Looking forward, what do you need from the United Parish community to support you in discernment and accessing or activating your gifts?

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*

Meditation

Take three minutes to reflect on this commandment from Jesus.

John 13:33-35

Little children, I am with you only a little longer.

*You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you,
‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’*

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another.”*

Wrap Up

We encourage you to return to the spiritual practices we have introduced in the previous weeks:

- the spiritual examen
- daily gratitudes
- lectio divina
- a Clearness Committee
- the Purpose survey below
- a prayer journal

All the lesson plans will be available through Easter if you want to download them.

Closing Prayer *invite participants to say their own prayers aloud as part of this prayer.*

God, be with us in the days ahead, in our journey toward Easter
as we seek to find your kind of clarity in whatever chaos exists around us.
Day by day, let us pause, listen, ask open and honest questions, breathe deeply,
and listen for your voice.

Hear these prayers we offer here together (*participants can offer their own prayers*).

We entrust to you these prayers,
both spoken aloud and those heard only in our hearts.

Give us the clarity and the strength to discover your inner peace
and your undying love and share it freely wherever we go. Amen.

Discerning Your Life Purpose questions

from Mark Scandrette's *Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love* (InterVarsity Press, 2011), pp. 196-7.

Scandrette founded ReImagine, a Center for Integral Christian Practice in San Francisco (reimagine.org) that serves like a Zen dojo, helping people learn to practice their faith in everyday ways. markscandrette.com

1. *What am I passionate about? When do I feel most alive, vital and energized?*
Your answer to these questions can help you identify the unique way that you were made to be of use in this world.

2. *How would I describe my personality and temperament? Am I an introvert or extrovert? What core yearnings motivate my actions and decisions?*
When you are reflecting on your vision and goals, it is important to consider the gifts and limits of your personality. You don't have to become someone else. Imagine scenarios that are realistic to who you were created to be.

3. *Who is calling out the best in me? What do people recognize and affirm about my best contribution to the world?* The feedback you receive from people who know you well can provide important clues about your destiny.

4. *In what areas do I long for greater wholeness in my personal life?*
Each of us has wounds or struggles that we must face and surrender as we enter God's light more fully. Part of your journey as a person is discovering healing and finding ways to manage your weaknesses.

5. *Where do I sense the greatest need for justice and healing in our world?*
The needs of suffering people in our world (both local and worldwide) can seem overwhelming. No one person can hold all that pain and struggle. Each of us has been given sensitivity to a certain frequency of needs. What is breaking your heart that breaks the heart of God?
Is it the physical needs of heart those in poverty, the emotional needs of those who are displaced, lonely or abused, or something else?

6. *Who are the people in my life that are important for me to care for and journey with over my lifetime?* This question acknowledges the fact that we are not meant to live as isolated individuals. Who are the stakeholders in your life (e.g. family, friends, a particular place and people)?

7. *What are my strongest talents, passions and skills? Where can they be of greatest service to others?* You've been given skills, talents and expertise that can be leveraged for the good of world. One of our primary life tasks is discerning how to utilize these resources.

8. *How does the work I presently do contribute to the greater wholeness that God desires for all of humanity?* It can help to make a connection between what you are already skilled to do with how you hope to contribute in the future.

9. *As you have worked through this survey, what are two or three "ahas" that can help you get clarity on your particular path for enacting your purpose as an agent of God's healing?*