

Discernment: Finding Clarity in the Chaos

Week 3: Discerning through Scripture, Saints, and Prayer

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.

In today's Gospel story (Luke 6:12-16), we heard about Jesus withdrawing in prayer before he calls his disciples.

What do you think he might have prayed about?

What were some questions he might have been considering?

Have you ever prayed over an upcoming choice? What were the results?

How might you benefit to pray regularly over decisions for which you are responsible?

We also heard about different discernment practices in worship.

What practices have you used in your life? What practices intrigue you?

If you find yourself typically drawn to solo discernment practices, what would it be like to take on a practice that involves others? Or vice-versa?

What role does God have in your discernment?

Some suggested practices for the week ahead

These are some easy-to-try spiritual practices that can help you as you launch into 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 homepage link at the bottom of the page.

Lectio Divina: a practice to try this week

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.

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 reliving 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

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 at 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 40form.org/signup

Scripture for your week ahead

Ponder this verse from the Epistles (James 1:5) *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

Take a few minutes to read and reread it during the week, paying attention to how it lands with you at different times and in different situations. Are you able to trust God to provide wisdom when you ask for it? How is God calling you to listen and be receptive to divine wisdom?

Throughout your week, you may also want to re-read the verses from Psalm 40, that we chanted in worship today.

For more information, check out unitedparishbrookline.org/news/opportunities-during-lent.