

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 25 JULY, 2021

Listen, attune, and heed
the inner Voice of Love.
For in sacred Silence, we open ourselves
to Wisdom,
to ever deepening communion with
the Source of all creation.

—Nan Merrill

GATHERING INTO PRAYER

Opening Sentences — Psalm 46 from *Psalms for Praying* by Nan Merrill

The Beloved is our refuge and our strength,
a loving Presence in times of trouble.

Therefore we will not fear
though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake
in the heart of the sea;
though the waters roar and foam...

In all things we hear: Be still and know that I am Love.

Be still and know... Be still...

(Take a few moments to still your body and mind.

Listening to/singing a gentle, reflective song or taking a few deep breaths might help.

Relax into your body. Look around you and settle into your space.

When you are ready, continue with the prayer.)

Prayer of Invocation

Gracious Creator and Keeper of Earth:

I behold the beauty of these winter days—

morning showers, warming sun,

birds in nest-building and mating mode.

In my stillness before the wonders of creation I give thanks.

Come to me, Lifegiving Spirit,

enter the sanctuary of my solitude.

Strengthen the parts of me that are flailing.

Give direction to the parts of me that are strong.

Gift me with resilience, trust and hope

as we journey through this season.

Amen.

ENCOUNTERING THE LIVING WORD

Scripture Reading—John 6:15–21

Jesus and his disciples are surrounded by a large crowd, listening to Jesus' teaching. In the context of the Passover festival with its highly symbolic meal, the Gospel tells of Jesus feeding the people with five loaves of bread and two fishes. The crowd is full of wonder. But the religious leaders feel threatened and hostile. The reading begins amidst the tension of these two sentiments.

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing.

When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Reflection on the Word

I've been mindful of the various responses we are having as we move through the changing situation of this week. I've seen and heard fear, anxiety, frustration, dispiritedness, resolve and stoicism in myself and others. In an attempt to respond somehow, on Tuesday morning I emailed those on the church email list a prayer inspired by the Stage 4 Restrictions which we initially entered on Monday. I posted this same prayer on Facebook and, even though I only have a few "friends", it was shared around and I received several comments—more than any other post since re-joining Facebook early in the year. A nerve was obviously touched.

The prayer identified two sides of silence. Silence can be a welcome reprieve from busyness and stimulation, a refreshing pause within the whole of life like Jesus' withdrawal to the mountain for some alone time after teaching and serving. But silence can also be *the silencing of*, that is, being restrained from giving voice or squelching down feelings and thoughts. Like another lockdown, it can deplete us of enthusiasm and energy.

*Again life will quiet down.
Sometimes slowness and silence
are a welcome balm.
But sometimes stillness
brings to the surface
the painful noise of... all sorts of dis-ease
because we are not in control.*

In my observation, our appetite—a popular word as of late—for solitude has decreased or at least taken on new shape. We were understanding of, if not flourishing in, the first lockdown of early 2020. Three lockdowns on, we might be compliant but I sense a growing impatience, frustration and crabbiness to the stay-at-home quiet that is forced upon us.

Imposed silence or suppression, as it is sometimes called, comes in many forms. It can come about because of “no-go-zones” within relationships—topics that are too painful or volatile to engage. It may be the undercurrent of grief or trauma that runs quietly yet continually below the surface. Or it is the result of self-censoring those parts of ourselves, our perspectives or our histories we feel others will find objectionable or unpleasant or which we ourselves wish to avoid.

Whatever its nature, this kind of silence is actually full of noise and pain. It is closer to the churning of the sea experienced by the disciples in the Gospel. Though God is in and through all things, their experience led them to believe Jesus was absent—they were lost in the dark and the wind was blowing them about.

This reflects the reality of the Beloved Community in John’s Gospel. Jesus was no longer physically present in the world. Therefore a major intent of the Gospel is to affirm Jesus is *with us in Spirit* and to encourage belief within the physical absence.

In today’s story, Jesus appears untouched by the churning sea and wind. Full of faith, he is able to hold a state of trust and non-anxious presence no matter the circumstance. The disciples see Jesus and wish to take him in the boat with them. Jesus may not be present in body, but he is as close as our desire.

*As the winter rain falls,
filling reservoirs
and causing rivers to flow,
fill us with your Spirit
in these days of our wintering.*



Inviting Jesus into the boat and trusting the voice deep down that says, “It is I; do not be afraid,” does not change situations in the world. Drawing near to God in faith may not protect us from COVID, release us from lockdown, or guarantee certain outcomes for the post-pandemic future. But it does enable us to, like Jesus, hold a trusting, non-anxious stance within our churning, changing world. It makes it possible to face many things with hope, including the noise beneath the silence and a torrent of struggle and pain.

In reflecting on faith, hope and love in a chapter from his book *Being Disciples*, Rowan Williams writes:

[Faith] appears not as a system, a comprehensive answer to all our problems. It appears quite simply in the form of 'dependable relationship'. You may not understand, or have the words on the tip of your tongue, but you learn somehow to be confident in a presence, an 'other', who does not change or go away. You realise that when the signposts and landmarks have been taken away there is a presence that does not let you go. And that is faith, I would say, in a very deeply biblical sense.

I appreciate that this kind of faith is expressed and shared, then, not through dogma or religious forms to which we and others must adhere, but through *dependable relationships*. We, as the Church made up of disciples of Christ, seek to demonstrate dependability in our relating individually and corporately. We are called to embody simplicity of being, transparency, honesty, and just plain showing up, especially when there is need.

This week I was grateful once again for the essential service status St. Andrew's received last year which has allowed us to nurture dependable relationships throughout 2020 and into this time. The foundation of communal space that has grown over these months puts us in a good place to *be there* in simple yet profound ways—a safe and loving presence in the heart of Glenelg.

It was heartening to see people sitting outside (in the cold!), exchanging names, sharing conversation with hot soup and a cuppa' in their hands. The seeds of hospitality, encounter and care we have been tending seem to have taken root and are well and truly growing and bearing fruit. Not only are we, as formal members of St. Andrew's, dependable but those we seek to serve are emboldened to be as well. *We are, altogether, dependable community.*

Like the disciples' boat that immediately reaches the land toward which they were going, we fulfil our calling and meet Christ's aim for the Church through dependability and fidelity. The more we invite in and know deeply the dependable relationship we have with the Source of Love, the more we are able to reflect this faithfulness—as a community, for our community.

*Help us to rest our minds and bodies,
gently easing ourselves down
with trust
in the warmth of your presence
with and for us always.
Amen*

RESPONDING WITH OUR LIVES

Silent Meditation

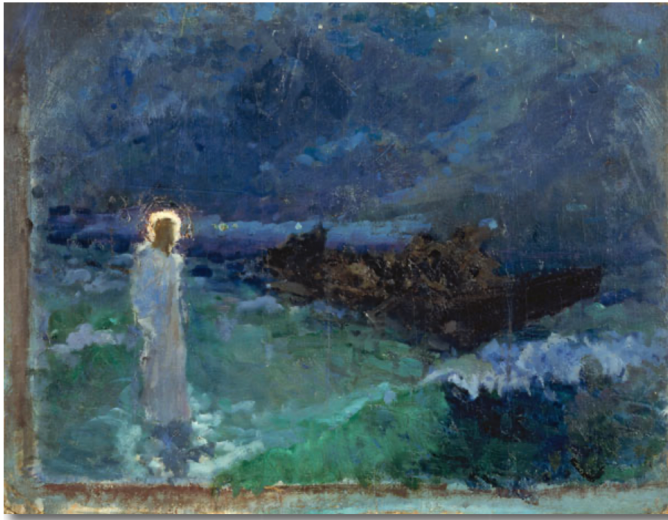
What are we doing in meditation?

*We are doing something very simple, very profound, and very transformative;
we are paying attention. ...It's like a ship going through the water.*

*You steer your way through the waves of the mind—
the desires, the images, the fantasies, the memories, the plans.*

Gently, one by one, you let them go by taking your attention off of them.

And we do that by giving our attention to the mantra. That's how it works. (Laurence Freeman)



What thoughts and feelings have come to you recently? “It is I; do not be afraid.”

Sit with these words from the Gospel for a few minutes: *It is I; do not be afraid*. You might make them, or part of them, your mantra. Repeat them gently in your mind until they fall away in deep prayer.

Painting by Konstantin Alexejewitsch Korowin

Prayers of the People

Gracious, sustaining Spirit flowing through our days, we rest in your faithful, dependable presence. Though intangible in form, you are known in all that is trustworthy and true such as the sun's rising and setting, the kindness of others, laughter and the sustenance of earth. As the world continues to churn and the winds of change continue to blow, hear us as we pray:
Draw near to us, O God, that we might be at peace and embody your love.

We pray for situations in our world where unrest, poverty, environmental crisis and disease strike fear in the hearts of people and their communities. This week we hold in your light the rioting in parts of South Africa and rising tensions in Afghanistan, the lifting of restrictions in the UK and the beginning of the Olympics in Tokyo as COVID outbreaks flare in both places, the floods in Germany, China and India, the wildfires in the US. Hear the cries of creation and her people as we pray:

Draw near to us, O God, that we might be at peace and embody your love.

We pray for kindness, generosity and compassion to grow and flourish in every heart and within the leaders of nations as the pandemic continues to rage around the world. Give strength to essential workers, patience to those enduring restrictions, comfort and healing to those who are suffering and resilience to one and all.

Draw near to us, O God, that we might be at peace and embody your love.

We give thanks for the sparks of love and hope we see within the darkness of this time. We are inspired by those who are reaching out to others, giving of themselves in small yet significant ways, making real the truth that we are truly in this together. We give thanks, too, for the stirrings in our own hearts moving us to love as we are able. So, we pray:

Draw near to us, O God, that we might be at peace and embody your love.

We pray now for that which is on our minds at this time, holding before you in the silence the people and situations of joy and concern...

Disciples' Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen

Blessing

As you leave this space of intentional prayer
may you be gentle with yourself and others.

May the fragrance of your silence
be one of grace, peace and hope.

May you rise up to love.

The love of God,
the grace of Jesus Christ
and the communion of the Spirit
be with you now and forevermore.

Amen