

Community Church of Issaquah

August 20, 2023

Finding Your Quiet Place

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Before we moved to the Lynnwood area, we lived in the Magnolia area of Seattle. Just a few blocks away from our home was Discovery Park. I would often take a walk there by way of our neighborhood little espresso shop, and with my latte in hand, would find a bench in the park overlooking Puget Sound. If I got there early enough, the only sound was of the water and an occasional boat crossing to the peninsula. That all would end when groups of joggers or a group of tourists gushing aloud or families with children would want to come to the edge of the hill and jabber loudly. Quiet time was limited if it could even be found. When a friend asked, “Why don’t you just go to the park next door to you?” To which I would reply, “It’s a dog park. Need I say more?”

For many, or actually, for most of us, finding a quiet place is difficult. Rushing traffic, crowds of people, and a myriad of other noises makes it hard to turn our hearing off and just be in silence. If I were to ask each of you to tell me your quiet place – a spot where you can go alone and just sit and reflect, what would you say? Do you have a place? The teachings of Jesus by word or by his example show us clearly the need for such a place. And actually, there are two things we are taught to do in such a location.

First, Jesus was clear that our prayer time often should be a quiet time. In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6, Jesus admonished his believers with these words: “And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners in order to be seen by others. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room and when you have shut your door, pray to your God who is in secret and your God who sees in secret will repay you.”

When we begin to analyze the message Christ has for us in these words, the first thought we likely have is, “Why do I have to go into a private room to pray? Can’t I just do that in front of the tv or before we eat?” Trust me, I’ve been there many, many times. But what I believe Christ is saying to us is that there are times when we need to just step away from our lives and spend some time in private with the Lord. Matthew offers a wonderful example of this principle in the final days of the life of Jesus.

Following the last dinner Jesus had with his disciples, he wanted to step away and find a quiet place to pray, One thing I had missed each time I read that particular passage in the 25th chapter of Matthew was this, “And after singing a hymn, he went out to the Mount of Olives.” Does that make you wonder which hymn and who accompanied them as they sang? Pardon me. That has nothing to do with what I was trying to emphasize.

Having shared his dinner with the twelve, one of whom would betray him, I think Jesus knew that things were going to become very difficult for him and he knew that he

needed some private time to pray with and to God, his father. His prayer was passionate, saying to God, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not as I will, but as you will." Or as some translations say, "Not my will, but thine be done." And were the disciples whom he took with him to the garden praying as he had instructed? No, they were sleeping and he had to awaken them to remind them to pray. Sometimes, we are more like the disciples, dozing when we need to be more like Jesus praying that God's will is done in our lives.

One of the reasons I still prefer to rise early in the morning is so that I can have a private time alone with God to pray and listen. And one of the things I have found over the many years is that while I am in the quiet, private prayer time, God's spirit will bring to my mind a person who needs support and care. That family or individual might not even be on the pages of my prayer book, but the Lord knows and rewards me with the privilege of praying for someone else.

The second reason we need a quiet place is that it offers us a time to think and reflect, and possibly a time to grieve or rejoice. One of the Scripture passages Duane read for us from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 14 begins with the words, "When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place." If we were to back up a few verses, we would learn what Jesus had heard and see the reason he wanted and needed to be alone in a quiet place.

Herod, the ruler, had taken John the Baptist into custody in anger that John had been preaching about the sin Herod

was committing by being with his brother's wife, Herodias. He wanted to kill John the Baptist but feared what that would incite. On his birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced for Herod and he was so pleased he told her that he would give her whatever she wanted. Herodias instructed her daughter to tell Herod she wanted the head of John the Baptist on a platter, and Herod complied. John the Baptist was beheaded and the disciples took his body for burial. When the disciples came to tell Jesus what had happened, it was then that he sought to find a quiet place. John the Baptist was not only his cousin, but had been Jesus's strongest follower. Now he was gone.

Like Jesus when we experience the loss of a loved one, we want to find a lonely or quiet place to process things. Sometimes we are able to do that, but often, like Jesus in this story, we might be interrupted by people seeking us and being in need themselves. The crowd followed Jesus and called him away from his quiet place to a hillside filled with thousands of people, all of whom needed attention and food. Like Jesus, there are times when we are distracted or diverted from our quiet place by some other circumstance. Perhaps it's a person, perhaps a phone call, perhaps something trivial, but nonetheless, we are taken away from that place where we wanted to be.

Each of us has a place that has special meaning to us – a place we treasure and love. Maybe it's that place we met someone, or married someone, or took our child to spend time, or where we were celebrated with a crowd. I think from your history here at CCI, many of you would say Camp Burton is that special place, or as we found earlier this

week, Bessie's yard and garden, or Woody and Merry's garden. These places have meaning for us and are an opportunity to step away from the daily routine of our lives and pause if only for a few minutes.

I do not know what your daily life is like, what you find that fills up your days and nights. But my hope is that there are those special times when we just find a corner or a quiet place and meditate. For me, I love to spend quiet times reading or listening to special music or browsing through pictures from the past and present. My understanding is that Jesus had this in mind when he sought to break away from the crowds and be alone. I like the advice Paul gave the church in Thessalonica when he told them to make it their ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to their own business.

On Sundays when you and I come together in this place, it's an opportunity for each of us to find a sense of peace and perhaps joy by being here. This afternoon, I want each of us to pause, stop hearing the minister talking on and on, and just be quiet. We're going to have the next few minutes as a time to do just that. In just a minute, I'm going to ask each of you to turn your chair around so that you are looking away from me and from others so that you can focus for a few minutes. And as you sit there silently in this quiet space, let God's spirit speak to you. Perhaps you need some comfort, or some encouragement, or peace, or a reminder of a very special person or event. Whatever it is, be present for yourself. And if the quiet time now is the perfect time for you to engage in prayer, then pray. We'll

come back from our quiet places in a few minutes and close our service.

Now, if you would, turn your chair around and sit in silence for a few minutes, trusting in the Spirit to tell you what you need to do.