

“BE STILL & KNOW”

Psalm 46

Today we talked about camping for the children’s time, inviting the young people and others to camp. This reminds me of a cartoon that showed a family setting up camp in the woods. They had brought their TV set, camera phones, video games, I-pods, and a box full of other electronic devices. "It's a good thing we've got this stuff," one of the kids is saying, "or we couldn't shut out the noise of that stream and the waterfall!" Camping is one of those activities in life that helps us get away from the busyness of everyday life to enjoy the beauty, peace and quiet of nature. But even camping can become another busy activity if we are not able to sit still long enough to get quiet inside of our souls. A few years ago, I read a book titled, *“A Walk in the Woods,”* by Bill Bryson. It was one of the funniest books I have ever read in my life. It was about the adventure of Bill who lived in Great Britain for 20 years and then came back to the States. He decided to reacquaint himself with his native country by walking the 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail, which stretches from Georgia to Maine. Bill invites one of his old friends, Stephen Katz to go with him on this hike. Katz is overweight and majorly out-of-shape, but he decides to go with him. They encounter many interesting hikers and have funny experiences, but underneath the humor of those encounters we see a deep appreciation of nature, silence and the value of just walking and being. I found this book to have theological hints in it in many ways because the author who was trying to reconnect with his country and culture through being in nature, learns ultimately to connect with his own soul and the soul of the earth.

But unfortunately, most of us don’t have the time and resources, physical, emotional or material, to just take this kind of hike in order to connect with our own souls. Most of us live ordinary lives without great and mysterious adventures. Yet, today we hear the words of the psalmist in Psalm 46 saying to us, “Be still and know that I am God.” And I wonder what does that look like for those of us who don’t live in a monastery or out in nature. What does it really mean for us to be still and know God in Batavia, NY? What does this grand vision of a world of complete peace have to do with us today as we live in a world of war, aggression, hunger and poverty?

Psalm 46 is a great poem about God’s care for all of creation and human history. The words of this psalm give us the reassurance that God is present with us and in every part of life even in the most troubling times. There is no time or circumstance where God is not present. So, the invitation is not to ask for God’s presence and care because that’s already there. The invitation is for us to be still and to know. The New American Standard Version translates the Hebrew word, *rapha*, into “cease striving.” So, this is not just a mere sitting down and being quiet. It is a call for a deeper kind of quiet, an inner peace that stops our striving both inwardly and outwardly. The Hebrew word for “know” in verse 10 is also a significant word for us. The word *yada* indicates a deeper kind of knowledge. It is not a knowledge that comes only from the head. It is a total kind of knowledge that is in the body, heart, mind and soul of a person. Then, to make this even a more complete picture for us, we are invited to cease striving and to know holistically that God is. The phrase “that I am God,” is reminiscent of God’s encounter with Moses in the burning bush when Moses asked God about God’s name and the response was, “I am who I am” in Exodus 3:14. It is put in the present tense because God exists in the present moment, in the eternal now. So, it is an invitation to know God right now as God is right here in this moment of time, not only in past events of history or in the future predictions of the prophets. Knowing God that intimately and closely with our bodies, hearts, minds and souls only happens in the present moment.

Yet, the problem is that most of us live anywhere but in the present moment. We rely so much in our daily life on our thoughts and emotions to know life. This has been to the detriment of our other ways of knowing life. This limitation started with the renaissance/our modern age and its heavy reliance on science and the human mind. René Descartes, the father of modern philosophy, put it well when he said, “I think therefore I am.” This heavy dependence on the rational mind to know life was necessary to help us develop in so many areas of science, philosophy, and math. But when it became our only way of knowing life, we lost a great deal of our intelligence. Everything became a subject or a problem to be analyzed or solved. Even our knowledge of God has become a matter of theology, teachings or doctrines. We had the illusion that our rational minds were going to lead us to times of peace and justice where all human beings would be provided and cared for. Even

when we come to pray before God, our prayer times are filled with our own words and our own thoughts that there is no room for God to speak to us and transform us.

So, how do we respond to this call to "be still and know that I am God?" Silence/stillness is one of the ways we learn to let go of the power of minds over us. It is not the only way, but it is a powerful way that helps us get in touch with other sources of knowledge: our heart and our soul. Father Thomas Keating, contemplative teacher and priest, once said, "Silence is the language God speaks and everything else is a bad translation." The amazing thing about learning to be fully still is the transforming power of that kind of silence to let go of our sense of importance and control.

Most of us struggle because we are either dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. Trusting in God's care, we can learn to relax into our being wherever we are and whatever we are doing. In his book, *"The Power of Now"*, Eckhart Tolle teaches about the value of learning to live in the present moment. He writes, "Enlightenment is not only the end of suffering and of continuous conflict within and without, but also the end of dreadful enslavement to incessant thinking... In the enlightened state, you still use your thinking mind when needed, but in a much more focused and effective way than before. You use it mostly for practical purposes, but you are free of the involuntary internal dialogue, and there is inner stillness... Why does the mind habitually deny or resist the Now? Because it cannot function and remain in control without time, which is past and future, so it perceives the timeless now as threatening." There are some practical points about this in your faith in action piece for today. These are taken from *"The Power of Now"* about being still and knowing God's presence in every moment:

1. End the delusion of time: Time isn't precious at all, because it is an illusion. What you perceive as precious is...the one point that is out of time: the Now.
2. Make it your practice to withdraw attention from past and future: Nothing ever happened in the past; it happened in the Now. Nothing will ever happen in the future; it will happen in the Now.
3. Give your fullest attention to whatever the moment presents. Gratitude for the present moment and the fullness of life now is true prosperity. You can practice this by taking any routine activity that normally is a means to an end and giving it your fullest attention. When you wash your hands, pay attention to all the sense perceptions associated with the activity: the sound of the water, the movement of your hands, the scent of the soap and so on.
4. Keep your inner space clear: See if you can catch yourself complaining, remove yourself from the situation, change it or accept it totally.
5. Watch out for any kind of defensiveness within yourself. What are you defending? An illusory identity, an image in your mind, a fictitious entity? In the light of your consciousness, the unconscious pattern will then quickly dissolve. This is the end of all arguments and power games, which are so corrosive to relationships. Power over others is weakness disguised as strength.

All the saints have known the value of silence and living in the present moment. Today, we have so much resistance to such stillness. We want our time to be used wisely in order to be productive or to be entertained. Some of us are also afraid of silence because it reminds us of the silence of loneliness or death! But if we listen to the words of Psalm 46 and take them to heart, we realize the illusion of our excuses of not having enough time or not knowing how to be in the stillness of God's presence.

Dorothy Day, an American journalist and Catholic social justice activist, once wrote, "If we are rushed for time, sow time and you will reap time. Go to church and spend a quiet hour in prayer. You will have more time than ever and your work will get done. Sow time with the poor. Sit and listen to them, give them your time lavishly. You will reap time a hundred fold." St. John of the Cross once wrote, "The risk is to still our own house so that Spirit can come through, so that we might drop into the vital nature of things, and the risk to then let that beautiful knowing inform our days."

Mark Yachonelli, a Presbyterian Christian Educator, often tells the story about a young pastor who after two years in ministry feeling so overwhelmed. He went to a spiritual director and told him how he was feeling burnt out and unable to continue in his ministry. He had felt like he was being pulled in so many directions. He worked 70 to 80 hours a week and never felt like he was adequate for the job or caught up. He felt that he was a failure and definitely had no time to pray. The spiritual director after listening for a long time to the pain of this young man, give him the advice to go to his office every day and take an hour every morning to pray before he

started doing anything. He asked him to put a sign on the door saying, "Pastor in Prayer," and to ask that he would not be interrupted. The young pastor was baffled by the advice given to him. If he has been working so many hours a week with no chance of finishing his work, it certainly didn't seem logical to take a significant chunk of time to pray. This is the last thing that he seemed to need, but out of desperation, the young pastor agreed to take the advice of his spiritual director until they met again. A month later, it was time for him to meet with his spiritual director and when he was asked about his progress, the young pastor was glowing with joy about the transformation that has taken place in his life. He reported back saying that somehow his time of prayer helped him shift his priorities and only do what was really important to do. He was no longer accepting every invitation he got or doing the tasks that lay people could do. His need for approval and people pleasing started to shift. He felt grounded and centered in God's love.

The illusion of time and the importance of our thoughts are often the things that keep us away from enjoying God's loving presence. Today we are invited to the table of our Lord Jesus Christ to experience the amazing love of God. May we be blessed to know with our body, heart, mind and soul how to be still and know God in the eternal now of this present moment at this table of grace. Amen.

FAITH IN ACTION

The words of Psalm 46, "Be still and know that I am God," give us a focus for our lives. We are invited to let go of our struggles, whether they are mental, physical or relational, in order to be in the stillness and peace of God's presence. Yet, our fears and anxieties often haunt us, preventing us from being fully present to God. In his book, "*The Power of Now*", Eckhart Tolle teaches about the value of learning to live in the present moment. Most of us struggle because we are either dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. Trusting in God's care, we can learn to relax into our being wherever we are and whatever we are doing. "Enlightenment is not only the end of suffering and of continuous conflict within and without, but also the end of dreadful enslavement to incessant thinking... In the enlightened state, you still use your thinking mind when needed, but in a much more focused and effective way than before. You use it mostly for practical purposes, but you are free of the involuntary internal dialogue, and there is inner stillness." Eckhart Tolle

Some practical points from "*The Power of Now*" for being still and knowing God's presence in every moment:

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"Time is what keeps the light from reaching us. There is no greater obstacle to God than time."

Meister Eckhart, 13th century spiritual teacher